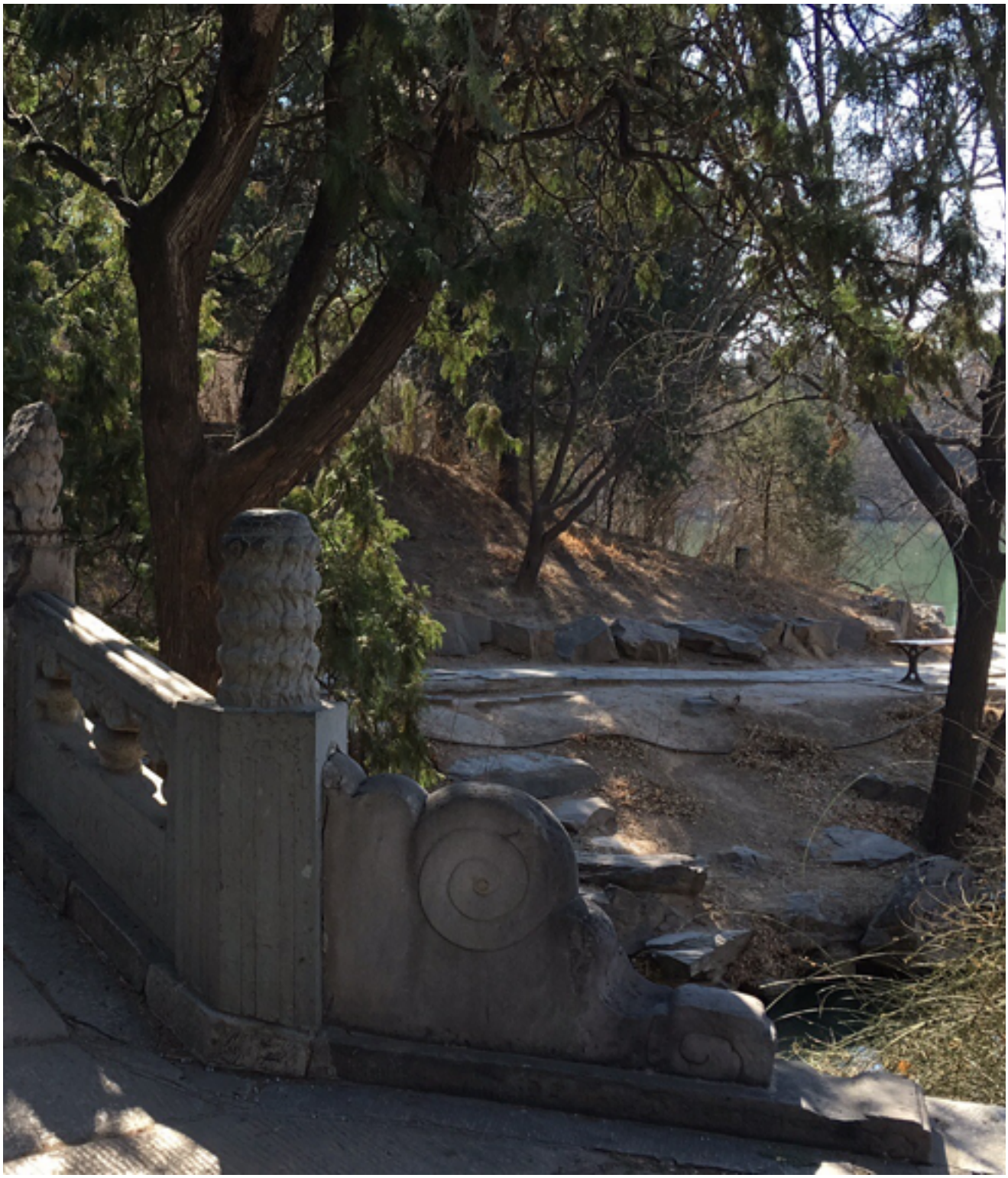
PEKING EULOGY



Jonathan Keir

Gutenbergstraße 4
72631 Aichtal
Germany

www.karlschlechtstiftung.de

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Cover photo: Weiming Lake, Peking University

A book is the product of a self distinct from the one we show to the world in our everyday lives, in our vices. If we want to begin to understand this self, it is only by digging within, excavating it from scratch. Nothing can substitute for this effort.

Proust

If you want what visible reality can give, you're an employee.
If you want the unseen world, you're not living your truth.
Both wishes are foolish, but you'll be forgiven for forgetting
That what you really want is love's confusing joy.

Rumi

More clearly and happily than ever will the artist of the future realise his mission as a fair enchanter, as a winged, hermetic, moon-sib mediator between life and spirit.

Thomas Mann

Art is fun and for fun. […] I am reluctant to say that the deep structure of any good literary work could be a philosophical one. […] A novel must be a house fit for free characters to live in.

[…] Love is the general name of the quality of attachment and it is capable of infinite degradation and is the source of our greatest errors. Its existence is the unmistakable sign that we are spiritual creatures.

Iris Murdoch

We knew that bending our writing toward the comfort of some imagined […] reader was only a distraction from the good and necessary work of achieving and dreaming up our people. We knew that the best writers don't just clear space for their own name, but transform their abundance into the wealth of many.

Danez Smith

Foreword

To say a few words in advance about a 380,000-word meta-anthology is not just a matter of advertising, but of justice to the reader. Without giving away any spoilers - for I now see that it is a single story with a beginning, a middle and an end - allow me at least to explain what this book (or three books in one) *isn't*. I dislike the word 'hypertext', but you ought to be able to throw five darts at the Contents on any given day, or pick five random page numbers between 1 and 848, and decide where you feel like exploring. Half of the coming words are not me at all, but others translated and quoted; this means that if you find my narrative voice or certain individual characters irritating along the way, there is always someone else to discover.

I was recently asked to list the five biggest literary and philosophical influences on my development; I reflected for a couple of days before fixing on the following quintet: Nietzsche, encountered in my late teens, a powerful smelling salt who cut through my provincial adolescent complacencies but left me unconvinced of his overall project; Borges, discovered on a hostel bookshelf in Buenos Aires in my early twenties, a refuge of intellection in a phase of heightened sensuality (and *vice versa*); Nabokov, foisted on me by fate after an interest in evolutionary psychology led me to study under his omnivorous biographer; Naguib Mahfouz, a liberating voice as if from another planet; and Tu Weiming, about whom there will be much more to say here. Of these five, only Tu is still alive; when I saw a chance to move to Beijing and take up a research position at Tu's Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies at Peking University in 2018, I dropped everything and took it, secure in the knowledge that, however it went, I would regret not seizing the opportunity: after all, the chief living heir to the Confucian tradition was welcoming me to his Academy. I thank Prof. Tu for everything he gave me, even if the experience revealed to both of us that there is a proud and incorrigible amateur streak running through me that utterly disqualifies me from each of the specific lanes - Philosophy, Sinology, Comp-Lit etc. - in the academic humanities ratrace.

Beijing was a delicious date with destiny in another important way too; I was sure that there was now no more important city in the world. Only a boy from Pukekohe, New Zealand, or some equally remote place, could begin to fathom the excitement of finally reaching the centre of human striving after a lifetime of exile on the periphery; the luxury of realising that there *is* no centre, no Borgesian Aleph from which all of existence might simultaneously be visible - no London or New York or Paris or Beijing or Shanghai of the soul - is just that: a luxury, one which I now enjoy. I don't know exactly what the next step is for me, but I've got the inferiority complex - proper to any person still young in spirit - out of my system; I can now look even China, in all its superhuman immensity, in the face as an equal.

To my surprise, Beijing and Tu Weiming led me back to the hearth of home. This trilogy - a record of my time under Tu's Confucian wing at Peking University - is not the kind of dry academic study that might be expected of an 'Associate Researcher' at the 'Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies'; it is a *Bildungsroman* in disguise, or in plain English, a reckoning with origins and options in an age of unbelievable, vertigo-inducing opportunity.

Kuaotunu, April 2020

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SPIRITUAL HUMANISM AS A WORLD ETHOS?

A Global Anthology of Learning for the Self

Jonathan Keir

Cover: Miguel Cabrera, ‘Sor Joana Inés de la Cruz’ (1750)

For all those struggling for their bearings in the cultural chaos and opportunity of the 21st Century.

And for all those who, knowingly or otherwise, have sacrificed on our behalf.

Proust […] was not remotely a scientist. His was an attempted literary demonstration of a trans-temporal soul.

Jeremy Bernstein

How can poetry entangled, necessarily, in the web of language be true to experience? It can't: it can only wrestle with the insolubility.

John Sutherland

The best human beings have not been driven by ideology, moral philosophy, and certainly not logic. […] Philosophy matters, but it is not all that matters, and although it is a good thing, one can have too much of it.

Julian Baggini

Many have since read Thucydides as performing an implicit critique of the Athenians' realism, hawkishness, and imperialism, a critique that seems to materialise largely through what Edith Foster has called 'contrasting narrative illustrations'.

Johanna Hanink

What art offers is space - a certain breathing room for the spirit.

John Updike

He who would serve as a leader must be stouthearted and enduring, for his burden is heavy and his Way is long. To be truly humane is the burden he takes upon himself - is that not heavy? His Way lasts until death - is that not long?

Confucius

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following individuals for making this book - compiled over a 12-month stint as a Visiting Scholar at Peking University in 2018-2019 - possible:

Prof. Tu Weiming, for his invitation to join the Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies; and his team (Ai Bei, Huang Qi and Wang Jianbao in particular), for giving me the freedom from administrative responsibility to be able to write the book in one go;

My former students Leonie Harsch, Alitzel Velasco Burgunder and Mengjie Ma, for their respective reading suggestions, which all turned out to be absolutely correct;

Mehmetcan Akpinar and Claus Dierksmeier, for their ongoing moral support for my work in general;

My family, which now includes a special new mushroom-headed member.

Foreword: Spiritual Humanism?

> *As fundamental monotheism and shallow cultism testify to one view of the human future, and as the millennium casts its shadow before us, it has been a privilege to soldier with such distinguished witnesses. If the baffled and fearful prehistory of our species ever comes to an end, and if we ever get off our knees and cull those blooms [to which Marx referred], there will be no need for smoking altars and forbidding temples with which to honour the freethinking humanists, who scorned to use the fear of death to coerce and flatter the poor.*
>
> Christopher Hitchens,
> *The Missionary Position* (1995)

This book was envisaged as a sequel; the first half of the story was written in an earlier effort, *From Global Ethic to World Ethos? Building on Hans Küng's Legacy of Basic Trust in Life* (2018). One can, however, start reading from here if one wishes; the overall goal is not merely to offer a list of cocktail recipes for the unprecedented and unfathomable cultural globalisation of our time, but to allow the reader to enjoy some actual drinks of her own.

Like Hans Küng with his *Projekt Weltethos*, Tu Weiming has sought to unite 21st-century humanity under a dialogical banner of diversity, a Confucianesque 'harmony without uniformity'. Tu's preferred umbrella neologism for this common and dynamic ethos is 'Spiritual Humanism', a term borrowed from Indian philosopher R. Balasubramanian; just as we used Küng's *Weltethos* as our *leitmotif* in *From Global Ethic*, so too will we use Tu's work on Spiritual Humanism (*jingshen renwenyhuzi* in Chinese) as the point of departure for our journey here.

The main goal, however, remains to breathe actual life into the idea of a World Ethos by recovering and pooling its echoes from seemingly disparate sources in the subsequent chapters. While an attempt has been made to build an implicit argument or arguments across the course of the book, the reader is also encouraged to pick and choose freely among individual names and works, and generally to pick a path through the whole as her fancy dictates. Individual chapters have correspondingly been written as more or less self-contained units: the fun job of animating a World Ethos - by making implicit creative connections *between* chapters - belongs to the individual reader.

Spiritual Humanism is not a Sinocentric idea, even if Chinese musicians and instruments lend themselves nicely to the symphony, and even if the movement in question here has a Chinese (or at least Taiwanese-American) conductor. Just as Hans Küng struggled to overcome the challenge of being perceived as too Catholic by liberal audiences and not Catholic enough by conservatives, so too is Tu Weiming faced with the delicate charge of managing patriotic expectations as the Director of Peking University's Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies (where I have had the privilege of writing this book) while simultaneously building bridges from China to the rest of the world at a moment when everyone is anxiously

watching the rise of the Chinese economic and cultural juggernaut to see if it will become just another empire in the history of empires or, as it promises, something more.

Spiritual Humanism is an anticolonial, antitotalitarian, cosmopolitan ethos, in which the *individual self* - your individual self and mine - is accorded inalienable value. This is only possible, however, when we each grasp that we even *have* selves to be valued, identities which somehow transcend the animal accidents of our daily lives. This requires, in the language of Hans Küng, *Grundvertrauen*, or Basic Trust in life or reality as a whole, a disposition which must be actively cultivated because it is not 'simply there'[1]. How we each get to this horizon of the spirit is a radically individual and free business (even if most spiritual traditions remind us that we are not islands either); it cannot, in any case, be sufficient to describe selfhood philosophically or to explain it scientifically, and it cannot, thank God, be prescribed in any pharmaceutical sense.

While a humanities education can and should lead you to water, only you, by definition, can ever do the drinking. A quick glance back at the Table of Contents will offer you a glimpse of the menu on offer: 20th and 21st-century authors - novelists, essayists, poets and others - from the six official linguistic worlds of the United Nations and beyond, who all share one thing: trust in the existence of the individual spirit, and by extension, an elusive Basic Trust in life itself - not a brittle scientistic formula susceptible to the surprises of reality, but a dynamic, embodied, humanistic ethos. With its steady oscillation between liberal quotation[2] and critical annotation, this anthology is, to paraphrase Dwight Garner, a 'bird's nest of collected facts threaded with the author's own subtle [and less subtle] interjections'[3].

Beijing, June 2019

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[1] See Chapter One of Hans Küng, *Was ich glaube*, (München: Piper, 2010) for a discussion of the concept of *Grundvertrauen* or *Lebensvertrauen*. Also available in English translation as Hans Küng, *What I Believe*, (Bloomsbury, 2010).

[2] Readers so able or inclined are encouraged to examine all translations in this book carefully against the originals (16 of the 24 chapters are devoted to non-English texts, and most of the translations are my own). While there has been no wilful intent to deceive - what could be more pointless or destructive of a project like this? - the nature of the translator's responsibility entails myriad difficult choices amid the ever-present danger of straightforward amateur misunderstanding. I have, moreover, tended to opt for liberal, square-bracket-heavy renditions which suit the demands of a unified narrative over the tyranny of an artless literalism.

[3] Dwight Garner, 'Unless They're True', https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/dwight-garner-favourite-quotations/, 27/11/2018 (accessed 29/11/2018),

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1. From Tang Junyi to Tu Weiming

> *Like any reader, I'm always looking for something vital, something alive, something not dead, but what kind of 'principle' is that? The 'life principle'? And besides, as you know well yourself, vitality can announce itself in many different ways – in a character, or in a turn of phrase (i.e. in what is represented, or in the medium of the representation). This un-thought quality is what makes criticism easy to do (instinctive, open, amateurish in the strict sense of the word) and weirdly hard to talk about or to teach. […] It happens that the kind of criticism I like to do is closer to reviewing than to academic criticism, and that's fine with me. […] in addition to making a specific argument, you are trying to recreate the experience of reading the book for a reader who may never read it; the reader is living vicariously through you, the reviewer. So you have to make the reader feel it, bring it alive, re-imagine or re-tell it, and that process might occupy half or more of the piece. This re-description is essentially paraphrase – or even plot summary – and is explicitly discouraged in academic criticism, as not analytical enough. Few scholars writing, say, about* War and Peace*, would spend half of their book or essay telling the academic audience what is already taken for granted – i.e., what it's like to read Tolstoy, what happens in the novel, and so on. Their audience would laugh at them, and consider them seriously naïve. And academic criticism is perhaps the poorer for that lack: I think paraphrase shouldn't be avoided, just done better.*[4]
>
> James Wood

The twin strands of Tu Weiming's lifelong struggle - to bring Chinese philosophy to the world and the world to Chinese philosophy - came together with his initiative to organise the 2018 World Congress of Philosophy ('Learning to be Human') in Beijing. In order to save the Chinese humanistic tradition from the oblivion of the Cultural Revolution, Tu believed that renewal would have to come at least partly from without; this book, written at Peking University but conceived elsewhere, ought likewise to be understood as a contribution to this ongoing cultural conversation within China, but also as a broader attempt to influence developments in the perennially crisis-ridden, but also perennially 'emerging', global humanities.

Tu himself belongs to a second generation, and really a third generation, of post-Qing Confucian philosophers faced with a crisis of legitimacy against a backdrop of unprecedented economic and cultural globalisation. If 20th-century China resolved, roughly speaking, to turn its back on its own ancient spiritual traditions and become, on one level, 'more Western than the Westerners' (even

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[4] James Wood, 'James Wood on How Criticism Works', https://aestheticsforbirds.com/2020/10/14/james-wood-on-how-criticism-works/#comments, 14/10/2020 (accessed 10/12/2020).

while blaming the latter for the ills of 19th-century colonial domination), and if Western-inspired globalisation has on the whole offered only shallow, secular answers to individual human beings in search of themselves, then a path was needed in which a Confucianism strengthened for the demands of the 21st Century could be imported back into China and, eventually, thrown into the global marketplace of ideas. Tu's own journey from Mainland China (b. 1940) to Taiwan (1949), the United States (1962) and back to China (2010) reflects this sense of mission. No one has personally done more to bring Confucian philosophy to the West, and now back to China, than Tu Weiming, even if he has only been able to scratch the surface of the dialogical possibilities on offer in his single lifetime; his mission will soon fall to others. This book is one such step on a collective journey: carrying Tu's 'Spiritual Humanism' from its birthplace in Beijing in the 2010s back out to the world beyond 'Cultural China' and the Confucian sphere.

While this opening chapter is by no means intended as a historical study of the development of modern Confucianism, an important 2017 monograph by Thomas Fröhlich - *Tang Junyi: Confucian Philosophy and the Challenge of Modernity* - will serve as a useful entry point into the baton relay of Spiritual Humanism by focusing on one of Tu's most important predecessors. Fröhlich's firmly German approach to Tang's attempts at Confucian bridgebuilding will also reveal the extent of the challenge involved in turning Spiritual Humanism into a truly decentred *World Ethos*: *describing* such an ethos philosophically, or explaining it in social-scientific terms, is not exactly the same thing as the much more important and difficult task of *embodying* it. Spiritual Humanism is more than a 'civil theology' designed to limit the damages of 'Machiavellian' politics; it is first and foremost a call to individual self-cultivation.

Thomas Fröhlich's *Tang Junyi*

Studies in the history of ideas allow for, and are said ideally to require, emotional detachment from the object of one's studies. One of Tu's biggest challenges when arriving in the United States in the 1960s, however, was to persuade his analytically trained philosophy professors and fellow students that it was possible to have insights based on love for one's own tradition; far from blurring one's vision, emotions might actually hold the key to humanistic engagement with the world. This is not a defence of irrationalism, but a claim that the Enlightenment fetish for 'reason', already long busy encroaching into philosophy and other humanistic 'disciplines', might need supplementing with something else in order to prevent post-Enlightenment modernity from degenerating into mere instrumental rationalism. In short, Tu was already sure in his youth that a path needed to be forged between wholesale abandonment of China's immense humanistic civilisation, on the one hand, and an overeager embrace of post-metaphysical 'Western' scientism and secularism on the other: in other words, what was required was not a *rejection* of the Enlightenment mentality and its obvious fruits (modern science and medicine, modern political institutions etc.), but rather an attempt to improve, complete, or reinforce the gains of the Enlightenment while pushing

‘beyond the Enlightenment mentality’.[5] Tang Junyi (1909-1978) was one of a handful of Chinese philosophers from his teachers’ generation, including Mou Zongsan (1909-1995), Xu Fuguan (1903-1982) and others, to have inspired the young Tu in the direction of this ‘inclusive humanism’ during his school and university years in Taiwan. The idea, however, of writing a book on Tang’s philosophy from the perspective of a Western historian of ideas already looms as a contradiction in terms; Fröhlich is aware of the danger, and he attempts to ‘think *with* Tang, instead of merely thinking about him’[6], but ultimately he is unable, despite his own best efforts, to escape the scientistic framing of his own study: this gap between philological analysis and direct humanistic or aesthetic experience is ironically the very one which modern Confucian philosophers - none more prominently than Tang and Tu themselves - devoted their careers to bridging.

Tang’s youth had culminated in exile in Hong Kong in 1949; from this colonial vantage point, he was forced to watch the descent of mainland China and Taiwan into regimes best described as anti-humanistic dictatorships, and to lament metropolitan, mercantile Hong Kong’s own inability to welcome him as a free and spiritual human being. Fröhlich focuses on this state of exile - political and existential - as a catalyst for Tang’s interest, from the 1950s to the end of his life, in an idea of cosmopolitanism in which modern exiles everywhere could feel at home: neither a return to ossified Chinese traditions and rituals, nor a capitulation to the quite literally soul-destroying instrumental rationality of Western-style consumerism which Tang saw all around him in the ‘fragrant port’ of Hong Kong. The Tang-drafted 1958 ‘Declaration to the World for Chinese Culture’, edited and signed by Mou, Xu and others, marked the central turning point in Confucianism’s 20th-century dialogue with itself and the world: Western Sinologists in particular, the authors argued, had failed to grasp the deep spirituality of the Confucian tradition, tending instead to view Confucianism (under the influence of Max Weber and others) as a social ethics of obedience to one’s parents and superiors. This parody of the Confucian worldview, sold alike by Chinese Communists and Nationalists keen to foster a ‘new culture’ hopelessly divorced from the Confucian tradition, was in dire need of correction (Tu proudly took up this mantle, becoming the leading supplier of the corrective over the coming decades, one which would not only enrich the West’s understanding of Confucianism, but also - crucially - of itself). Fröhlich adopts an intellectual historian’s view of Tang’s pioneering contributions to these debates, seeking to define and elucidate the differences between Tang’s approach and those of Western, and particularly German, references more familiar to his reader.

‘Tang generally refrained from offering dogmatic prescriptions for individual and collective forms of life. It was his belief that everyone needed to follow his or her own path to the inner source of “sagehood”,’[7] Fröhlich stresses early on. Can

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[5] See Tu Weiming, Beyond the Enlightenment Mentality’, in Tu Weiming, *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity: Essays on the Confucian Discourse in Cultural China*, (New Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilizations, 2010), pp. 112-129 for a short overview of Tu’s critical approach to the Enlightenment’s legacy.

[6] Thomas Fröhlich, *Tang Junyi: Confucian Philosophy and the Challenge of Humanity*, (Leiden: Brill, 2017), p. 271.

[7] Fröhlich, *Tang Junyi*, p. 47.

there ever be an anti-dogmatic '-ism' to describe and encompass this radically subjective philosophy of self-cultivation? The *Xueheng* movement had, from its founding in 1922, sought to bring Irving Babbitt's New Humanism to China under such a guise:

> There was, above all, a cosmopolitan culture, purportedly on the rise worldwide, that was fostered by Western and Eastern strands of humanism and also included religious traditions. This burgeoning humanistic culture was expected to counteract some of the worst side effects of social modernity. The latter were addressed under such topics as rampant materialism, consumerism and urbanisation, the decay of the 'republican spirit', the upsurge of a misguided scientism in education and scholarship, and the triumph of Marxism and communism. Besides, *Xueheng* joined in Babbitt's call for an 'aristocracy of character and intelligence.[8]

A generation later, however, Tang preferred to insist on the qualitative gulf between private self-cultivation and political engagement:

> [Notwithstanding] *prima facie* affinities with *Xueheng*, there is no evidence that Tang ever shared the conviction that scholar-poets or cultural heroes could actually shape modern society. Nor did he endorse the idea of obtaining politically effective values from classical scholarship and literature. Tang ultimately conceived of the interrelations between the humanistic and the political realm in a much more complex manner. For example, he subscribed, among other things, to the notion that the humanistic sphere should be relieved from the burden to produce an immediate political effect, whether in the form of political values and norms or in politically exemplary personalities.[9]

Fröhlich wants to stress the absolute separation in Tang's thought between the 'theatre' of culture and the 'guards' who protect the performance:

> Tang further elucidated his concept of politics by comparing the function of politics, in a manner similar to differentiation theory, to the role of a policeman who is standing guard at the entrance of a theatre. The policeman thus facilitates the realisation of the (humanistic) social and cultural values (inside the theatre), but he does so 'indirectly', without participating in the theatre performance itself, neither as a spectator nor as a critic. […] Here, too, politics is to be understood primarily as a means. It should hence be limited to a 'domain' (*lingyu*) within culture and society and must not be conceptualised as permeating the social and cultural domains. According to this conceptual strategy, politics itself is neither a sphere in which humanistic culture is produced, nor should politics take responsibility for making judgments about specific normative contents of humanistic culture. The foremost task of politics is to safeguard humanistic culture on

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[8] Fröhlich, *Tang Junyi*, p. 50.

[9] Fröhlich, *Tang Junyi*, p. 51.

> the whole and in so doing prevent democracy from deteriorating into a combat zone of ideologies.[10]

The distinction here is subtle but important: Tang's modern Confucianism seeks to separate religion and state, but for spiritual rather than secular reasons. Fröhlich struggles to abide this:

> A community populated only by sages would lose its political character altogether, and there would be no negotiating, no use of political power, and even no communication. There would just be a complete unity of 'innate knowing' and behaviour. This vision obviously transcends the realm of liberal democracy in a radical sense. To be sure, neither Tang Junyi nor Mou Zongsan expected such a community would ever become a historical reality. The community of sages is real only insofar as it is part of the civil-theological justification of democracy. [… However] the civil-theological justification paradoxically points to the complete dissolution of democracy. After all, there is an implicit tendency to portray democracy both as a precondition or a context and as a means to the (apolitical) higher end of self-fulfilment as a sage. The problem is not so much that democracy is seen as a means, since this is asserted in other political theories, including Western theories, without undermining the existence of democracy. The problem is that Tang assumed that the end to which democracy is supposed to lead (i.e. the sphere of the sage) is settled beyond the sphere of politics, making democracy as means not just optional, but accidental.[11]

This seems an utter misunderstanding of the modern Confucian project: a democratic political system can be understood instead as the natural outcome of mass individual self-cultivation, as a story from Tang's own childhood indirectly suggests:

> In retrospect, the root of my antipathy towards any thoughts that regard man as a natural animal, which is the source of my philosophical thinking, can be traced back to an experience when I was only six or seven years old. One day my father told me the scientific prediction that the light and heat of the sun would [one day] vanish. The earth would then reach its final day. By the time of the earth's final day, there would be only one man with his dog. I remember that this story roused my boundless interest. Several days later, the earth of our courtyard cracked and warped in the sun after some rain. At that time, I thought that the earth might split and collapse. By now, the situation in the courtyard occurred already forty years ago. I still remember it very vividly. This is, I believe, the source of my philosophical thinking and all my opinions about human nature. Why do people think of the destruction of the world? Included in this [contemplation] is the mystery and dignity of human nature and the difference between man and animals. […] How can I imagine the havoc of the world while bearing this very existence in my

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[10] Fröhlich, *Tang Junyi*, pp. 234-235.

[11] Fröhlich, *Tang Junyi*, p. 226.

> mind? Later on, I reached the firm understanding that man is [a form of] existence which entails the transcending of the material world.[12]

Democratic politics is what one more or less automatically gets when individuals freely reach this spiritual horizon of transcendence and trust; before it, they will simply seek to assert their own wills to material power at the expense of others[13], as Tang himself was acutely aware:

> Tang restated his dire diagnosis of modern man's reification in various texts from the 1950s to the 1970s. In a particularly succinct passage from an article on 'World Humanism and Chinese Humanism' from 1959, he maintained that since humanity has lost control over the things it produces in affluent societies, a severe threat has emerged for Eastern and Western humanism, and even for humanity itself. This threat entails a surfeit of science and technology resulting in the production of weapons of mass destruction, as well as a severe spiritual crisis among urban citizens who live isolated, empty lives. Finally, a 'hitherto unknown' 'scientification' of modern political organisations might occur and lead to the establishment of highly rigid organisations in which the individual merely figures as a statistical number, unable to exert the 'freedom of a spiritual life'. Tang depicted two types of materialism from a global perspective that have emerged in this context: first, Soviet-style communism, which produced a 'conceptual materialism' that locks human beings in an 'intellectual cage' and triggers a 'comprehensive reification of man'; second, the materialism found in the large cities of America and Europe, where a 'behavioral materialism' effectuates the calculation of all human values against monetary standards. Both types of materialism coincide in their negative effect of depriving human beings of their subjectivity. Any solution to this crisis must therefore consist of enabling human beings to 'magnify themselves' and to spiritually rise above the sphere of material production.[14]

The solution at a global level cannot be called 'Confucian' or 'Confucian alone'; a less culture-specific label for this anti-ideological -ism or 'World Ethos' is required:

> In Tang's interpretation, Confucian humanism elevates the [individual] human being to the position of the 'soul' of this-worldly reality (the 'ten thousand things') and accords an 'absolute' value to individual personhood. While Confucian humanism is different from a belief in 'objectively [present] gods', it still has a religious dimension which centres on the belief that the human mind may permeate 'Heaven'. The Confucian humanism that Tang had in mind was thus not at all antagonistic to religions; on the contrary, humanism was 'complete' only insofar as it acknowledged the importance of

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[12] Fröhlich, *Tang Junyi*, pp. 83-84.

[13] See Fröhlich, *Tang Junyi*, pp. 161-181 for a discussion of Tang's view of the role of the 'will to power' in political life.

[14] Fröhlich, *Tang Junyi*, pp. 62-63.

> religions. It is on the basis of this premise that Tang stressed the potential of Confucian humanism to accept and incorporate non-Confucian religions, while at the same time comparing this quasi-transcendental outlook of Confucian humanistic religiosity with Western forms of idealistic philosophy. He consequently described Confucian humanism as an 'idealistic humanism' or 'humanistic idealism'.[15]

Tu will prefer 'Spiritual Humanism' as the label for this ethos; Tang, however, is more interested in securing individual freedom than he is in the triumph of any -ism or dogma:

> A political state which subjects its citizens to dogmatism fails to live up to the true idea of a state, because it suppresses moral subjectivity. Consequently, Tang conceived of an ideal state which embodies an ethical relation, without however suppressing moral subjectivity. […] Against this backdrop, he developed his thoughts on human freedom. By freedom, he understood moral and spiritual self-fulfilment, and thus the authentic selfhood of the individual. […] Tang explicitly claimed to follow a Confucian tradition of identifying freedom as the freedom to build one's personality and character and thereby attain the 'true self' of an ethical person.[16]

There is, however, no spoonfeedable or packageable formula for 'culture':

> According to Tang's notion of self-cultivation, individual 'efforts' may vary greatly in form, contents, and mode, and are by no means simply a matter of repressing natural instincts. Tang discussed in this context, for example, artistic creation: Whereas a piece of art in its material form has no moral value as such, the process of artistic creation has moral value insofar as the artist does not selfishly keep his notion of beauty to himself. By expressing his vision of art, he or she shows a willingness to transcend an egotistic, subjective inwardness.
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> […] He interpreted 'music' in a very broad sense as an equivalent to the arts in general and related it to an 'artistic conduct of life'. The subjective consciousness temporarily 'forgets' the empirical self when appreciating the beauty of art or creating a new piece of art. The moments of artistic self-oblivion occur in the immediacy of producing and contemplating art and entail, as Tang believed, the type of self-oblivion that a scientist may experience when conducting research in a highly concentrated manner. Here, the containment of the instinct-driven self happens, as it were, as a side-effect. Tang thus deemed these experiences to be spontaneous ways of restraining the 'selfish spirit', and thereby of unfolding the individual's 'social nature' (*shehuixing*).
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> […] Narrative forms of moral thought are thus particularly well-suited to self-cultivation, and this includes anecdotes about the moral conduct of virtuous persons. The focus here is not on analysing principles of moral

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[15] Fröhlich, *Tang Junyi*, p. 81.

[16] Fröhlich, *Tang Junyi*, p. 190.

> conduct, but on familiarising oneself with the exemplary moral acts of virtuous persons and thereby retracing, in effect, their particular moral judgments.[17]

Philosophy is hence transcended in this broader 'narrative humanism' in more or less the same way that Tang's contemporary Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) subsumed philosophy within the realm of literature by dramatising the tragic quests of individual philosophers. As Fröhlich puts it,

> when depicting the function of philosophical language, Tang suggested the image of opening a gate to one's own spirit and to all existence, and referred to the philosophical soliloquies of St. Augustine, Zhuangzi and Kierkegaard which took, according to him, the form of prayers.
>
> […] As regards the theological foundation of philosophy, he explained that the philosophical 'transformation of the individual through teachings' (*jiaohua*) consists of familiarising oneself with the many contradictions between different philosophical schools and ideas. Such contradictions, after all, are due to a 'secret intention of Heaven'. Tang consequently professed that he himself hardly ever intended to devise theories, preferring instead to reflect on a constellation in which mutually contradictory statements contribute to intuitively 'accomplishing the teaching' (*chengjiao*).
>
> […] Humans may, through philosophy, attain a discursive 'self-consciousness' (*zijue*) of the 'wholeness of their spiritual potency' (*qi xinling zhi quan*), which initiates their 'turning back' to the source of all knowing and which cannot be gained by strictly compartmentalised scientific activity.
>
> […] Moreover, it is conceivable that [Tang] wanted to express, at a formal level, his suspicion of modern scientific civilisation: his allusive, allegorical, at times obscure writing style should serve as an antidote to modern tendencies to reify human existence under conditions of instrumental rationality and, accordingly, to restrict the human mind. […] Such coherence could not, as we have seen, take the form of a conceptual (Western) philosophical language. The quest for authenticity here refers, first of all, to the philosopher who, by aiming at an intuitive insight, relativises conceptual claims to truth and thereby tacitly acknowledges linguistic and terminological ambiguity. This in turn accords with the peculiarities of Chinese philosophy as Tang identified them. He contended that the language of Chinese philosophy 'merely' fulfils the function of a makeshift bridge between the existential and spiritual realm. After the bridge is crossed, it is 'transcended'. Theoretical/philosophical reflection, in other words, has no exclusive claim to truth. It is as provisional as other truth claims. Besides using language of a 'theoretical nature', Chinese philosophers, according to Tang, also placed great importance on a 'literary' language and the forms of philosophical dialogues and letters.[18]

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[17] Fröhlich, *Tang Junyi*, pp. 148-149, 155.

[18] Fröhlich, *Tang Junyi*, pp. 119-121, 125.

Fröhlich, as we have seen, *describes* this narrative turn in modern Confucianism quite brilliantly, but only indirectly *embodies* it himself; Tang is still to be judged above all by the verbose standards of contemporary Western philosophy, and is frequently found wanting:

> While rejecting the traditionalistic idea of resubmitting politics altogether to pre-modern ethical standards and values, he repudiated the idea of reducing politics to a purely functional sphere depleted of any normative contents. The middle position that Tang envisioned for politics is an elusive terrain which is difficult to demarcate conceptually, even though he set a perimeter around the two-fold dimension of dissociative and associative aspects of political action. On the one hand, he depicted the sphere of political action as characterised by a dissociative struggle for power which involves specific means, institutions, and procedures; on the other, he conceptualised a social sphere of humanistic culture and values which is said to function as a crucial normative input for fostering associative behaviour in politics.
>
> Such an expectation with respect to the political relevance of humanistic culture appears to be overly optimistic, while at the same time underestimating the increasing political impact of modern mass communication.[19]

Fröhlich presents Tang's alternative with a patience suggestive of at least a certain admiration, but he seems extremely afraid to embrace it too enthusiastically for fear of losing credibility among his core (academic, Western) readership:

> Insofar as Tang's own account points to the theological layers of his philosophy, it provides more insight than those enthusiastic judgments that portray him as a heroic guardian of China's humanistic traditions in a hostile modern environment. The most influential words of such praise came from Mou Zongsan, who, in a commemorative text after Tang's death, called him a 'giant in "the universe of cultural consciousness"'. Mou further compared Tang's intellectual standing to that of Newton, Einstein, Plato and Kant as well as Huang Zongxi (1610-1695), Gu Yanwu (1613-1682), and Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692) in their respective fields and times. The problem with this facile judgment is not only its enthusiasm, but also the fact that it labels Tang with the cliché of a defender of Chinese spiritual culture. This cliché might, moreover, lead to the insinuation that Tang, as such a defender, belongs to the ranks of philosophers of life like Rudolf Eucken, who had diagnosed Germany as being in the midst of a spiritual crisis of unprecedented dimensions. Eucken had warned that the deluge of 'reflection, criticism and negation' would put the country in danger of betraying its intellectual and spiritual imprint that had been given to it by 'men like Luther, Kant, Goethe, Beethoven', and the philosophers of German Idealism. In contrast, Tang Junyi was not primarily concerned with threats to the intellectual-spiritual life or the *Seelenleben* of the nation as

[19] Fröhlich, *Tang Junyi*, p. 237.

> such; his focus was much more on the decay of intellectual and cultural preconditions for the individual's ability to exert 'reflection, criticism and negation' in modern society.[20]

What, exactly, is so wrong with Mou's 'enthusiasm'? Fröhlich correctly diagnoses Tang and his fellow modern Confucians as uninterested in the *Seelenleben* of any collective, and only concerned with the spiritual life of individual human beings. Why couldn't or shouldn't such individualism form the basis of a universal humanistic ethos?

> Based on his distinction between world religions and the religiosity (or the 'religious spirit') of a renewed Confucianism, Tang assumed that Confucian religiosity is better suited than the world religions to foster civic virtues in general, and religious tolerance in particular. More specifically, he expected that Confucian religiosity can provide a foundation for other religions to attain a position of mutual 'recognition' in China's (future) 'humanistic world' (*renwen shijie*).
>
> […] As regards the topic of religious tolerance, Tang is more or less in line with Western ideas of civil religion in that he placed great emphasis on tolerance. He deemed Confucian religiosity exceptionally suitable for infusing religious tolerance into society due to its lack of religious dogmatism and hence tried to convince his readers that Confucian religiosity should serve as a spiritual pivot. Consequently, he discussed at length the potential of Confucian religiosity to open up a 'spiritual ground' or 'meeting place' for all religions in China and the world.[21]

A closer understanding of Spiritual Humanism as a World Ethos, however, such as we hope to offer the reader over the course of this book, ought to reveal that no such 'submission' to the superiority of Confucianism is required at all; all that is required is the liberation of the individual, a theme which Tang and Fröhlich hold equally dear:

> Tang's civil theology asserts that the perfectibility of the human being as a sage is a historical reality, but such sagehood is neither a permanent state of mind nor an individual's way of life, nor can it be realised by whole collectivities of human agents, such as congregations, nations and classes. A revolution in the name of establishing a community of sages is consequently absent from Tang's modern Confucianism, as is the idea of a collective will totally dominating history.
>
> […] In realising self-perfection in the highest form, human beings lift themselves beyond their historical existence. Accordingly, modern Confucianism does not speculate about the final realisation of human emancipation in history, nor does it speculate about an apocalyptical crisis of humanity.

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[20] Fröhlich, *Tang Junyi*, p. 84.

[21] Fröhlich, *Tang Junyi*, pp. 242-243.

> […] The quintessence of Tang's diagnosis of modernity is evident from his conclusion that there is a potential convergence between totalitarian and liberal societies in the common degeneration of the individual: both totalitarian societies and societies of 'laissez-faire individualism' are made up of individuals who are closely enmeshed in an unrestrained quest for wealth, power, and prestige which eventually leads to the individual's loss of a 'feeling of authentic existence' (*zhenshi cunzaigan*). The decline of the 'authentic self' pertains to the individual's loss of self-awareness as a being that is capable of lifting itself up to the realm of sagehood - and to achieve this not at the cost of others but on the basis of recognising each other's political and social freedom as a precondition for one's quest for self-cultivation. This decline in turn gives rise to the formation of an isolated and alienated self in the spheres of politics, society, and 'academic culture'. This self is utilising human beings as means to maximise its gains in terms of wealth, power and prestige, thereby exterminating those forms of recognition that do not accord with instrumental rationality. Such objectification affects not only the others but also encapsulates the self. It eventually turns into an atomistic self that is particularly prone, according to Tang, to the lures of totalitarianism.[22]

Fröhlich very cleverly ties up his *Tang Junyi: Confucian Philosophy and the Challenge of Modernity* with a chapter which seems to make no sense at all, but which makes all the sense in the world when one understands Fröhlich's position as a postwar German-born academic: he wants to bring Tang to bear on the unique challenge to modernity posed by the Holocaust:

> In this context, Tang turned to the global ascension of a Janus-faced scientific civilisation that is crucial to 'free and democratic societies' but may also function as a trajectory for the reification of modern man:
>
> > If man is regarded merely as an object in the external world, then like other external objects he has no reason not to be used, controlled and manufactured. The totalitarian states do in fact use scientific knowledge and techniques to remold men for political purposes, degrading their dignity and condemning their soul. Here we can again see the need for Confucian teachings, which respect scientific study on the one hand, and hold sacred the transcendental subjectivity of man on the other. […] For example, Hitler and Stalin and other dictators all made use of scientific and technological methods to build a human society. But what kind of society did they actually build? They applied scientific and technological methods to control and enchain the freedom of humanity, form autocratic and dictatorial politics, and destroy democratic institutions. [This] was evidently even more effective than not using scientific and technological methods.

[22] Fröhlich, *Tang Junyi*, pp. 255-256, 268, 278-279.

> […] Tang also deemed it imperative, as we have seen, to initiate a renewal of humanistic thought and values (e.g. as a renewal of a 'classical spirit') within a liberal democracy. He related this agenda explicitly to the struggle of the 'free world' against the 'totalitarian world', which he saw as unfolding in the 1950s as a struggle that should involve the reconstruction of a 'democratic spirit'. The notion 'democratic spirit' refers to the conviction that the stability of democratic government requires the social diffusion of a humanistic culture. Tang thus warned, in an interview from 1974, that because democracy was abused by totalitarianism in the 20th Century, establishing a kind of 'education and culture' that generates common knowledge about 'true democratic political institutions' was now necessary. When seen from this perspective, the modern Confucian project to interweave the renewal of China's humanistic 'main current' with the adoption of a democratic political form is also an attempt to fend off totalitarianism.
>
> […Tang's] moral thought is best described as centring on the issue of the self-image of individuals. What is at stake here is the capacity of individuals to conceive of themselves as solitary moral authorities, namely as sages capable of moral intuition. Such a self-depiction can be considered as an intrinsic requirement for the individual's ability to make autonomous moral judgments. With its core concept of *liangzhi*, Tang's Confucian civil theology unfolds a moral vision that describes the individual as having immediate access to an innate source of judgments about right and wrong. This entails a tendency to de-emphasise the role of society as the producer of morality.
>
> But *liangzhi* does not belong to this moral vision exclusively: notions of *liangzhi*, after all, proved attractive to Chiang Kai-shek and his followers, as well as to 20th-century Japanese militarists. It seems that there is an inevitable ambiguity to the notion of *liangzhi*. […] Faced with such a dilemma, Tang inscribed his moral intuitionism into an ethics that stressed the individual's social responsibility. The Confucian individual was not to withdraw into the irrationality of purely spiritual inwardness, but rather called upon to bear the tension between the requirements of social life and the continuous effort to realise the self-image of becoming the sole mediator of the 'inner sage'. Still, the individual is not seen as bound by conventionally sanctioned moral rules in realising his or her capacity for moral intuition. Tang's modern Confucianism addresses, in other words, 'the question of *moral responsibility for resisting socialisation*' - and hence a problem that belongs to the reflection on the Holocaust.[23]

Fröhlich, in short, embodies a postwar German critical spirit which adopts, for understandable historical reasons, a *de facto* posture of Habermasian suspicion of all that transcends 'reason'; even the Holocaust must be 'reflected upon' and 'explained', not (as it will be in Chapter 9 of this book) merely 'narrated'. As Fröhlich

[23] Fröhlich, *Tang Junyi*, pp. 279, 281, 288-289.

confessed to me personally in December 2018[24], the idea that the Holocaust was ultimately caused by a 'lack of self-cultivation' is an utter non-starter in Germany, as is vague waffle about anything *geistig* or spiritual: the common view is that precisely such talk got Germany into its 20-century mess in the first place. And yet, this is essentially the argument on offer in this book: a self-cultivated individual is the only type of person who can 'resist socialisation', speak truth to power, and generally embody ethical knowledge. The real tragedy of a scientistic stance, moreover, is that it prevents its victims from experiencing the humanistic ethos of Tang Junyi, Tu Weiming and modern Confucianism directly (a goal which this book hopes to achieve via echoes from well beyond China); nevertheless, the view from outside which Fröhlich offers the reader of his extraordinary book at least makes her want to explore inside for herself.

Henry Rosemont, Roger Ames and the Confucian Self

In 'The Internationalization of Confucianism in the 21st Century' (2014), Henry Rosemont Jr. admirably describes the 'need for a global ethics' in the 21st Century:

> To some - particularly in developing countries - a demand for a *global ethics* will at least initially be seen as code for accepting a 'universalist' ethics which has come, quite properly much of the time, to be seen as just one more attempt at Western (or First World) hegemony, imperialism, or other opprobrious terms of art that signify attempts to dominate, to control, and exploit the rest of the world under a capitalist system. As a consquence, a global ethics must be formulated and developed with great care, and it must be done openly, in two distinct senses of 'openly': the task must be undertaken by all peoples in all cultures, and it must not be assumed in advance that any particular culture has a monopoly on ethical insight.
>
> […] Without a deep sensitivity to the particularities of specific cultural norms around the world, the one-size-fits-all universalism so rightly suspect today will continue to be resisted in many parts of the world, and if it continues to dominate our thinking, will be increasingly ineffectual in reversing the manifold political, social and environmental evils adversely affecting more and more people every day. And its potentially totalitarian influence on everyone's thinking would almost certainly serve to stifle the human capacity for creativity, expression and joy far beyond what any particular Big Brother ever dreamed of accomplishing.
>
> At the same time, attending only to, and living in the midst of solely specific cultural particularities will make for an isolationist orientation, which is no longer possible in the global village the world is becoming, and worse than that, will impoverish thinking in each isolationist culture itself about the range of possibilities of what might be true, or just, or beautiful for its bearers. We expand our intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual horizons when

[24] I was lucky enough to meet Thomas Fröhlich at a memorial conference in honour of Tang Junyi held at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in December 2018. I thank him for his enthusiastic support for my project, and trust that he understands my engagement with his work in the constructive spirit in which it was intended.

> we can confront (in a non-threatening way) other intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual forms of life.[25]

The solution offered by Rosemont and his colleague Roger Ames, however, is a radical one: Confucian 'role ethics' is to replace Western 'individualism':

> The ethics of today, philosophical and popular, are all based on the concept of the *individual* as the locus of moral concern. While a great deal of good has come from such an orientation in the past - especially for the early promotion of democracy - it has become increasingly dysfunctional over the course of (at least) the last century. Before we say more about the need for and nature of a global ethics, we must appreciate why, in our opinion, the concept of the free, autonomous individual should no longer be at the heart of it; we must first be clear just how much of today's moral, political, economic and social mischief can be traced to the concept of individualism and attendant concept of freedom so that we can argue that nothing of worth is lost, and much might be gained by a different conceptual foundation for ethics.[26]

The central 'argument' in *this* book, however, is that '*self*-cultivation' - a core Confucian notion - is the only possible 'conceptual foundation' for ethics, if ethics can even be said to have a 'conceptual' foundation at all; rather than arguing over such terms, however, or seeking to construct a 'one-size-fits-all' formula for such cultivation, we instead offer a humble variety of menu options to thirsty selves in search of restoration. For as Rosemont himself argues,

> our cognitive and affective domains are inextricably linked: no idea is utterly devoid of emotion, emotions are not empty of cognitive content; we both think and feel with the same organ, the 'heart-mind' (*xin*). […] Surely we should at all times be reasonable, but that is not the same as the demand to employ instrumental rationality in all ethical circumstances. […] What we divide as the political, social, ethical, aesthetic and religious realms of human life (and in philosophy) are not divided in that way by the Master and his followers, either in theory or in fact.[27]

Nor is it easy or useful to disagree with Ames when he says:

> Both Rosemont and I believe that the long-postponed impact of Confucian values on different aspects of the world's philosophical and cultural traditions is now on the horizon, and that a creative fusion of Confucianism

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[25] Henry Rosemont Jr., 'The Internationalization of Confucianism in the 21st Century', in Cheng Chung-yi (ed.), *New Directions in Chinese Philosophy*, (Hong Kong: New Asia College, 2014), pp. 11-13.

[26] Rosemont, 'The Internationalization of Confucianism in the 21st Century', p. 6.

[27] Rosemont, 'The Internationalization of Confucianism in the 21st Century', pp. 15, 16, 17.

> with other narratives will follow behind the rise of China as a contemporary economic and political force.
>
> Beethoven is not 'music that German people like to listen to' - Beethoven is world music. Similarly, Confucianism is not just Chinese or East Asian - it is quickly becoming a global resource for addressing the pressing issues of our times. […] For us in the first decades of the 21st Century, 'appreciating' Confucianism means no more or less than participating in this evolutionary process at a juncture when Confucian values will as never before emerge on the world stage as a cultural force to be reckoned with.[28]

Confucianism for Ames, 'rather than advancing universal principles', 'respects [as this book does] the uniqueness of the particular [story] and the need for a generative wisdom that takes this uniqueness into account'; '[it] proceeds […] from those *particular* historical instances of successful living', which include, but are by no means not limited to, Confucius or 'Confucians' themselves.[29] Ames argues, via Tang Junyi, that Confucianism can hence be thought of as a 'sustained attempt to "family" the lived human experience'[30] in the intimate sense of a global republic of letters:

> If the family is a morally strong, thriving association of significant persons within a mature culture, much is available for investment in and growth for the incipient person. If the family is barren and troubled within only a thinly cultured environment, it is a more difficult road for the emerging person. But even when the legendary Shun is born into the family of the morally deficient Blind Man, the model of Emperor Yao is still available as part of a rich cultural resource that enables Shun through the assiduous cultivation of habits of conduct to become a sage himself. Shun's circumstances are a fair demonstration that there are cultural assets available for everyone to draw upon in aspiring to become sagely in their conduct.
>
> The basic significance of the [Confucian *tianrenheyi*] mantra […] is making this same point about potential. It is the person nourished by culture who becomes consummately human, and it is the life of the consummate human who contributes to the cultural resources that make a consummate humanity possible. Potentiality emerges in these collaborations between aspiring persons and an inspired world.[31]

Culture does not, however - God only knows - make us better people on its own; such improvement always requires our own autonomous engagement with it. We wish to show in this book that, for all the excesses and distortions wrought by *homo*

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[28] Roger T. Ames, 'Achieving Personal Identity in Confucian Role Ethics', in Cheng Chung-yi (ed.), *New Directions in Chinese Philosophy*, (Hong Kong: New Asia College, 2014), p. 20.

[29] See Ames, 'Achieving Personal Identity in Confucian Role Ethics', p. 23.

[30] Ames, 'Achieving Personal Identity in Confucian Role Ethics', p. 33.

[31] Ames, 'Achieving Personal Identity in Confucian Role Ethics', pp. 45-46.

economicus models in the social sciences[32], the idea of the 'autonomous self' still has plenty of meat on it; the world's date with Confucianism, and Confucianism's date with the world, would be better served, on the very terms set forth by Rosemont and Ames themselves, to cling to this legacy of individual freedom *for* rather than *from* morality (a feature of the modern novel and modern poetry alike, if not of modern philosophy). To repeat the words of Tu Weiming's other great teacher, Mou Zongsan: 'People nowadays tend to think that morality restrains. […] The truth is that morality is not for restraining people. Morality is for liberating and fulfilling people.'[33] Whether Hans Küng's *Projekt Weltethos* needs an injection of such 'Confucian' spirit to help it transcend its own abstract universalist image, or whether a fresh start is needed under a 'Spiritual Humanism' paradigm, will be for the readers of this book (and its prequel) to decide.

Tu Weiming's Spiritual Humanism and Hans Küng's *Weltethos*

I came to see the damage that was done
and the treasures that prevail.
I stroke the beam of my lamp
slowly along the flank
of something more permanent
than fish or weed

the thing I came for:
the wreck and not the story of the wreck
the thing itself and not the myth.

Adrienne Rich
'Diving into the Wreck'

Hans Küng's failure to animate and export his *Weltethos* idea, at least as I tried to document it in *From Global Ethic*, parallels Thomas Fröhlich's inability to penetrate the ethos of modern Confucianism. The attempt to pigeonhole Confucianism as a 'role ethics', meanwhile, and to deny the cross-cultural humanistic value of the concept of autonomous selfhood, is counterproductive, and destined to fail: a 'World Ethos' is an *ethos*, not a theory or definition of an ethos, and an embodiment of something which transcends all roles; Tu Weiming's Spiritual Humanism (*jingshen renwenzhuyi*) offers, in the tradition of modern Confucianism, something more than description and less than dogma: it is a warm invitation, one which we

[32] Please see my former boss Claus Dierksmeier's *Reframing Economic Ethics: The Philosophical Foundations of Humanistic Management*, (Palgrave Humanism in Business Series, 2016) for an argument for humanistic reform of the social sciences based on a conception of 'qualitative freedom' for the autonomous self.

[33] Mou Zongsan, Nineteen Lectures in Chinese Philosophy (Zhongguo zhexue shijiu jiang), (Shanghai, Guji Chubanshe, 1997), pp. 78-79.

will be forwarding over the coming chapters, not to autonomous self-cultivation as such (for what could be more didactic and boring?), but to a banquet full of surprises.

Tu begins his 2018 Wang Yangming Lecture 'Spiritual Humanism: Self, Community, Earth, and Heaven' by admitting that 'in any philosophical inquiry abstract concepts are unavoidable'; nevertheless, he continues, 'I would like to stress that while abstract conceptualization is unavoidable my purpose is to enable the concrete, immediately and experientially accessible.'[34] The paradigm example in the Confucian tradition is Lu Xiangshan:

> Xiangshan is noted for his commitment to the Mencian line of thinking. He made it explicit that his experiential understanding of Mencius did not come from any other sources than reading the *Mencius* and that he got it by himself. To him, reading the *Mencius* is not to read an ancient text to understand, through interpretation, the textual meaning of what the Master meant to say. Rather, it is a living encounter with Mencius in person who uttered these words to him personally and directly. This kind of utterance sounds like a religious injunction that is not subject to discussion, debate, or verification.[35]

It *sounds* like it, but it isn't; in fact, the whole challenge of modern Confucianism, at least as understood by the likes of Tang and Tu, is to discuss, debate and 'verify' these experiences, not by using external social-scientific criteria or philological instruments, but by building trust, through examples, in the possibility of a more intimate access. Such 'Spiritual Humanism' is the exact opposite of what Christopher Hitchens describes as the 'fundamental monotheism and shallow cultism' of those 'fraud[s] of Chaucerian proportions' who 'know they are right and claim the mandate of heaven'[36]; likewise, in Tu's view,

> human nature in turn expresses itself through the vitality and dynamism of the original heart. It is not only an idea but an activity. It feels, wills, senses, and knows in connection with an ever-expanding network of relationships. It is relational and its potential for connectivity is unlimited, but there is always a core, a center that cannot be reduced to its connections [or roles] no matter how extensive they are. […] It is not a static structure, but a continuously becoming activity. In this sense, human beings should not be conceived as being but becoming. Human beings as becoming are ceaselessly evolving. This has cosmological as well as anthropological significance.
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> […] I know that I can never fully understand the singularity that I recognize as myself, but I know for sure that it is my privilege and

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[34] Tu Weiming, 'Spiritual Humanism: Self, Community, Earth and Heaven', Wang Yangming Lecture, World Congress of Philosophy, 18 August 2018, p. 2.

[35] Tu, 'Spiritual Humanism: Self, Community, Earth and Heaven', p. 9.

[36] Christopher Hitchens, *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice*, (Verso, 1995), p. 6.

> responsibility to try to do so. By analogy, I am aware that numerous singularities, like me, are in the same boat.
>
> This is the human condition that is relevant to all spiritual traditions.[37]

Spiritual Humanism is not to be thought of as requiring mind-body dualism, belief one way or the other in an afterlife, or any other given dogma; it is the lived experience itself of authenticity and autonomy, as in the further example, from the Confucian tradition, of Cheng Hao:

> Cheng Hao confidently asserted that his learning in general was indebted to his predecessors, but the true import of the two characters 'Heavenly Principle' (*tianli*) was intimately embodied in him by himself. In other words, Cheng Hao experienced the full meaning of the Heavenly Principle by personally getting it himself. His subjectivity enabled him to realize that the Heavenly Principle is in his original heart. It was not revealed to him by an authoritative force from outside. He really got it himself.
>
> […] In the *Book of Change* the cosmos is always a dynamic process generating new realities by creatively transforming the existing order. The message for us is that we ought to emulate this Heavenly vitality by continuous effort of self-strengthening. Our reverence for Heaven is not to worship a 'wholly other' authority totally beyond our comprehension but to express a deep sense of awe for the source of life and creativity in itself.
>
> […] Understandably, the highest aspiration of self-realization is the 'unity of Heaven and humanity'. Yet, we must acknowledge the asymmetry in the Heaven-human relationship. Although Heaven is creativity in itself, human beings learn to be creative through personal effort. Heaven's genuineness is naturally brilliant, whereas human beings struggle to become true to themselves by means of knowledge and wisdom.
>
> […] However, Cheng Hao's personal experience of embodying the Heavenly Principle is significant in two senses. It is a vision of humanity and it is a confirmation of subjectivity. Humanity as Cheng Hao envisioned it is not merely an idea but an activity; dynamic, transformative, and productive. This is how the Heavenly Principle functions in human life. Its dynamism is ceaseless. It is always in the process of becoming.[38]

This is, depending on the generosity of one's understanding, by no means incompatible with the Abrahamic monotheisms:

> The grammar of theism strikes a sympathetic resonance in Spiritual Humanism. Sacred places (cathedrals, churches, temples, mosques, synagogues), hymns, songs, prayers, dances, festivals are beyond the pretensions to scientific, philosophical, or theological control. All three great theistic religions have spiritual resources and intellectual depths to inspire

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[37] Tu, 'Spiritual Humanism: Self, Community, Earth and Heaven', pp. 10, 15.

[38] Tu, 'Spiritual Humanism: Self, Community, Earth and Heaven', pp. 19-20, 23.

> us to sing songs of hope and express our gratitude to divine love. They have made profound contributions to human religiosity.[39]

But just as a 21st-century 'World Ethos' is a hopeless cause as long as it remains a kind of twisted therapy group for religious fundamentalists keen to have their own pathologies buttressed by contact with fundamentalists from other cultures - a fair summation of 'interreligious dialogue' at its politically correct worst - so too does Tu's Spiritual Humanism invite productive controversy rather than methadone-style treatment for superstition:

> Spiritual Humanism may be theistic or pantheistic, but it embraces atheism and a variety of vitalism characteristic of most indigenous traditions as well.
>
> […] Our spiritual transformation is not a departure from where we are but a journey to the interiority of our being. Paradoxically, the innermost core of our being, the source of our self-knowledge, is none other than the macrocosmic reality ingrained in our existence. Surely, Earth, community, and body constrain us. They shape us into concrete forms. We are inescapably earthly, communal, and bodily. Hitherto, spiritual traditions in general have instructed us to free ourselves from these constraints. A great human aspiration is to be liberated from mundane bondage, to escape from the prison house of the soul. In Spiritual Humanism, these are enabling constraints, the vehicles that carry us forward to our destiny. They are instrumental in offering each of us the unique path for self-realization. Without them we cannot exist in any concrete sense.[40]

All this requires, however, deep trust in these 'enabling constraints', in life itself, lest the desire for 'escape', via physical suicide or the spiritual suicide of submission to totalitarian forces (including those of fundamentalist religion), prove overwhelming. Like Lu Xiangshan and Cheng Hao, we have to find such trust and freedom for ourselves, through our own efforts; there is no magic pill formula for it that can simply be prescribed, taken home and swallowed. Beyond all friendly respect, therefore, for Hans Küng's efforts to reform Catholic theology for the modern era and to promote a culture of global dialogue on the basis of a shared sense of 'Basic Trust in Life', Tu takes Confucian aim at the 'contractarian', 'lowest-common-denominator' approach to universal ethics made famous by the Küng-drafted 1993 *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*:

> Küng firmly believed that the peaceful coexistence of religions was a necessary precondition for common human survival [in the 21st Century], but this universal ethical code, arrived at via interreligious negotiation and the elision of all contradictions and conflicts, was destined to collapse into weakness and abstraction. […] How, instead, to understand the world's heterogeneous cultures as sources for one's own spiritual development? And how to avoid the trap of relativism by encouraging self-criticism? […]

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[39] Tu, 'Spiritual Humanism: Self, Community, Earth and Heaven', p. 29.

[40] Tu, 'Spiritual Humanism: Self, Community, Earth and Heaven', p. 29.

> Küng's lowest-common-denominator [Declaration] looks feeble and unpersuasive in this light.[41]

The solution Tu proposes with 'Spiritual Humanism' is to shift from all forms of 'contractarianism' and 'collectivism' and to embrace, instead, the anti-totalitarian metaphor of 'learning for the self': 'Any recourse to collectivist ideology to thwart the advancement of learning for the self is fundamentally anti-Confucian. But the Confucian self is not a lonely island; she is a centre of relationships. As such, the [Confucian] call to "enlarge oneself in order to enlarge others" is not pathological altruism; […] nor is it a call to individual self-sacrifice in the name of the collective; rather, it is the *junzi*'s individual call to herself to follow her own true path.'[42] Such mature selfhood is unthinkable without a family or village behind it ('from the perspective of learning for the self, the family is the fundamental structure […] within which the cultivation of individual virtue can occur'[43]), but the ancient Confucian principle which states that 'from the Emperor to the common person, all must take self-cultivation as the root' is neither scientific nor political in nature; it must be understood as occupying an autonomous humanistic sphere, in which every human being has an equal right to education.[44]

The *Zhìshífènzǐ* as a Universal Ideal

> *The difference between the intellectual and the mere functionary is that the intellectual stands in opposition to all order, even good order.*
>
> Adonis

Tu has distinguished in Chinese between 知识分子 (*zhīshifènzǐ*) - the standard term for 'intellectual' - and 智识分子 (*zhìshífènzǐ)*, a neologism which reflects an emphasis on humanistic 'wisdom' rather than scientistic 'knowledge'.[45] Such a *zhìshífènzǐ* or 'wisdollectual' is, broadly speaking, an individual within any profession who treats her work as a vocation, and who is hence willing to exercise 'loyal opposition' to her seniors and superiors in the name of a wider ethical calling.[46]

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[41] Tu Weiming, 'Quanqiu Lunli de Rujia Quanshi' ('A Confucian Interpretation of the Global Ethic'), *Journal of Literature, History and Philosophy*, v. 6, 2002, pp. 6-7.

[42] Tu, 'Quanqiu Lunli de Rujia Quanshi', pp. 7-8.

[43] Tu, 'Quanqiu Lunli de Rujia Quanshi', p. 8.

[44] See Tu, 'Quanqiu Lunli de Rujia Quanshi', p. 8.

[45] Tu Weiming, 'Wenhua Zhongguo yu Rujia Chuantong', *First Wu Teh Yao Memorial Lecture*, 20/3/1995.

[46] Tu, 'Wenhua Zhongguo yu Rujia Chuantong'.

Of all the myths about Confucianism which Tu has spent his long life dispelling, perhaps the greatest of all is the idea that the virtue of *xiao* - more often than not rendered didactically in English as 'filial piety' - entails an ethic of blind submission to authority. In Tu's eyes, filial *critique* - of one's own parents, but also in the wider sense of the entire culture one has inherited - is synonymous with both freedom and loyalty; his return to Mainland China in 2010 can be understood as an attempt to replant this seed of critical reflection and loyal opposition at the country's flagship institution of higher learning, Peking University. Decades of Maoist rule, followed by 40 years of (wildly successful but also heavily authoritarian and materialistic) 'Reform and Opening Up', have left China at an important cultural crossroads; we argue in the rest of this chapter and the rest of this book, 'with' Tu but also far beyond him, that the critical spirit embodied by the *zhìshífènzǐ* is central to understanding Spiritual Humanism in a global context, and offers far more fertile soil for the survival of the global humanities in a STEM-heavy world than the contractarian and consensus-based approach of the *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*.

Tu uses the word *zhìshífènzǐ* 'in a specific way [which] implies a broader stake in society and politics, the fate of the nation and the peace of the world at large, than mere concern for one's own professional advancement or the immediate physical well-being of oneself or one's family; it means care for something even more profound.'[47] An intellectual may typically be defined as a 'turgid academic researcher unwilling to sully her hands beyond the confines of the ivory tower', but a 'wisdollectual' may come from anywhere; contemporary academia, indeed, may be less than ideal soil for the cultivation of such individuals.[48] Still, the *zhìshífènzǐ* is a minority in every walk of life:

> From the politician who seeks at all costs to expand her sphere of influence without any broader concerns than her own accumulation of power […] to the journalist who merely compiles news reports from readily available information for a quick and easy paycheck, we are a long way from the ideal of a *zhìshífènzǐ*. But whether one looks in academia, politics, business or the media, there *are* examples of exceptional individuals. […] Where do their resources come from if not from an independent personality, a sense of mission connected to cultural history of some kind, a concern for people everywhere and for the opinion of Heaven, a need to represent this ideal in one's own behaviour and not only for one's own sake?[49]

The Confucian idiom may be problematic here - many both within and beyond 'Cultural China' will struggle with the 'Heaven' metaphor in English - but Tu's deeper goal is to point to a form of 'learning for the self' which, under the rubric of 'Spiritual Humanism', embraces not only Confucianism and various forms of theism and pantheism, but atheism and manifold indigenous traditions as well. The *zhìshífènzǐ* may have been conceived by Tu for the circumstances of 'Cultural China', but just

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[47] Tu, 'Wenhua Zhongguo yu Rujia Chuantong'.

[48] See Tu, 'Wenhua Zhongguo yu Rujia Chuantong'.

[49] Tu, 'Wenhua Zhongguo yu Rujia Chuantong'.

as it encompasses all professions, so too does it ultimately transcend individual cultures and religions. There is, indeed, a common denominator - high rather than low - of human freedom for 'ultimate concern'[50], which Tu expresses in the following terms:

> Western-style secular humanism has promoted a culture of human domination over nature, a vision of struggle between the human and the natural world, and a Social Darwinism which pits individual human beings against each other, thereby breaking any bond between our animal nature and any higher ideals. […] The Confucian tradition [by contrast] takes the idea of destiny seriously, while recognising that each concrete individual is limited in what she can achieve at any given time. For a start, my gender, my time and place of birth, my parents and educational opportunities, my ethnicity and so on are not for me to choose. […] The business of turning these unchangeable facts about ourselves into resources for self-realisation in the ever-evolving context of daily life is an individual discipline; we are limited creatures, but we are entirely free within these limits. However little wisdom we have accumulated, however terrible our former or current environment, however little scope we may have for development in certain concrete directions, we are still free to advance the cultivation of our own selves; even in the most dire of circumstances, every minute is profoundly precious.[51]

The implications of this view of humanistic 'wisdom' for professional ethics are immense, if unspecific; beyond any formal or 'contractarian' codes of conduct, the *zhìshífènzǐ* is beholden to her own constantly evolving sense of vocational responsibility as it connects to her wider sense of personal 'destiny' and meaning. It is the intergenerational virtue of *xiao*, however - the desire to live up to the best of that which others have given us - which prevents such individual dignity and freedom from descending into self-righteous relativism; our truest freedom is one of autonomous belonging, not consumeristic choice, and it manifests itself not in self-interested subordination to external authority, but always in constructive and loving critique of it.

The *Zhìshífènzǐ* as the Goal of Humanistic Education?

You don't build love with oughts.

Vladimir Mayakovsky

It is beyond the scope of this first chapter to plough into ongoing debates in American fora such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Arts and Letters Daily*

[50] See Tu, 'Wenhua Zhongguo yu Rujia Chuantong'.

[51] Tu, 'Wenhua Zhongguo yu Rujia Chuantong'.

on the decline and fall of the humanities, or to engage in the details of popular campaigns by intellectual celebrities such as Jordan Peterson to resuscitate the humanities in new forms for a digital age. But it is worthy of loyal opposition to Tu Weiming himself to push beyond his academic legacy as a modern Confucian scholar and ask where his *zhìshífènzǐ* might belong in conversations beyond the ivory tower on the place of the humanities in contemporary global education. Every sphere of human endeavour could presumably benefit from a multiplication of such whistleblowing bravery, but it would also, first and foremost, be intrinsically beneficial to the millions of young individuals concerned to be given extra assistance with the complex and endless business of 'learning to be human'. Economists, education bureaucrats and even voters understandably fear words like 'endless', but that is what the humanities are, both in theory and practice; difficult resource allocation decisions will always have to be made, but if the *zhìshífènzǐ* is an intrinsic as well as an extrinsic good, then any qualitatively free society must make at least *some* arrangements to provide fair and meaningful access to the learning and culture which make her more likely.

Tu's turn to 'Spiritual Humanism' in the 2010s can be understood as a response to the failure of Küng's Global Ethic Project and other postmodern initiatives in the 1990s and 2000s to provide the kind of global leadership the humanities so desperately need; it is also, as a label borrowed from Indian philosopher R. Balasubramanian, an attempt to provide a sufficiently de-Confucianised -ism to prevent accusations of cultural bias of the sort that faced Küng and his *Declaration*. Yet Tu's attempts to *define* 'Spiritual Humanism' in the language of philosophy have remained, as they are destined to do, both interculturally awkward and heavily Confucian; humanity will never wholeheartedly agree on formulations like the one Tu chooses for the conclusion to his 'Spiritual Humanism' lecture at the 2018 World Congress of Philosophy:

> A human being so conceived is not a creature but an active agent in the cosmic transformation as an observer, participant, indeed co-creator. Even though there may not be a Creator, the creativity since the Big Bang has never been lost but cumulated in every segment of the evolutionary story - sun, earth, life, animal, and human. We are the inheritor of the cosmic energy. We are charged with the responsibility to see to it that what has been endowed in our nature continues to give generative power to new realities and life forms. Spiritual Humanism believes that human life has transcendent meaning, that there is always mystery to be comprehended, and that theism as well as other manifestations of human religiosity teaches us to rise above secularism. We are finite beings, but in our finitude, there is the constant presence of infinite divinity. Spiritual Humanism is a faith in Humanity: the task of learning to be fully human is to 'form one body with Heaven, Earth and the myriad things', for there is intrinsic unity between immanence and transcendence.[52]

Broadly accepting Tu's critique of Küng's *Declaration*, and choosing to embark on a book project on Spiritual Humanism in 2018, I was faced with the challenge of how

[52] Tu, 'Spiritual Humanism', p. 33.

to avoid such accusations of cultural bias myself in my approach. My conclusion was that only a critical anthology - sufficiently global in scope - could minimise the problem by providing a multiplicity of entry points to the idea of 'learning for the self'; by offering a smorgasbord of 24 stories, I hope to illustrate by narrative juxtaposition what a *zhìshífènzǐ* might look and feel like in two dozen separate contexts. Still, it was Tu's insistence on humanistic wisdom as 'embodied knowledge' (*tizhi*) which initially emboldened me to offer stories, and stories within and among stories, rather than too-pithy, philosophically framed and culturally bound definitions.

The reader will decide at the end if this endeavour - ultimately a literary one - was a success or not. But given that these 24 chapters represent an infinitesimal fraction of the humanistic patrimony of the world, the fate of this particular book is beside the point compared to the wider question at stake: namely, whether the sprawling mass of human spirituality represented by the world's artistic and religious heritage needs to be collected under rubrics at all, and if so, why. In any case, Küng's moniker of *Grundvertrauen* ('Basic Trust' in life or reality) sustained 24 chapters, and Tu's 'Spiritual Humanism' has also stretched easily here to 24 voices from many different backgrounds; all 48 could be said to represent examples of the *zhìshífènzǐ* in action in one way or another. There can be no end to such stories - a true *zhìshífènzǐ* defines herself ever anew in response to unrepeatable circumstances - but exactly how many such stories are needed to edify a young, questing self in search of spiritual nourishment? And given that each of us starts each day with a different set of 'limits', which stories will speak to our situations most powerfully and help us most with our own 'learning'? It is clear that there can be no curriculum or closed canon here in the manner of an anatomy syllabus or 'Introduction to Organisational Psychology' course.

Then there is the problem of turning anything at all - even the mass production of *zhìshífènzǐ* - into the 'goal' of humanistic education. Art works as art because it surprises, not because it performs a prior ideological or social function. 'Learning for the self', in other words, can only ever be defined retrospectively by the self doing the learning; as soon as bureaucrats get their hands on it, it ceases to be what it is. And while it can jokingly be said that even Hitler and Stalin were in favour of freedom of speech for views that they liked, like all jokes, this one works because it is true: the freedom creatively to define 'loyalty' lies always with the reader or disciple, never with the master.

The chapters to come in this book, therefore, will not work identically on any two readers, but they are not meant to. As Borges, the great liberator of philosophy from its own pretensions, teasingly put it: 'Literature is not the art of combining words; it is something much more important than that', namely a form of learning for oneself which transcends the promise of material trappings summarised under the pejorative Confucian label 'learning for others'. Such instrumental learning, at times confusingly called 'vocational', views all 'knowledge' - even so-called 'self-help' knowledge - as means to social recognition, status, and wealth. The reader here is invited, by contrast, to immerse herself in the following stories, not with any didactic or instrumental goal of self-improvement for wealth creation in mind, but entirely for their own sakes. The funny thing about real self-cultivation is that, like real happiness, it is absolutely hopeless to aim for it. And the even funnier thing about the world we currently inhabit is that the most globally resonant intellectual debate

of 2019 - held between Jordan Peterson and Slavoj Zizek in Toronto on 19 April ('Happiness: Capitalism vs. Marxism') - could cover *precisely* this moral and spiritual terrain and yet fail to mention Confucianism once (except as a pretext for continued Communist Party rule in China):

> Zizek: Since we live in a modern era, we cannot simply refer to an unquestionable authority to confer a mission or task on us. Modernity means that yes, we should carry the burden, but the main burden is freedom itself. We are responsible for our burdens. Not only are we not allowed cheap excuses for not doing our duty, duty itself should not serve as an excuse. We are never just instruments of some higher cause. Once traditional authority loses its substantial power, it is not possible to return to it. All such returns are today a postmodern fake. […] Far from pushing us too far, the Left has gradually [been] losing ground for decades. Its trademarks - universal health care, free education, and so on - are continually diminished. Look at Bernie Sanders's program. It is just a version of what half a century ago in Europe was simply the predominant social democracy, and today it is decried as a threat to our freedoms, to the American way of life, and so on and so on. I can see no threat to free creativity in this program; on the contrary, I see healthcare and education and so on as enabling me to focus my life on important creative issues. I see equality as a space for creating differences. […] Freedom and responsibility hurt; they require an effort, and the highest function of an authentic master is literally to awaken us to our freedom.
>
> […]
>
> Peterson: There's something that isn't exactly right about reducing everything to economic competition, and capitalism certainly pushes in that direction, advertising culture pushes in that direction, sales and marketing culture pushes in that direction, and there are reasons for that and I have a certain amount of admiration for the necessity of advertisers and salesmen and marketers, but that doesn't mean that the transformation of all elements of life into commodities in a capitalist sense is the best way forward. […] And maybe capitalism will not solve our problems - I actually don't believe that it will. I've in fact argued that the proper pathway forward is one of individual moral responsibility aimed at the highest good - something for me that's rooted in our underlying Judeo-Christian tradition that insists that each person is sovereign in their own right and a locus of ultimate value, which is something that you can accept regardless of your religious presuppositions and something that you do accept if you participate in a society such as ours. […] We presume that each person is a locus of responsibility and decision-making of such import that the very stability of the state depends upon the integrity of their psyche, the integrity of their character, and so what I've been suggesting to people is that they adopt as much responsibility as they possibly can in keeping with that, in keeping with their aiming at the highest possible good, which to me is something approximating a balance between what's good for you as an individual and

> what's good for your family […] and then what's good for society. […] I happen to believe that that has to happen at the individual level first and that's the pathway forward that I see. […] It's not happiness, it's meaning, and meaning is to be found in the adoption of responsibilities. […] It's that you're you're acting in a manner that is in accordance with what you believe to be right but you're doing it in a manner that simultaneously expands your ability to do it which means that you cannot stay safely ensconced within the confines of your current ethical beliefs; you have to stand on the edge of what you know and encounter continually the consequences of your ignorance. [… It's the feeling that] you're in the right place at the right time, you're doing what you should be doing but you're doing it in a manner that expands your capacity to do even better things in the future. I think that's the deepest human instinct there is; it's not rational, it's far deeper than that. And it's something that's genuine and it exists within us and it constitutes a proper guide if you don't pervert it with self-deception and deceit.
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> […] It's not that I'm making a case for the individual like Ayn Rand makes a case for the individual; that's not it. I'm making a case for individual *responsibility*; that's not the same thing. it's like there is something that's good for you but it has to also be good for your family if it's just good for you that's not good enough and if it's good for you and your family and it's not good for society then that's not good enough either and so the responsibility is to find a pathway that balances these things in a harmonious manner.[53]

This book may be understood as an attempt to expand or enrich this 'unfinished' global conversation with voices which the two speakers - not to mention their enormous, hungry, young, international audience, in search of some sort of 21st-century World Ethos beyond the shallow Cold War binaries of 'Communism' and 'Capitalism' - may not have heard. Tu Weiming, with his modern Confucian backing vocals and 'anthropocosmic' vision of individual investment in the destiny of the universe, was the first of these; here come 23 more.

[53] Jordan Peterson and Slavoj Zizek, 'Happiness: Capitalism vs. Marxism', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78BFFq_8XvM&t=1s, 20/4/2019 (accessed 25/4/2019).

2. Natalia Ginzburg's *Le piccole virtú*

> *In her choice of details, the true artist does not seek out the most realistic or least realistic in order to seem more or less modern; she paints her inner world, and the characters which populate it, such as they are, not such as she might wish them to be. If the characters are fake, then the world she constructs is also fake. This generally happens to those artists who do not possess a truth of their own, and who content themselves instead with reheating the words of others. […] Telling one's own truth: this is the only way to give birth to a work of art.*
>
> Natalia Ginzburg

Natalia Ginzburg's *Le piccole virtú (The Small Virtues)*, a collection of essays published in Turin in 1962, may seem an unlikely place to continue our journey, but we hope to have justified our choice by the time we have walked down each of the book's eleven short streets. Is Ginzburg best regarded as a 'modern Confucian' author in the tradition of Tang Junyi and Tu Weiming? One might very well be inclined to say so, but our deeper hope is to have forgotten such tribal questions entirely by the end of the chapter.

<u>'Inverno in Abruzzo' ('Winter in Abruzzo' (1944))</u>

Le piccole virtú begins with a feeling familiar to Tang Junyi: 'When the first snow began to fall, a slow sadness took hold of us. We were in exile: our city was far away, and so too the books, friends and various shifting parts of a true existence.'[54] This war-enforced nostalgia of exile - seemingly from the 'myriad things' of the world itself - 'grew in us every day', and assumes a spiritual dimension (as Tang's own did in 'mercantile' Hong Kong) via contrast with the venality of a local shopkeeper:

> I would talk to the children about our old city (they were very small, and had no memory of it). I told them that the houses were tall, that there were lots of houses and streets, and lots of nice shops. 'But here there's Girò,' they would say.
>
> […] Girò sold a bit of everything: tinned food, candles, postcards, shoes, oranges. When the new deliveries arrived, the kids would follow him and eat the rotten oranges he threw away. At Christmas, there were sweets and liqueurs as well, but Girò never moved a cent on the price. 'What a

[54] Natalia Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2015(1962)), p. 6. All translations in this book are my own unless otherwise stated.

> miserable bastard you are, Girò,' the women would tell him. 'The nice guys get eaten by the dogs,' he would reply.[55]

Ginzburg's husband Leone, soon to be captured, tortured and murdered by the Gestapo, represents the polar opposite of Girò, as his final letter from prison attests:

> One of the things that pains me the most is the ease with which the people around me (including, sometimes, myself) lose their taste for the bigger injustices when faced with danger to their own lives. I will therefore try to talk about you, not me. My aspiration for you is that you get back to a normal existence as soon as you possibly can. […] Through your work as an artist, you will liberate yourself from the surfeit of tears which must be swelling up inside you; through your social engagement, whatever form that may end up taking, you will stay close to the worlds of other people. […] I've spent a lot of time recently thinking about our life together. Our only enemy, I concluded, was my own fear. Whenever I was besieged by it, I concentrated so hard on trying to overcome it that I had no vitality left in me for anything else. Don't you agree? If and when we see each other again, I will be free from this fear, and there will be no more stretches of darkness in our days together.[56]

Ginzburg herself will play with time throughout *Le piccole virtú*; 'Inverno in Abruzzo' was written in the Italian remote past tense despite the fact that the dreadful events described had happened only months before. The goal is seemingly to establish a permanent, spiritual dimension of time itself, in which intimacy and sacrifice transcend the linearity of daily routine:

> My husband died in Rome's Regina Coeli Prison just a few months after we left the village. Faced with the horror of his lonely death and the various terrors which preceded it, I ask myself if this really happened to us, to those people who used to buy their oranges at Girò's and go for walks together in the snow. I had faith, then, in an easy and happy future, full of sated desires, shared experiences and undertakings. But that was the best time of my life, and it is only now that it is gone forever - only now - that I know.[57]

<u>'Le scarpe rotte' ('Ruined Shoes' (1945))</u>

Ginzburg will insist throughout *Le piccole virtú* that the life of the spirit - a possibility for everyone, but not a given for anyone - requires a modicum of material and emotional comfort, at least in early life:

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[55] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 8-9.

[56] Domenico Scarpa quotes Leone Ginzburg's final letter to Natalia in his introduction to the text, 'Le strade di Natalia Ginzburg', in Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. XXV-XXVI.

[57] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 9-10.

> I am part of a family where everyone has solid, decent shoes. My mother had so many pairs at one stage that she even had to find a separate wardrobe just to keep them all. When I go back and see my folks, they let out cries of shame and pain at the sight of the shoes I am wearing. But I know that it is possible to live with shoes like this. During the German occupation, I was on my own here in Rome, and had only the one pair. […] This is why I have such miserable shoes even now; they are a reminder, and they don't seem anywhere near as bad as the ones I was reduced to then. If I find myself with money now, I don't spend it on shoes because they don't seem like anything particularly essential to me anymore. I was spoilt by life first, constantly surrounded by a caring and watchful family aura, but during that year in Rome I was on my own for the first time, and Rome is therefore very dear to me, despite being loaded with history, terrifying memories, and few kind hours.[58]

By contrast, Ginzburg's friend Angela Zucconi, reduced by the war to the same uncobbled state, 'doesn't have anyone to tell her off for the shoes she is wearing':

> My friend sometimes says that she is sick of working and would like to throw her life to the dogs. She says she wants to hole up in a bar and drink away her entire savings, or curl up in bed, forget everything, let the gas and electricity go unpaid, and slowly watch everything fall apart. She says this is what she will do when I leave. Our life together will not last long - I will go back to my mother and my children, to a house where I will no longer be allowed to get away with shoes like ours. My mother will take care of me, stop me using brooches as buttons, and devise ways of preventing me from writing into all hours of the night. And I, in turn, will take care of my kids, and beat the temptation to throw my life to the dogs. I will be all grave and maternal again, as I always am when I am around them, a different person from now, a person my friend doesn't know at all.
>
> I will keep an eye on the time, and generally keep an eye on everything, making sure in particular that my children always have warm and dry feet, because I know that that's how it should be, if at all possible, at least in childhood. Perhaps precisely in order to be able to walk in miserable shoes later in life, it is good to have warm and dry feet as a kid.[59]

Adult spirituality then, for Ginzburg, is not divorced from economic and social privilege in childhood. Everyone will need to call on these deep resources sooner or later, and those who have not been lucky enough to pool them will simply cave to the temptation to 'throw life to the dogs' when the going gets tough. This is not to say that individual character and selfhood are not forged in struggle, which, as Ginzburg herself admits of her time in occupied Rome, they also are; it is to say that the journey to selfhood cannot properly begin without prior trust in the meaning of such struggle, which can only come from intimate social relationships which,

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[58] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 11-12.

[59] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, p. 13.

paradoxically, make a transcendence of Girò-like materialism possible by making the things which money *can* buy seem trivial by comparison. The self is not reducible to its relationships, but these relationships remain, for Ginzburg as for Tu Weiming, among the 'enabling constraints' of a spiritual life.

'Ritratto d'un amico' ('Portrait of a Friend' (1957))

Cesare Pavese, the 'friend' in question here, was one such 'enabling constraint' in the development of Ginzburg's own spirituality:

> Our city resembles, we now see, the friend we have lost, and to whom it was so dear. Like him, it is hard-working, dripping with the stubborn and febrile sweat of its own labour, and yet at the same time somehow listless and prone to idling and dreaming. In the city that so resembles him, we feel our friend come back to life wherever we go.
>
> […] His poems ring in our ears whenever we return to the city in thought or deed. We don't even know if the poems are any good anymore; they have simply become part of us, offering a mirror back to our youth, to those faraway days when we heard them for the first time from our young friend's lips and discovered, with profound wonder, that one could make poetry out of our grey, heavy and prosaic city after all.[60]

And yet, for all his artistic gifts, Pavese offered Ginzburg as much spiritual nourishment by what he *failed* to give to their relationship as by what he actually gave to it:

> He wasn't a model for us, even though he taught us many things; for we saw the absurd and tortured labyrinths of thought in which his simple spirit was imprisoned. We would have liked to teach him plenty too, teach him to live in a more straightforward and less claustrophobic way, but we never managed to teach him anything, because whenever we tried to explain anything to him at all, he would raise his hand and say he already knew.
>
> When we asked him if he enjoyed being famous, he would reply with a proud sneer that he had always expected it; this wicked boyish arrogance flared up with a certain regularity. But from the very tone of his reply, one sensed that there was no joy for him in his fame anymore; indeed, he was incapable of enjoying or loving anything once he had it. He even said that he knew his art so well that it had no secrets left to offer him - and not offering secrets, it no longer interested him. Even his own friends, he would tell us, had no secrets, and bored him infinitely; and we, terrified of being boring to him, failed to tell him that we knew exactly where he was lost: in not wanting to give in to a love of existence itself, including its excess of routines and apparent lack of secrets.[61]

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[60] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 16-17.

[61] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 19-20.

Despite his private sadnesses and obsessions, or perhaps precisely because of his willingness to share them, in his own way, with his friends, Pavese nevertheless succeeded in securing his survival in a spiritual dimension:

> He was, at times, very sad, but for a long time we thought that he would be cured of it when he finally made the decision to grow up. His sadness seemed adolescent, the voluptuous and distracted melancholy of a boy whose feet had not yet touched the Earth and preferred to walk on the arid and solitary planet of his own dreams. Sometimes, in the evenings, he would come and join us; he would sit there, pale as a ghost, with his scarf wrapped around his neck. He would play with his hair or a napkin, and fail to pronounce a single word all evening or otherwise answer any of our questions. Then, suddenly, he would get up, put on his coat, and leave. Humiliated, we would wonder if our company had disappointed him, if he had sought peace with us and failed to find it, or if he had simply decided to spend an evening in silence under a lamp which wasn't his own.
>
> Talking to him was never easy, even when he was in one of his better moods; but a meeting with him, even one composed of few words, could be restorative and stimulating like no other. We became more intelligent when we were around him; we felt compelled to put all that was best and most serious in us into our words, and to set aside all that was commonplace, imprecise, or incoherent.
>
> We often felt small next to him, because we were unable to be as sober, modest, generous or even-handed as he was. He could be very rude with us, and never pardoned a single one of our faults; but if we were sick or in pain, he would immediately find a tone of motherly affection and concern.
>
> […] Shortly after his death, we walked up our old hill together. […] We were all still very close, and had been for many years: we were people who had laboured and thought together. As happens when a group suffers a loss, we tried our best to be kinder and more protective of each other, because we felt that he, in his own mysterious way, had always protected and cared for us. He was more present than ever on the hill that day.[62]

Pavese may not have explicitly sought such immortality, and 'immortality' may not be exactly the right word for it - these friends will all die (and have all died) - and yet something of Pavese's goodness survives and is transmitted to Ginzburg's reader, who may come from anywhere, and who is somehow strengthened by it, even though she never knew Pavese, Ginzburg or the circle of friends personally. Human civilisation starts to look, on this account, like the ability to accumulate and transmit such stories across space and time, to pool a World Ethos with which to produce - not in the sense of manufacturing, but in the sense of educating or allowing to be born - individuals with ever deeper spiritual roots in the human past, in the stories of their own blood ancestors but also in foreign stories that their ancestors never knew existed. This is the 'vocation' of which Ginzburg will speak: the sense of connection to life itself, a feeling which even a self-described 'small' writer can enjoy and share, and which compels her to pursue her craft and add to the pool of spiritual resources

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[62] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 17-18, 21.

available to the world, a fund from which future generations, through their own spiritual effort, can draw in turn, adding their own contributions along the way.

‘Elogio e compianto dell’Inghilterra’ (‘Praise and Sympathy for England’ (1961))

Countries and cultures can do more or less to foster the spiritual lives of their citizens, and thereby do more or less to foster the spiritual lives of human beings far away in space in time. Ginzburg admits that England has achieved some institutional ‘virtues’ that may by no means be considered ‘small’, but by 1961, it is clear to her that the culture as a whole has failed to transmit these virtues to its new citizens; by making ‘big’ virtues out of ‘smaller’ ones, the country has somehow ended up spiritually beggaring itself:

> Civility, respect for one’s neighbour, good governance, the foresight to cater to human needs, to offer assistance in old age and infirmity - all this is without doubt the fruit of an ancient and profound intelligence. And yet this intelligence is neither visible nor palpable in any way among the people one passes on the street. When one looks around oneself, there are no traces of it left. One waits in vain for words of human wisdom from those one chances to encounter.
>
> […] Maybe they are right to shroud their cafés and restaurants in foreign décor, because when these establishments are openly and plainly English, there reigns an atmosphere of such squallid desperation that one is driven to thoughts of suicide.
>
> I have often asked myself what the motive for such desperation might be. I think it perhaps derives from a certain desolation which seems to govern social relations here. Any place where the English meet to converse - wherever it is - exudes melancholy. There is, indeed, nothing quite as sad as an English conversation, committed to the bitter end not to unpack anything essential, and to remain imprisoned in trivialities. In order not to offend one’s neighbour by penetrating into the intimacy [of his spirit], which is sacred, English conversations drone on with subjects of extreme boredom for everyone, just so that any real danger might be averted.[63]

Italy, by contrast, ‘is a country ready to submit to the worst forms of government. It is a country where nothing runs on time, as everyone knows, and where disorder, cynicism, incompetence and confusion reign. And yet, on our streets, one feels humane intelligence circulating like the blood of a collective organism.’[64] This intelligence, for all its seeming inability to effect lasting institutional change, ‘warms and consoles the heart’; England, on the other hand,

> is a country where one stays exactly what one already is. The spirit does not perform even the slightest movement. It remains immobile, unchanged, stuck in a humid and temperate climate without seasons, just as the grass

[63] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, p. 27.

[64] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, p. 28.

> here remains the same, never completely frozen over and never burnt off by the sun. The spirit does not free itself from its vices, but also does not pick up any new ones. Like the English grass, it remains trapped in its own lush solitude, watered by omnipresent rain.[65]

'La maison Volpé' (1960)

A concrete example of a depressing foreign-themed English café - La maison Volpe - is then offered by Ginzburg as an illustration of her point:

> I do not know what possible enjoyment there could be in spending one's time in a place so devoid of all happiness; there are no lovers with their arms around each other here, and conversations all remain at a polite whisper; no one looks as if she is getting involved in the kind of intimate or emotional exchange that one sees all the time, between men and women and even between friends, in our cafés. There is no sort of intimacy in that polite whispering. The décor - the dim lights, curtains and rugs - might be trying their best to suggest it, but it remains an abstract proposition, a remote dream.[66]

There is no autonomous spiritual life for human beings without intimacy with other human beings, but there can also be no intimacy between human beings who lack their own autonomous inner spiritual life. Intimacy, including (as we will see in the final essay) intimacy between parents and children, Ginzburg argues, requires zones of both proximity and solitude, conversation and silence, a veritable exercise in oscillation well summarised in one of Tu Weiming's preferred Confucian dicta: 'In order to enlarge others, I must enlarge myself; in order to enlarge myself, I must enlarge others.' The England which Ginzburg visited in the early 1960s seemed to have lost this balance between the forces of introspection and community so necessary for the spiritual health of a country's citizens.

'Lui e io' ('He and I' (1962))

Ginzburg's second husband, Gabriele Baldini, offered her a return to this balance of intimacy in her own life, shattered as it was by the events of the Second World War. The spiritual is the dimension of surprise *par excellence*; no laws of probability or cause and effect seem to apply there:

> I already felt very old, full of experience and mistakes, and he seemed a mere boy to me, a thousand centuries from my planet. I don't remember what we said to each other that evening on via Nazionale - nothing important, I guess - but the idea that we would one day become husband and wife was also a thousand centuries from my mind.

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[65] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 29-30.

[66] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, p. 32.

> When I mention our promenade on the via Nazionale to him, he says he remembers, but I know he's lying. I even sometimes ask myself if we are the same two people who had conversed so politely and urbanely about everything and nothing in the sunset almost twenty years ago - two happy interlocutors, two young, polite and self-absorbed intellectuals going for a walk, so ready to pass vaguely benevolent judgment on each other, and so happy to go their separate ways forever in that sunset on that street corner.[67]

Seemingly 'a thousand centuries away', and yet, in the dimension of the spirit, fated to be husband and wife: if we could predict the future of this dimension of our lives, the meaning of our very existences as autonomous beings would immediately dissipate. Ginzburg's faith in the existence of this dimension, however - or rather, her 'embodied knowledge' of it - allows her to speculate on the relativity of other seemingly astronomical distances:

> The fact that I struggle to understand painting and the other fine arts doesn't particularly bother me, but I suffer from not being able to love music; indeed, I think my spirit suffers by being deprived of this love. But there's nothing I can do about it; I will never understand music, I will never love it. Even when I decide I like a piece of music, I can never remember it, and how can you hope to love something you can't remember?
>
> What I *do* remember from certain songs are the lyrics. I can repeat words I love *ad infinitum*. I can hum the tune too, in my own tone-deaf way, and experience a kind of happiness.
>
> It seems to me that I follow a certain musical cadence and metre in my writing. Maybe music was very close to my universe after all, and my universe, God knows why, didn't welcome it.[68]

<u>Il figlio dell'uomo ('The Son of Man' (1946))</u>

Ginzburg loops back here to revisit the carnage of the war, again emphasing in her play with time a single spiritual plane on which the true events of *Le piccole virtú* elliptically unfold: though this essay was written fifteen years before 'He and I', the reader comes to it only afterwards, and is forced to insert it retrospectively into the broader narrative deliberately woven here by Ginzburg's time-travelling voice.

She explores the scars, to be sure, but also her remarkable ability to heal from them. She says initially: 'There was the war, and people have seen so many houses destroyed that they no longer feel secure in their own homes the way they once did. There are things from which we do not heal; the years will pass and we will never recover.'[69] Already by the end of 'The Son of Man', however, she has

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[67] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 46-47.

[68] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, p. 43.

[69] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, p. 51.

reaffirmed her attachment to her own spirituality, an attachment which the war, far from destroying her bonds with her own life, has actually strengthened:

> There is no peace for the son of man. Foxes have their holes and wolves have their lairs, but the son of man has nowhere to rest his head. Every one of us would love to rest her head somewhere, to bury herself in a warm and dry den. But there is no peace for the sons of men. Every one of us has been deceived by the illusion of being able to sleep on some certainty or other, a faith on which to rest her tired limbs. But all the old certainties have been stripped from us, and true faith is never something which can grant us a refuge of this kind.
>
> […] There is an unbridgeable abyss between us and the generation which came before us. The dangers they faced were less pressing; their houses only rarely disappeared. Earthquakes and fires weren't the sorts of things that happened daily to everyone. Women knitted, had their cooks make lunch for them, and entertained guests in houses that stayed up. Everyone made plans, pursued studies of some sort, and expected to build a life in peace. It was a different era, and perhaps even a good one. But we are very tied to our fear, and deep down very happy with our destiny as human beings.[70]

On the one hand, Ginzburg will go on to reaffirm the importance of offering, if at all possible, just such a resting place and secure base for exploration to the young; on the other, however, the imperative not to lie about life trumps all pedagogical concerns:

> We can't lie in our books, and we can't lie in any of the things we do. This is perhaps the only good thing to come out of this war: not lying, and not putting up with it when other people lie to us. This is what our generation is like. The older generation is still very fond of making up stories, veils and masks behind which to hide reality. Our language saddens and offends them. They don't understand our attitude to reality. We are near to things in their substance. It is the only good thing to come from the war, but it has only been good for the young; to the older among us it has brought only bewildered insecurity and fear. The young are afraid too, of course, and insecure in their houses, but we are not helpless before our fear. We have been coarsened and strengthened in ways our parents have not.
>
> […] We have no tears anymore either. That which moved our parents doesn't touch us at all. The older ones reproach us for the way we raise our children, and would prefer we lied to them the way they lied to us. They would like it if our children entertained themselves with friendly puppets in big pink bedrooms with cute little rabbits and trees on the wallpaper. They would have us cloak their childhoods in veils and lies, and deliberately keep reality in its true substance hidden from them. But we can't do it. We can't do it with children we have woken in the middle of the night and dressed in a pitch black panic as the alarm sirens lacerated the sky. We can't do it with

[70] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 53-54.

> children who have seen what terror and horror look like on our faces. We can't tell children like this that we found them in the cabbage patch, or that Grandma has gone on a long train trip.[71]

'Il mio mestiere' ('My Trade' (1949))

From here, Ginzburg leaps into a discussion of the meaning of her 'calling' as a writer, namely spiritual truth-telling for herself and all those ready to hear it:

> When I write I never think that there might be some better way of doing it which I can copy from other writers. I don't care how other writers do it. I want to be clear about this: the only thing I am any good at is writing stories. If I try to write any sort of article on command, for a newspaper or whatever, it always seems to go pretty badly: it's as if I have to seek the whole thing outside myself. I can do it, but I can only do it about as well as I can learn foreign languages or speak in public. And I always have the feeling that I'm cheating my reader with borrowed and stolen words. I suffer as if I were in exile from myself. When I write stories, on the other hand, I am like a person in her homeland, on roads she has known since childhood and among walls and trees that somehow belong to her. My profession is writing stories - sometimes imagined and sometimes drawn from my own autobiography, but in any case, *stories*… […] This is my profession, and I will do it until my dying day. I am very happy with my choice of profession, and wouldn't change it for anything in the world.[72]

This trade requires, however, the gruelling business of continual presence with one's spiritual self:

> I spent my days writing my poems and copying them in my notebooks. […] For a fair while I thought it was all worth it because my poems were so beautiful, but at a certain point I began to doubt their beauty: I gradually got bored of writing them, and found myself manufacturing things to write about. Suddenly it seemed as if I had explored the entire universe of poetic possibility, used every possible rhyme: *speranza lontananza*, *pensiero mistero*, *vento argento*, *fragranza speranza*. I didn't have anything left to say. This was the start of a nasty little period for me; I would spend the afternoons rummaging through words that gave me no pleasure anymore, feeling guilty and ashamed of letting my schoolwork suffer. It never occurred to me that I might have chosen the wrong profession - I knew I needed to write - but I didn't understand why, all of a sudden, my days with my beloved words had become so arid and poor.
>
> […] It was then that I learnt that there is no concept of saving for a rainy day in this business. If one starts thinking to oneself 'well that's a nice little detail, but I don't want to waste it on what I'm writing now - I'll stockpile

[71] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 53-54.

[72] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 55-56.

> it for later use instead', it will freeze inside you, and you won't be able to use it later at all. Whenever you write anything, you have to throw everything into it, the cumulative best of your entire life up to that point.
>
> […] A limp, a dirty habit, whatever - I always had to give my characters a tic or identifying characteristic of some sort. It was a way of escaping the fear that they might not be real, a means of imbuing them with a humanity in which, deep down, I couldn't bring myself to believe. I didn't yet understand that my early characters were not characters at all, but puppets - quite well sewn puppets, to be sure, similar in appearance to human beings, but puppets all the same. As soon as I invented a new one I would put my stamp on it, give it its ugly identifying mark, and there was something deeply unhealthy about all this, a kind of malign resentment of reality. It wasn't a resentment founded on anything absolute - I was a happy girl really - but it was a defence mechanism, the resentment of the person who feels others are taking her for a ride all the time, the farmer newly arrived in the city who sees thieves all around him. I was proud of my puppetry initially - I regarded it as a great triumph of irony over ingenuity, and over the adolescent kitsch of my early poems. Irony and cynicism seemed important weapons in my hands; I thought they allowed me to write like a man, and I wanted terribly to write like one: I was terrified at the thought of my readers being able to tell I was a woman from what I wrote.[73]

As well as letting the guilt of an inferiority complex halt her professional progress, Ginzburg allows the routine grind of mothering to interrupt her calling completely, but not for long:

> The children seemed far too important to justify losing myself in stupid stories with stupid stuffed characters. But I had a ferocious nostalgia for my profession, and I sometimes found myself with tears in my eyes as I thought how beautiful my time in it had been.
>
> […] I would write avidly and joyously in the afternoons when the kids went for a walk with a girl from the village. It was a beautiful autumn, and I was so happy every day.[74]

As she reemerges from this self-imposed silence of grief, motherhood and exile from her vocation, Ginzburg comes to see her writing as part of the centre of her relationships - even with her own children - not as subordinate to them:

> This calling is a boss, a boss capable of frustrating the living daylights out of us, a boss who shouts at us and insults us. We have to swallow our spit of contempt and our tears of shame, grind our teeth, dry the blood from our wounds, and get on with the business of service. Service on *her* terms, not ours. It is then that she helps you to stand on your own two feet, in firm connection with the Earth around you; she helps us to vanquish the madness and delirium, desperation and fever of our own solipsistic making.

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[73] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 61-62.

[74] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 64-65.

> But *she* decides the schedule; she comes when *she* decides, not when *we* think we need her.
>
> […] Still, I've often thought that I haven't been so hard done by, and that I am being unfair if I start berating the gods of my destiny, because they have given me three children and a vocation. In fact, I couldn't imagine my life at all without my calling. It has always been there in me, and has not left me for a single moment; even when I thought it was sound asleep inside me, its bright and protecting eyes were watching over me all the time.
>
> Such, such are the joys of my profession. It doesn't bring much money in, and indeed one often has to ply some other trade on the side to make ends meet; but it is a very sweet thing when it *does* bear financial fruit, like receiving a gift from the hands of one's beloved.[75]

The calling transcends, ultimately, the words that Ginzburg employs as means to the higher end of spiritual development:

> There is a corner of my spirit where I know perfectly well what I am - a small, small writer. I swear I know it. But it doesn't bother me really. […] What I try to believe is that no one has contributed exactly what I have, no matter how flea-like or mosquito-like my contribution to the overall pile. What matters is to treat it as a calling, a profession, something that one will do for one's entire life. As such, however, it is no joke. There are innumerable dangers beyond the ones I have elaborated. […] There remains, always, the danger of bluffing with words that do not really exist in us, words that we have fished by chance from someone else's river and combined adroitly because, well, we've become clever at doing it. It's very difficult to avoid doing this, but if you can, it's the best job in the world. The days and accidents of our lives, as well as those of others to which we bear witness, all feed it, and the calling grows in us. It feeds on all the ugly stuff too, drinks in the best and worst of our lives, the good blood and bad blood which pumps from our hearts. It feeds itself and grows in us.[76]

Such 'growth' would be meaningless without at least the possibility of an audience; and yet it would be impossible without the 'lived concreteness' and embodied consciousness of the writer herself, who engages in spiritual cultivation first and foremost for her own private sake. Words are simply the means, more or less honestly deployed, of publicising this private process. The desire to enlarge oneself, however, entails the desire to enlarge others, and vice versa; the artist, in this case the writer, therefore both takes from and gives back to life itself, multiplying, if she is lucky, the vitality of the cosmos in the process.

<u>'Silenzio' ('Silence' (1951))</u>

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[75] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, p. 68.

[76] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, p. 69.

Bundling the themes of England, war trauma and writing addressed in the preceding essays, Ginzburg returns to 'silence', this time from the perspective of then fashionable psychoanalysis (though one could substitute 'psychoanalysis' for 'neuroscience' or 'antidepressant drugs' today):

> There are two types of silence: silence with oneself and silence with others. Both are equal founts of suffering. SIlence with ourselves is dominated by a violent antipathy which seizes us in our very being, contempt for our own very spirit, as if it were something so disgusting that nothing should be said about it. It is clear that we have to break this silence with ourselves if we are to break our silence with others. It is also clear that we have no right to hate our own selves, no right to hide our thoughts from our own spirit.
>
> The vogue contemporary strategy for liberating oneself from such silence involves going and getting oneself psychoanalysed. Talking about oneself incessantly to someone who listens, and indeed is paid to listen - laying bare the roots of our own silence - can provide some sort of temporary comfort. But the silence in question here is broader and deeper than any role-playing game can fix: we are plunged back into it as soon as we are out the door; indeed, the comfort of the couch suddenly seems superficial and vulgar to us. Silence has, so to speak, invaded the Earth: whoever escapes on her own for an hour does nothing to help the common cause of resistance.
>
> When we go and get ourselves psychoanalysed, we are told that we have to stop hating ourselves. But in order to liberate ourselves from this hatred, this sense of guilt and existential panic, we are called to live according to nature, to abandon ourselves to our instincts and follow our noses for pleasure - in short, to turn our lives into acts of unadulterated choice. But this is not to follow nature: it is to go against it. Human beings don't always get to choose. We don't get to choose the hour of our birth, our face, our parents, our childhood; we don't typically get to choose the hour of our deaths either. We have to accept our fate today in the same way we have to accept our overall destiny: the only real choice given to us is between good and evil, justice and injustice, truthfulness and perfidy. What the psychoanalysts tell us has no lasting purchase because it does not take account of our moral responsibility, which is the only true dimension of choice we have.[77]

In perhaps the most 'Confucian' passage in the entire book, Ginzburg doubles down on the humanities, or what we are calling the self-cultivation of a certain 'Spiritual Humanism', against medical solutions to moral problems:

> Today as never before, the destinies of individual human beings are so intimately connected with each other that we can truly say that disaster for one is disaster for all. It is strange, therefore, that at a time when human destinies are so unprecedentedly intertwined, where the fall of one takes thousands of others with it, silence has come to suffocate us, and we are

[77] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 73-74.

> incapable of exchanging any truly free words with each other. This is why the private medical solutions proposed to cure us reveal themselves to be ineffective. We are told to defend ourselves with selfishness against desperation. We are far too ready to classify the vices of our spirit as 'diseases', to put up with them, let them rule us, and swallow syrupy medicines to control the symptoms. Our silence, however, must be examined and judged in the court of moral law. We don't get to choose whether we are happy or unhappy. But we *must* choose not to be *diabolically* unhappy. Silence can reach a form of closed, monstrous and *diabolical* unhappiness, poisoning the days of our youth and making our bread taste bitter. It can even, in extreme cases, lead to death.
>
> Silence must be examined and judged in the court of moral law, because silence, like sloth and lust, is a sin. The fact that it is a sin so widespread among our peers, the bitter fruit of our unhealthy age, does not absolve us of the responsibility to recognise its nature and call it by its true name.[78]

'I rapporti umani' ('Human Relationships' (1953))

Silence *can* be a sin, but, as we will see, it can also be a virtue; the key 'problem' which *Le piccole virtú* aims to solve in a philosophical sense is that of 'human relationships', of the proper relationship between self and other, the proper 'balance' between silence and exchange, self-cultivation and self-sacrifice: 'At the centre of our lives stands the problem of our relationships with other human beings: as soon as we become aware of this as a clear problem, and not merely as a vague source of confusion and suffering, we can begin the task of retracing our own steps and reconstructing the history of our relationships with other people from early childhood until now.'[79]

The first challenge of adolescence, as Ginzburg portrays it, is that of finding 'the right person for us': this begins, after a certain experience of 'silence' and incompleteness at home, with the search for a 'best friend' at high school with whom to share one's existential doubts, extending into adulthood as the search for a spiritual life companion:

> In which house in the city, at which point on the planet does the right person for us live, the one similar to us in every regard, ready to respond to our every question, listen to us forever without getting bored, smile at our faults and enjoy looking at our face forever? What words do we have to pronounce in order to have her recognise us among thousands? […] We believe we are in the presence of this person thousands of times over: our heart beats furiously at the sound of a name, the curves of a nose or a

[78] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 74-75.

[79] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, p. 77.

> smile, for the sole reason that we have decided that that is the name or nose or smile of the person made for us…[80]

Do we ever get there? There is no way of knowing in advance, Ginzburg writes in 1953, early in her second marriage: 'After many years, only after many years, after a dense network of habits, memories and violent contrasts has established itself, will we finally know that this was really the right person for us, that we couldn't have put up with anyone else, that we can only ask this one person for what our heart requires.'[81] Before we can achieve such retrospective certainty, however, life will throw its surprises and fears at us; for many, as it did for Ginzburg, this will mean children:

> We love our young children in such a painful, frightened way that it seems as if we have never had, and could never have, anyone closer to us. We are still not very used to the presence of our children on Earth: we are still stupefied and shaken by their appearance in our lives. We don't have friends anymore; or rather, we hate our old friends, when our child is sick, for distracting us from our one agonising source of tenderness. We no longer have a vocation of our own; we had one, a dear profession, and now if we invest anything in it at all we immediately feel guilty about it, and we return immediately to our one agonising source; a sunny day or green pasture now mean for us only that our children might get sunburnt or have a chance to explore: we have lost all faculties of private enjoyment and contemplation.
>
> […] How stupid we have become, we sometimes think with regret as we look at the head of our child that has become so familiar to us, familiar as nothing else in the world has ever been, and as we watch her pile a mountain of earth with her grubby, chubby hands. How stupid we have become, and how small and slow our thoughts! One could fit them in a nutshell, and yet how exhausting and suffocating they are! Where has the wild universe gone that used to fascinate us, whither our vitality and the free and living rhythm of our passing days, our resolute and glorious overview of the whole, and our triumphant stride into the future? Where is my neighbour now? Where is God now? We only find ourselves thinking of God when our child is sick…[82]

And yet, Ginzburg concludes from nothing other than her own spiritual experience, the voice of the individual self remains audible even through marriage and children, and constitutes the burning centre of our relationships with the world, like the sun - quiet from a distance, but a roaring inferno within:

> In fits and starts, from the depths of our own exhaustion, our awareness of the myriad things returns, so pungent as to bring tears to our eyes: perhaps

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[80] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 86-87.

[81] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 90-91.

[82] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 92-93.

> we are looking at the Earth for the last time. We have never felt with such force the love that ties us to the dust in the streets, to the high pitches of the birds, the wheezy rhythm of our own breath. But we also feel stronger than our own slipping breath, we feel that it no longer really belongs to us: we have never loved our children so much, their weight in our arms, the caress of their hair on our cheeks, and yet we feel no fear anymore, not even for them: we ask God to protect them if He should so desire. We tell Him to do as he pleases.
>
> […] Now we are really adults, we think, and we are shocked to discover that this is what it means, not what we thought as kids, not self-assurance, and not a secure possession of all earthly riches. We are adults because we now have the silent presence of the dead on our shoulders, whom we invite to judge our present behaviour, and to forgive us for past offences. We would like to strip our past of so many cruel words, so many cruel decisions when we were afraid of death but didn't know, before we had understood that death was truly unavoidable. We are adults for all the silent replies, all the silent forgiveness we carry within us from our ancestors. We are adults for the brief moments that we manage to look at the Earth as if for the last time, and having renounced the desire to control it, have returned it to the will of God: at such moments, everything appears in its proper place under heaven, under the sun, including other human beings and ourselves, hung out as we are on the only existential post that has been given to us. At such moments, we find an equilibrium in our oscillations. It may seem that we can recreate such moments whenever we want, and find the words we need for our calling there, our words for our neighbour, and to view her with fair and free eyes, not the fearful and disdainful gaze of the person asking whether her neighbour is her master or her slave. We have, in our other moments, only really known how to be masters or slaves; but in these secret moments of full and proper equilibrium, we realise that there is no domination and no slavery on Earth. We will seek to understand if others have experienced such moments, or are still far from them. This becomes, indeed, the most important thing to know. In the life of a human being, it is the highest achievement, and we want to commune with others at the highest point of their individual destinies.[83]

Such spiritual engagement, however, requires constant effort, and cannot simply be reached once and for all via formula or prior accumulated wisdom:

> The story of human relationships is never finished in us, because as soon as they become too easy, too natural and spontaneous, they lose the richness of discovery and choice and become simply habit and pleasure, a mere drunkenness of nature. We may think we can just return to our secret moments whenever we want and find the words we need there for our present circumstances, but it is not true that we can always just waltz back there without effort - so often our attempts to return prove dead ends, and we end up feigning concern and warmth for our neighbour when in reality

[83] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 95-96.

> we are stuck back in the frozen darkness of our own hearts. Human relationships must be rediscovered and reinvented every day. We must remember that every type of interaction with our neighbour is a fresh human deed, and as such can be good or bad, honest or deceitful, charitable or sinful.
>
> We are old enough now that our teenage children have started looking at us with those stony eyes of theirs; we suffer from them, even though we know very well what they mean: we looked at our own parents in the same way. We complain and pretend to be worried but we know how the long chain of human relationships unfolds, the long and necessary arc it must take in each of us, the long path we must each tread before we can begin to understand what mercy is.[84]

There is nothing selfish or solipsistic, Ginzburg concludes, about our need for human relationships at their best: only autonomous spiritual 'selves' can transcend master-slave relationships of totalitarian hierarchy and enrich each other as free, needy but ultimately helpful equals. The 'problem of human relationships' has a very clear solution: education for such freedom.

'Le piccole virtú ('The Small Virtues' (1960))

Ginzburg addresses this question of spiritual education directly in the final essay, which also gives her the title for her volume as a whole:

> As far as the education of children is concerned, I think we should teach them not the small virtues, but the big ones. Not thrift, but generosity and indifference to money; not prudence, but courage and a disregard for danger; not cunning, but purity and love of truth; not relationship management, but love for one's neighbour and self-sacrifice; not the desire for success, but the desire for being and knowing.
>
> Typically, however, we do the opposite: we rush to teach them respect for the small virtues, and we end up basing our entire education system around them. In this way, we choose the easier road, since the small virtues don't involve any material danger, and on the contrary insure us against the vicissitudes of the future. We fail to teach the big virtues, and yet we still love them, and want our children to have them: but we nourish the faith that they will spontaneuously spring in their spirits anyway, one fine day, because they are instinctive, whereas the others, the smaller ones, are the fruit of reflection and calculation and must therefore be taught.
>
> In reality there is no difference. The small virtues are products of our instinct too, our instinct for self-defence. Reason, that brilliant judge of personal safety, speaks, judges and argues through them. The big virtues erupt from an instinct in which reason does not speak directly, an instinct for

[84] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 96-97.

> which it would be difficult for me to find a name. And the best in us is to be found in this unnamable instinct, not in the defensive voice of reason.[85]

Spirituality by no means disdains reason, but, through courage, transcends it. The fear of poverty is the first thing which parents should teach their children to overcome, not by equipping them with tools to avoid ever being poor (the war taught Ginzburg that no such tools can ever provide a guarantee of financial security), but paradoxically by 'spoiling' them with the trivial things that money *can* buy:

> Since we are all confronted, in one way or another, with the problem of money, the first small virtue that it occurs to us to teach our children is thrift. […] We shouldn't teach them to save money: we should teach them to spend it. We should regularly give our children small, insignificant sums of money, and tell them to spend it however they want, on any momentary caprice of their choosing: they will immediately go and buy some trifle, and will soon forget the money they have spent in a hurry without dwelling on it, without developing any attachment to it. On the contrary, they will come to understand money as something transitory and stupid, as they should in childhood.
>
> It is absolutely right that children should live the first years of their lives without knowing what money is. Sometimes this is impossible because we are too poor; sometimes it is impossible because we are too rich. When we are very poor, when money is tightly linked to questions of daily survival, it is so quickly translated by a child into food, heating and clothes that it has no way of getting near her spirit. But if we are neither rich nor poor, it is equally possible to allow a child to go through an entire childhood without knowing what money really is. [… She should ideally be introduced] not too soon, and not too late: the secret of education is guessing the right time for everything.
>
> Being fair with ourselves and generous with others: this means having the right relationship with money, and being free in the face of money. There is no doubt that, in families where money is earned and promptly spent, where it flows as freely as water from a fountain and therefore scarcely exists as money as such, it is much less difficult to educate a child to such equanimity and liberty.
>
> […] If we want to educate our richer children to this simple disposition, then it is clear that the money which the family has saved has to be given away freely to others. Such wealth only makes sense as a free choice of simplicity and generosity in the midst of plenty, not as greed or fear. A child from a rich family does not learn about social justice by being made to wear a poor child's clothes, or because he is offered an apple instead of cake at afternoon tea, or because the family deprives him of a bicycle she has long desired; such modesty in the midst of money is completely false, and falsehoods are always the opposite of education. Depriving her of a bicycle that she wants, and that we could afford, is only to frustrate her for no good

[85] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 99-100.

> reason, to make her childhood less happy in the name of an abstract principle, and without any justification in reality. We tacitly affirm, by doing so, that the money is more important than the bicycle, when in fact she should absolutely learn that the bicycle is more important than the money needed to buy it.
>
> The true defence against wealth is not the fear of wealth, of its fragility or the vicious consequences that it can bring: the true defence against wealth is indifference to money. In order to educate a child to this indifference, there is no other remedy than to give her money to spend, when there is money to be given, so that she learns to separate herself from it without worry or regret. One may rightly worry that if a child gets used to spending money, she may not be able to do without it; what will she do tomorrow if she isn't rich? But it is much easier not to have money when one is used to spending it, when one knows it well, than when we have been raised to regard it with reverence and fear, when we have felt its presence around us without being allowed to raise our eyes and look at it directly. […] The money we give to our children ought to be given for no particular reason, with indifference, so that they learn to receive it with indifference. It should be given not so that they learn to love it, but so that they learn not to love it, and to understand its true character, and its impotence when it comes to satisfying the truest desires, which are those of the spirit.
>
> […] It is a mistake - a minor one, but a mistake nonetheless - to offer our children money in return for the performance of household chores. It is an error because we are not, for our children, employers; the family's money is theirs as much as it is ours. Those small favours and chores ought to be performed without compensation, as a voluntary contribution to the life of the family.[86]

This logic of voluntarism extends, however, beyond questions of money into education as a whole:

> In general, I think we should be very cautious about promising rewards and administering punishments: more often than not, sacrifices go unrewarded, and bad behaviour is not only not punished, but loudly and actively rewarded in success and money. It is therefore best that our children know from the beginning that goodness does not receive recompense, and wickedness does not receive punishment. And yet, it is necessary that we come to love goodness and loathe evil; and there is no logical explanation for any of this.
>
> We are accustomed to placing an importance on our child's scholastic achievement that is completely unfounded, and only because of our unwarranted respect for the small virtue of success.
>
> […] In truth, school for a child should be, from the beginning, the first battle she faces on her own, without us; it should be clear from the beginning that it is her own battleground, where we can only offer occasional and indirect help. If she suffers injustice or incomprehension

[86] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 102-104, 105, 106-107.

> there, then we should let her know that there is nothing strange in that, because life itself will involve being continually misunderstood and undervalued; the only thing that matters is that we don't commit injustices ourselves. We share in the successes and failures of our children because we care about them, in the same way that they will come to share in our successes and failures, our happinesses and worries as we all grow older. It is wrong to say that they owe it to us to be good at school or to give the best of their energies to their formal studies. If they decide to devote the best of themselves to something outside the school framework, to collecting beetles or learning Turkish, it's up to them, and we have nothing to criticise them for or claim any sort of wounded pride. If it seems for the moment as if they don't want to devote themselves to anything in particular, then we shouldn't complain too much about that either; it may be that what looks to us like simple mucking around is constructive play and reflection which will bear its fruits tomorrow. We can't ever know whether their time spent reading stupid books or playing football is a waste of time and energy or a form of preparation for something bigger, because the possibilities of the spirit are infinite. What we can't do, as parents, is to allow ourselves to be carried away by panic at the thought of our child's failure to achieve 'success'. Any reprimands we execute ought to be like hurricanes or tropical storms: violent, but soon forgotten, nothing permanently to darken the nature of our relationship with our children. We are there to console our children if a failure has caused them pain, to offer them encouragement if a failure has discouraged them from trying again. We are also there to take them down a notch if a success has gone to their heads, and to reduce school to its humble and narrow frame: not a mortgage on any given future, but a simple box of tools from which one might one day be able to choose.[87]

Ginzburg's conclusion ties this parenting style to the idea of 'education for a true vocation':

> What we should hold dear to our hearts, when it comes to the education of our children, is that they never come to love life any less than they should. This education can take different forms for different individuals; a seemingly lazy, lonely and shy child may not be without such love or oppressed by the fear of living, but simply in a state of preparation for discovery of her true calling. For what is a human being's vocation if not the highest expression of her love for life? We should therefore wait, alongside our children, until this vocation awakens and takes shape in them. They may look like moles or lizards, pretending to be dead, but in reality they have their eyes on their prey the whole time, and will throw themselves on it when the time is right. Alongside them, but in silence and at a certain distance, we should patiently and lovingly wait for the spirit to announce itself. We shouldn't have any concrete demands of it: we shouldn't expect our children to be geniuses or artists, heroes or saints of any given sort. We should be ready to accept

[87] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 107-109.

everything: our patience ought to contain room for the loftiest as well as the most modest destiny, provided it is a true one.

A vocation, an ardent passion for something which has nothing to do with money, the awareness of being able to do one thing better than anyone else, and to love this thing above all else, is the only chance a rich child has of not being conditioned by money, of being free from money, of feeling neither pride nor shame at having too much of it. She won't even notice the clothes she wears, and will be ready to accept any deprivation tomorrow, because the only true hunger and thirst in her will be this passion, which will have devoured all that is futile and transitory, conquered all the bad habits and attitudes picked up along the way, and alone rule over her spirit. A vocation is a person's only true source of health and wealth.

What chances do we have of awakening and stimulating the birth and development of a vocation in our children? We don't have many options, but we perhaps have a few. The birth and development of a vocation requires space, space and silence, the true and free silence of space. The relationship which emerges between us and our children ought to be one of active exchange of thoughts and feelings, and yet also include profound zones of silence; it must be an intimate relationship, but we must not get ourselves violently mixed up in their interiority; we must find a healthy equilibrium between silence and exchange. We should be important for our children, but not too important; they should like us, but not too much, so that they don't try to become identical to us or follow us blind into our profession, or to seek our image in their adult companions. We should be in a relationship of friendship with them, and yet not so close that they have trouble making true friends, with whom they can share things they hide from us. Their search for friends, their love lives, their religious lives, their quest for a vocation all require pockets of silence and shade, and should be conducted at a certain distance from us. You might say at this point that our intimacy with our children doesn't amount to very much. But there should be pockets of religious experience, of the life of the mind and of emotional and moral life, that they do share with us; we are, so to speak, the starting point for their journey, the trampoline for their jump. We should be there to help when help is needed; they should know that they don't belong to us, but that we belong to them, that we are always available, present in the next room, ready to respond as best we can to any question or request.

And if we have a vocation ourselves, if we have not betrayed it, if we have continued to love and serve it with passion over many years, we can keep thoughts of ownership over our children far from our hearts, and love them the right way. If, on the other hand, we don't have a vocation, or if we have abandoned or betrayed it, whether out of cynicism, a fear of living for ourselves, a misunderstanding of parental love, or some small virtue that has installed itself in us, we will cling to our children like a castaway to a liferaft, and insist that they give back everything that we have given them, that they become exactly what we want them to become, and that they obtain from life everything which we failed to obtain for ourselves. We will end up asking them for everything which only a vocation of our own can give us; we will ask them to be entirely our work, as if the fact of having

> once procreated them gives us the right to keep recreating them in our own image throughout their lives. If we do so, we stop treating them as free and independent human beings, and regard them instead as products of our own spirit. But if we *do* have a vocation of our own, if we have not disowned or betrayed it, we can let our children blossom outside of ourselves, in their own time, surrounded by the shade and space that the flowering of a vocation, and of an autonomous spiritual being, requires. This is the only real hope we have of helping them to find their own calling: having one ourselves, recognising it and loving it and loyally serving it. For it is this love of life which, in the end, generates love of life in them.[88]

Concluding Remarks

We wanted, first and foremost, to *introduce* Natalia Ginzburg here (hence the many long quotations), to allow the reader to live a moment with her without having to read *all* of her, more than we wanted to dissect her on the sterilised operating table of scientistic explanation. What can we, as humanities 'professionals' called to serve 21st-century global civil society in educational settings like schools and universities, add to Ginzburg's private journey in *Le piccole virtú*? Perhaps one of the main services is that of clever and novel juxtaposition, with Tu Weiming and modern Confucianism as well as with the names and works to come. But of course the urge to comment along the way - to add something explicit of one's own to this symphony's 24 otherwise discrete movements - is also impossible to resist. There is no point or way of repeating over and over again what is being done here, but we can perhaps clarify it one more time without becoming too boring or didactic about it: a World Ethos is being built, one small brick of human spirituality at a time. We can't build the whole house in this book - indeed (and thank God), it will never be finished by anyone - but we can contribute something strong and novel to the foundations by tightly packing these 24 bricks from such wildly disparate climes next to each other for the first time.

[88] Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtú*, pp. 109-111-

3. Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Birth of a Dream Weaver*

Even if you bring me
Suitors with piles of money
He is the only one I want
Allow me to live my destiny

Elly Wamala, 'Talanta Yange'

Birth of a Dream Weaver: A Memoir of a Writer's Awakening (2016) begins with an injustice ('a wound in the heart'): one of Ngugi wa Thiongo's early plays is denied an important platform on the sole grounds that a British official 'would not be capable' of the acts of violence depicted in it: 'As I stood in Queen's Court, [these] were the words that went round and round in my spirit: "A British official would not be capable…" […] I went to my room, No. 75 on the Second Floor, and lay on my bed. In my spirit I heard only a cacophany with the refrain: "A British official… therefore… no chance."'[89] It is precisely the British colonial regime's inability to regard its African subjects as *spiritual* equals which drives Ngugi on the path to his vocation as a writer:

> A year after the beginning of the war and the state of emergency, the government hired the services of Dr. J.C. Carothers, M.B., D.P.M., the editor of the book 'The African Mind in Health and Disease: A Study in Ethnopsychiatry', and generously remunerated him for a scientific study of the 'Mau Mau' mind. This expert on the African soul published the results in 1955 under the title 'The Psychology of Mau Mau'. He diagnosed the 'Mau Mau' phenomenon as a manifestation of mass hysteria, in which violence and witchcraft reared their ugly heads.
>
> He was by no means the first. In 1851, a hundred years before him, another self-described authority on the African soul, Samuel A. Cartwright, had presented the Louisiana Medical Association with an article titled 'Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race', in which he diagnosed the wish to flee from slavery as a form of spiritual illness, and even gave it a name: *drapetomania*. Acute outbreaks of this pathology could lead the victim so far as to seek active release from the paradise of the slave plantation.
>
> Carothers, like Cartwright before him, had woven mythical and Christian elements into his medical science: an obsession with witchcraft and the Devil. Like the slaveholder, the colonial settler viewed the colonial system as natural, reasonable and praiseworthy, a manifestation of God's

[89] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Geburt eines Traumwebers: Zeit des Aufbruchs*, trans. Thoma Brückner (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2018(2016)), pp. 13-14. I bought this book while waiting for my Chinese visa to be processed in Frankfurt in May 2018. Having read it enthusiastically in German translation, I decided to retranslate quotes into English myself rather than seek out Ngugi's English version, as I easily could have done. This unusual decision was prompted by the theme of the book, and is also intended to reinforce the serendipity of my encounter with Ngugi's story. Enthusiastic readers of *this* book are invited to compare my renditions with Ngugi's original.

> goodness; contempt for it was a deviation from the desirable norm, and evidence of the presence of diabolical evil. Hired medical science buttressed this distorted but profitable view of the universe. Psychiatry, psychology and Christianity came together in the slave plantation for Cartwright, and in the settler colony for Carothers. Cartwright's therapeutic method, which involved toe amputations to prevent slaves from running too far, found its corollary in Carothers' surgical penetration of the soul, which made it impossible for the spiritless body to long for freedom.
>
> […] The problem was that those affected did not want to be freed from their illnesses. They argued that they were political prisoners, not slaves. […] Moral amputation through physical intervention was explained as a necessity: this philosophy bears the name of John Cowan, the former Kenyan Superintendent of Prisons, and is most widely associated with the notorious Hola.[90]

Ngugi's move to university at Makerere College in Kampala, Uganda in 1959 is spurred by a fertile combination of both anger and courage in the face of such circumstances:

> I get on the train in Limuru. It is the same station which, four years before, had seen my tears when the authorities refused to let me on the train to Alliance High School because I didn't have a pass to enter the neighbouring region, as the law in wartime demanded of all journeys undertaken by Africans within the country's borders. A low-ranking official took pity on me and smuggled me onto another train. Now, four years on, I am getting on another train to travel into a neighbouring country. As in the past, my mother remains my anchor. Since she first sent me off to school as a young boy, she has always demanded that I strive beyond myself to see what is out there in the world.
>
> I leave colonial Kenya behind, with all its terror and insecurity, but until now also the land of all my dreams and desires. Minneh Nyambura is once again to be found among the many who have come to see me off, and her smiling gaze makes my heart beat so fast that I am convinced the people around me can hear it thumping. Around a week before, the two of us had sealed a secret spiritual pact.[91]

This spiritual pact 'always to do one's best' finds its corollary in Makerere's oath to 'strive for truth', which Ngugi will take deadly seriously:

> The word 'truth' was bandied around a lot at Alliance High School. And yet it appeared everywhere as a kind of axiomatic whole: we simply had to swallow it. Really all we had to do to get it was kneel before the cross. It was not so much that we possessed it as that it possessed us. A civilised possession of the spirit. One truth for everyone. Unchanging. Eternal. It was a dogma-dependent truth.

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[90] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 17-19.

[91] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 26.

> This [Makerere] truth, however, to which we had just sworn allegiance, felt different, more like a process.
>
> […] At the time it sounded enthralling; after living in a land with only the one, colonial truth, I had now won the right to ask questions, and maybe one day contribute some quantum of my own to the human tree of knowledge.
>
> […] The teaching staff seemed open to the idea of helping us strive for truth, as we had promised to do. They emboldened us to develop our own points of view, instead of simply repeating what we had read in books - that was the difference between school and university, they added.
>
> […] I didn't need the sermons. I took the oath seriously, and it influenced my approach to the books I read and the lessons I took. I didn't judge myself by the grades I got, but on a bar I set for myself: my mother's 'is that your best?' question. I had committed myself to strive for an ideal, to follow the truth wherever she led me on this path to the best of myself.[92]

This inchoate adolescent mixture of intellectual curiosity, family loyalty and a desire to contribute to society is distilled, in the course the book, into the form that Ngugi's spiritual 'best-striving' will finally take - namely, a vocation as a writer. Makerere will provide Ngugi, as all universities should, with a variety of intellectual sparring partners in both human and written form: among other sources, the young Ngugi found himself in an 'ongoing and stormy love relationship'[93] with the Bible. The human representatives of the Christian faith at Makerere, however, on both the Protestant and Catholic sides, were largely disappointments:

> I had hoped that this [religion] course would be a study of religion in general, including African and Eastern traditions, [… but] it focused exclusively on Christianity. […] How could a political figure, in the case of the Anglican Church a King or Queen, be the head of a religious institution? There had of course been periods where popes were crowned, and given control of armies and harems. This seemed to me to be another clear case of mixing politics and religion, the very thing which the architects of the Protestant Reformation had sought to end. I didn't want to take sides, but we were, were we not, at Makerere College, and bound by an oath to strive for truth? Were we not engaging in academic debate? Reverend Payne didn't seem to see it that way. […] I took no further part in Payne's course. This was my first exercise of academic and religious freedom, and it felt good.[94]

Beyond Reverend Dennis Payne, however, it was Father Paul Foster who represented the low-water mark of Ngugi's Makerere experience of Christianity, not only for his 'conclusions' but above all for his duplicity in his engagement with students:

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[92] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 34-35, 41.

[93] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 42.

[94] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 42-43.

> As if he had read Carothers and Cartwright and built on their extraordinary capacity to read the minds of the blacks, Foster wrote, or attempted to write, amusing stories about his African students who could never answer a straightforward question clearly. Asked about a specific bird in a specific tree, they would, he complained, talk about a tree on a hill near their homes. In this way, Foster concluded that logic and rationality were foreign to the African mind. His students, who had revered him as a liberal thinker and generous author, were hurt and angry when they saw how Foster had really seen them. They had treated him as a human equal: he had seen them as the mere black objects of his anthropological gaze.[95]

'Intellectual intolerance and insularity' at Makerere, however, were not limited to the purveyors of religion. Economics lecturer Dr. Cyril Ehrlich, for example, 'spent the first twenty minutes of every lecture reminding us how intellectually underendowed we were, and warning us not to pretend otherwise'[96]:

> Then he would start on about foreign universities and their high standards. This daily dressing down was worse than anything I ever had to face at school. I felt utterly trapped in Ehrlich's [compulsory] seminar. […] It was in this seminar, however, that the vague idea of publishing a book while still a student took shape. I would have been only too happy to show him that we already had everything we needed to become precisely who we wanted to be.[97]

If the idea of writing a book while still at university came from a certain spiritual space of frustration and hatred, the courage to finish it required living examples of intellectual and moral generosity. Two examples from the Makerere staff stand out in Ngugi's memory:

> In stark opposition to [Payne and Foster] stood Reverend Fred Welbourne, who honoured his title with his friendly and genuine engagement with students and staff. […] He was open-minded on every issue, even religious questions, and devoted himself to a study of African religions and conceptions of faith which the orthodox priesthood held against him. How could he describe devil worship as a religion, let alone sacrifice his time to studying it?! He was, in essence, a Christian believer, [… but] he was a missionary with a liberal mission.[98]

The second, infinitely more influential figure in the young Ngugi's development was Hugh Dinwiddy, the Dean of Makerere's Northcote Hall:

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[95] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 44.

[96] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 45.

[97] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 45-46.

[98] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 44-45.

> Dinwiddy was Catholic, and unlike Pater Foster, was the embodiment of a true Catholic culture. His character had been formed by lifelong engagement in sport and science. […] He loved literature, music, and people, and was always drawn to individual stories. His full-belly laugh was infectious.
>
> […] Dinwiddy! He brought the friendliest - but also the most competitive - sporting spirit into Northcote. He was head trainer, motivator, cheerleader, adviser and consoler. […] His generous personality contributed to the development of a Northcote team spirit to which we were all fiercely loyal.
>
> […] To live in Dinwiddy's Northcote was to be part of something greater than oneself.[99]

This feeling of belonging will cause 'something to happen' in Ngugi: he will feel obligated to 'give his best' to writing a play for the Inter-Hall English Competition, which Northcote will eventually win.

Alongside the lively music and dance evenings which also taught the young Ngugi to appreciate the joys of wine, women and song, one student friendship - with the tortured genius J. Njoroge - is singled out as crucial to Ngugi's development; here too, the inspiration of healthy competition to drive one to one's 'best' is evident:

> He had the restless spirit of a genius, and Dinwiddy seemed to understand that. Njoroge never came back. He died in a car accident.
>
> I missed him terribly. We were locked in constant debate about everything, from politics to literature and philosophy. I couldn't get near him on European history and philosophy, but at least my superior knowledge of literature made up for it.[100]

<u>'Ending Colonialism'</u>

The spiritual drama of attending a colonial university in a period of ostensibly rapid decolonisation is the overarching theme of Ngugi's Makerere years. That it is a *spiritual* drama is made clear by Ngugi's repeated insistence on the black-and-white difference between the best and worst of the white colonisers themselves, and their various treatment of him as everything from spiritual equal to animal object:

> The claim to knowledge of native thought and the native spirit is a thread common to most European writing about Africa, liberal as well as conservative. The basis for this knowledge was the sheer fact of contact, whether with human beings or other animals - hence the common recourse to metaphors from zoology and the jungle. The fact that LFA soldiers camped in the forest led, [for example, to the conclusion that] 'the natural tendency of the wounded animal is to return to her burrow'.

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[99] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 53-54, 56, 57.

[100] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 55.

> […] One need not have studied psychology to understand that […] the colony projected its own deeds onto those it encountered. It was not the LFA who committed the Hola Massacre and other mass executions, built concentration camps and ran torture chambers across the whole country.
>
> How should a colonial student cope with the daily bombardment of condescencion towards her own history and her own being? The educational journey of such a student is always marked by failures, but sometimes also by victories, despite the scars that always remain. One can only hope that scars actually form, and that no open wounds fester. My good fortune was to love books. An enlightening book can cause shock, but at least one can always weigh one book against the next. Makerere taught me to love books even more; its well-stocked library became a second home. In the library, I was the executor of my own intellectual estate, with a team of willing and engaged staff standing freely at my disposal.
>
> It was thus that I stumbled on Norman Ley's *Kenya*. This University of Glasgow-educated doctor questioned the colonial system he served. A large part of my fascination [with the book] owed to the fact that, in observations dating from 1902 to 1920, he never once claimed to know the African's essence. […] Ley's book contained many jewels for me, which I conscientiously copied out by hand as if the process might help me to find answers to my many questions.[101]

Ngugi encapsulates the spiritual dimension of this struggle for postcolonial identity in the figure of Patrice Lumumba:

> Lumumba reminded the Congolese that their independence had not been decided in roundtable discussions in Brussels, but achieved through their own daily struggle: 'We are proud of this effort, the tears, fire and blood, right into the marrow of our being, because it was an honest and just effort, and indispensable for preparing an end to the humiliating slavery into which we had been forced.'[102]

Asking himself, in prison years later, whether there was a single moment or event at which he 'became' a writer, Ngugi at first offers a range of plausible answers, as if to say that it was a long and gradual process.[103] In the end, however, he fixes on one incident, the moment at which he understood the spiritual dimension of his calling: Jonathan Kariara's response to an early draft of his short story 'The Fig Tree' (1960):

> Returning the draft to me, Kariara praised the quality of the writing, but at the same time pointed out the difference between an episode and a story. I had merely described an event. 'You can't simply say "I drove to Nairobi and

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[101] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 73, 74-75.

[102] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 80.

[103] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 85-88.

back." What happened there and why? Has the experience changed the character in any way, even if only subtly?'

I went back and worked on the text. Not just one draft, several. The woman still flees - that part stayed - but she finds refuge under the mugumo, a sacred fig tree, under which she has a spiritual experience, and discovers that she is pregnant.

[…] The story and the domestic violence bore resemblances to my experience at home, but there were a couple of important deviations from my biography. […] The fictional solution to the conflict is unsatisfying, because it is unclear whether anything in the man has changed, but I put plenty into the evocation of the landscape, the spiritual transformation and the development of a feeling of self-worth and self-understanding which allows the woman better to assert herself in her relationship.

'The Fig Tree' appeared in *Penpoint* in December 1960.[104]

'Learning for the self', if it can only happen in and for the self, nevertheless requires the inspiration or mirror of contact with other selves, other spirits, and the generosity of those teachers, friends and books that provide it:

I then read George Lamming's *In The Castle of My Skin*. Cheryl Gertzel, a History teacher, had allowed me to make use of her library. How is it possible that a Caribbean world had spoken to me so enchantingly as to make me want to create a world of my own? A Kenyan village. Limuru. Going to school in a hail of bullets. Life in an endless nightmare. A society that is waking to a new life.

Easier said than done. Nothing took shape in my head. No story. Limuru and Kenya remained the place from which I had fled. I wanted to write about it, to understand it. I wanted to write about women who had been imprisoned under the watchful eye of the Home Guard, and then said nothing about what had happened to them when they got home. One can see that they are not the same, but they don't talk about it. A few whispered words here and there, and the odd one who is driven crazy by the whole thing and starts yelling about torture, bottles shoved inside her vagina and so on. For the most part, though, no details, and the whole only ever publicly admitted in a state of collapse. Men raped with bottles too, testicles mutilated, and they couldn't talk about it either, until they reached breaking point.

I scribble a few words down here and there, but nothing will take shape. I can't find the melody of the whole thing. I lived in a land of fear, and I can't write about it. I know what terror feels like, but I can't find words for it. I have seen villages razed to the ground, but I can't find any images to capture the desperation. I am helpless before a reality that I have known, and in which thousands are still stuck in concentration camps.

[…]
O mother and father

[104] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 90-91.

The heroes of yesteryear
Called after spears
To defend the nation
The heroes of tomorrow
Need chalk and a blackboard
So please send me to school.

> We sang this song, or variations on it, in the early 1950s in front of the school in Manguo, one of the many independently built and privately run local schools which the colonial state closed and reopened under government control. The state banned the songs, because they sang of the struggle for land, freedom and education.
>
> […] The song could still get me into trouble in Kenya, but even there, no power could prevent a melody from playing in my own head. The lyrics return to me - subversive pulses from the underground, or from the past, a story that the colony tried to bury under a pile of white lies. My imagination digs it out. It is still alive.
>
> Memories pour back: my daily walk to primary school, many miles away; teachers who were not much better dressed than their students, and who likewise trudged off on foot to school and back, save the lucky few with old bicycles; leaky classrooms; landowners like Kieya, who offered their land for schools to be built; and the many local men and women who reached deep into their own shallow pockets to offer chickens, sheep, cows, anything they could to pay the teachers, maintain and grow the infrastructure, and cover supplies. In some schools the students even built the desks and chairs in woodwork class. A collective sacrifice, all to create space for education.
>
> […] The determination, the collective will seizes my imagination - *that*'s what I want to write about. The collective, unconditional reaching for education, the common dream of a meaningful tomorrow.[105]

This collective struggle for an 'unconditional' education with outcomes unspecified in advance - in short, humanistic or spiritual rather than narrowly vocational learning - finds its individual embodiment in the figure of the lone, barefoot teacher:

> He is the world-opener; he brings the world to his students; he is the prophet of the morrow. I want so urgently to write about this that it grabs me like a rising fever. The outlines of this teacher figure take form; a name even finds him: Waiyaki. Why this name among countless others? This is not just any name; it has an echo with the Kikuyu. […] He died [in the 1890s as a resistance hero] and was buried in a place called Kibwezi. The legend, however, had it that he was buried alive with his head facing down towards the centre of the Earth. His death was meant to teach us where a longing for land, freedom and education could lead.

[105] Ngugi, pp. 95, 97-99.

> My fictional Waiyaki, however, was a teacher, and yet also somehow an avatar of the original warrior-Waiyaki, except that he used chalk instead of a spear. The pen, in other words, was mightier than the sword.[106]

The female side of Ngugi's story cannot be told, he realises, without addressing the elephant of Female Genital Mutilation, though this too is represented as a spiritual as well as animal violation of the individual human being. East African societies should stop defiantly viewing it as an illustration of their cultural 'superiority', Ngugi argues, and focus instead on the spiritual traits of character which actually matter, and matter everywhere:

> Later, in a newspaper column, I describe this ritual practice visited on our women as a brutal nonsense, as a tradition without which African societies can flourish and grow perfectly well. I conclude that 'it should be relentlessly attacked from all sides'. […] One cannot, and should never, use an oppressive ritual, with which one finds oneself in total opposition, to promote an [anticolonial] political agenda with which one happens to agree. I don't know why anyone would ever find this a good idea, but I want to understand why they might. Let's take a woman who has been directly harmed by this ritual; this is the starting point for a parallel fictional journey.
>
> The contours of a second main character emerge from meetings with memory. I am at school in Manguo, and she is the little girl I want to impress by jumping over a barbed-wire fence with all the *sprezzatura* of a hurdles champion. I fall over and hurt my leg; she looks briefly over her shoulder at me before carrying on her way. The look in her eyes, however - this mysterious mixture of vague amusement, arrogance and a certain confusion - stayed with me long after I had forgotten her face and my own pain. My sketch demanded a name: Muthoni - shy, but knows herself well, looks out at the world with distance and pride, and demands to know why. I don't know what to make of her, but the character fascinates me.
>
> Muthoni needs a sister, her opposite in many ways - she prefers to give ground than to fight over it - but the two love and care for each other. Her portrait emerges from her name - Nyambura, the bringer of rain, one of the nine daughters of the legendary father of the Kikuyu people. […] It was also the name of a living Nyambura, whose father Kimunya was the second-born son of her grandfather Mukoma wa Njiiri. […] Mukoma, a colonial-appointed chief, lost his comfortable status by leading the resistance against the British seizure of land near Tigoni. […] The people, however, never forgot his courage and refusal to obey bad orders, and celebrated him in song.[107]

This emerging cast of characters collectively represent a 'story about the struggle for the country's soul'[108]. Ngugi did not, thankfully, have to face (and, he suggests, could probably not have faced) this enormous monster of a spiritual undertaking ('a

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[106] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 99.

[107] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 101-102.

[108] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 104.

force larger than my current self'[109]) alone. First there was, as always at Makerere, Dinwiddy:

> Years later Dinwiddy told the story of me knocking on his door one evening looking extremely serious and worried. He invited me in and, assuming it was some kind of desperate and confidential emergency, led me out onto the veranda and away from his wife Yvonne, who was inside playing the piano.
>
> 'I have a terrible feeling that I have started to write a novel,' I blurted, safe in the knowledge that he would understand what I meant. […] In the course of writing the book I often went to him late at night, and he never once complained.
>
> This first visit, however, was truly important. I don't remember the exact words.[110]

Then, as always, there were the naysayers and wellwishers on the sidelines:

> It had done the rounds that Mutiga and I were writing novels. This aroused less wonder in our peers than mocking laughter. […] 'I've heard you're writing a book eh? You're in your second year as a student here and you think you can do something that not even our professors have done?
>
> It seemed as if they had forgotten the Makerere oath. A hierarchy should not stand in the way of the quest for truth, or at least should not quell the individual's determination for her own battle. Even a child can be the one to reveal that the emperor has no clothes. Moreover, others in the past, and in other nations and regions, had done it. 'If they can do it, so can we,' I would fire back. I had first heard these words from a teacher at primary school in Manguo.
>
> […] From time to time one would hear inquiring voices too, questions from those who were truly excited by the idea. Bethuel Kiplagat in the room nextdoor, for example, would pop his head in every now and then; he was still the same emboldening presence that he had been as a Prefect in our Alliance days. He was a year ahead of me. His curiosity was a constant motivation.[111]

The healthy, win-win competition with Joe Mutiga, however, sadly ends in a certain kind of failure for Ngugi, a reminder of the spirit's ultimate freedom, its resistance to laws and therapeutic recipes:

> At my next meeting with Joe Mutiga, at which we had planned to share details of our respective literary journeys, I told him of my doubts about my whole project. Mutiga was optimistic for me. He talked about the [local] Book Award: 'A thousand shillings for the winner for God's sake! Keep your eyes

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[109] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 106.

[110] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 104-105.

[111] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 106.

> on the prize.' This was pure generosity from him; we were in competition for this money, and yet here he was spurring me on when I was down. 'OK, I'll try,' I said as I strove to get beyond my writer's block.
>
> And the Muse came back. For several months I rode a wave of pure ecstasy. […] I met with Mutiga again, and was able to report spectacular progress. This time, however, *he* was stuck. He wanted to give up, he said, and would content himself with being a poet. No, I insisted, echoing his own words back to him: 'Keep your eyes on the prize!' […] I tried this over several days but I never got an 'OK, I'll try' or any other indication of renewed desire back from him. As hard as I tried, his spirit just wouldn't grab onto the literary liferaft [of the Book Award]. I knew it was hopeless because he stopped coming to me altogether to show me his work or indulge his curiosity in mine. I felt even lonelier than before.[112]

In the end, however, Ngugi achieves, with large amounts of help from many different individuals over many years, something inside himself. This something is also a gift to his nation and the future, to a spiritual realm in which other individual human beings within and beyond Kenya can share:

> I had taken the liberty of doing something that had never been done in East Africa: I had written a novel. I know, of course, that European authors had written books which claimed to be 'Kenyan', […] but they all describe the adventure of white heroes in Africa, with black people in the background as decoration along with the other *flora* and *fauna*.
>
> Now, though, I suddenly felt that I was part of something that was in the air and not simply a private reality for me. Everywhere in the country there was something that we had not had for a long time: hope, optimism. We made sure that things happened: we wrote history. [… It was] the hope for a new break of day, for the country, for myself as a writer, and for the life that Nyambura had brought into the world: hope for the future of a new nation.[113]

<u>Spiritual Humanism and 'Race Relations'</u>

Ngugi's self-described journey at Makerere to a colourblind 'humanism of art, culture […] and true human sympathy'[114] nevertheless traverses - for how could it not? - the *négritude* debates raging in the African and World Literature journals of the period. On the one hand, Jomo Kenyatta and other Resistance leaders called for a 'rejection of the skin-colour pigeonhole'; on the other hand, however, there were popular Resistance songs like this:

> Stick us up in concentration camps

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[112] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 107.

[113] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 109-110.

[114] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 128.

> Leave us to rot in prison
> Drive us to exile and faraway isles
> We will never give up the struggle for freedom
> Kenya is a land for black people.[115]

While such songs 'expressed defiance and a collective discovery of racial identity', there was also, for Ngugi, a 'parallel' individual journey to self-awareness 'which contained many stops along the way':

> The first true discovery of the meaning of my skin colour came when a young white Officer, armed with a machinegun, knocked the living daylights out of me with a punch to the face, and I was unable to return the favour as my newly circumcised manhood would have demanded.
>
> […] I remember how grown men would kneel at his command, and this reminded me of King Lear's dictum that even a dog wins obedience when she holds the right office. White was the colour of power. White would checkmate black every time until black became strong enough to prevent it. Black Power was the only realistic answer to white domination. Only thus could a dialogue among equals ever emerge.[116]

The courage to embody this spirit of equality in one's daily thoughts and actions was sharpened by Ngugi's proximity to its blind and servile opposite during a stint as summer intern at the East African Agricultural and Forestry Research Organisation (EAAFRO):

> At first, it was something new: I was happy to work for scientists, researchers, serious minds, people whose lives were dedicated to the Makerere oath: rigorous pursuit of truth.
>
> […] Lady Viviana was the Director of the EAAFRO Library. Under her came her white Deputy, Mrs. Smart-Ogletree, and under both came a black assistant, Moses Wainana. Moses was submission incarnate when dealing with his white superiors, […] but the exact opposite with those below. […] Moses put up with me because I was a Makererean and only stayed for the holidays, three weeks at most; […] I think he enjoyed the idea of having a Makererean working under him. Once, when he discovered that I had used the white toilets, he almost had a heart attack. 'They're for the whites!' he cried. I replied that I didn't see anything written to that effect.
>
> The researchers spent so long in a world of test tubes, greenhouses and virus laboratories that they came to see their black underlings as plant or animal pests who likewise required the use of gloves. They reminded me of Casaubon in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, who lived with the dead as he searched for the key to all mythologies.[117]

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[115] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 113.

[116] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 113-114.

[117] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 115-117.

Ngugi's contemporaneous literary journey eventually leads him, via the generosity of a white translation, to Senghor himself:

> Gerald Moore introduced Makerere to *Négritude* poetry. The Cambridge-educaged Head of the Extra-Mural Department was at that time, along with Ulli Beier and Janheinz Jahn, one of three European scholars to engage seriously with emerging literature from the African continent. […] In later years he and Beier published the influential *Penguin Book of Modern African Poetry*, the core of which was Senghor's work on *Négritude*. I read these poetic homages to black existence with repeated astonishment; Moore's translation captured the music of it.[118]

The point of the *Négritude* movement, and of modern African literature in general, Ngugi suggests here, was precisely to greet head-on the 'black masks blowing in the four winds from which the spirit blows'[119], to free the African individual from the 'pigeonhole of skin colour', to offer her a seat among spiritual equals at the top table of world literature.

That Ngugi himself was destined for a seat at this top table was seen by the generous newspaper editor Jack Ensoll, who did the young student a favour by kindly firing him:

> 'I want to give you my honest opinion,' Jack said. 'I've read your article, and I liked it. I like *how* you write, how you craft sentences, but even a couple more months in this office will take that from you, that something, that individual voice that you have. Please, don't let us ruin what is hidden in you. Your future lies between bookcovers.[120]

Ngugi nevertheless tackled a range of pressing social issues in his short-lived column, from homelessness and social welfare to FGM ('I oppose anyone who calls herself enlightened and defends the practice by conveying a message to ordinary people that it has something special to do with our culture or some strong, mystical Africanness'[121]). An overarching theme of these articles, however, was official language policy; in 'Swahili Must Find its Proper Place', for example, Ngugi complained that African writers were forced to 'tame the music and the struggle in their souls by writing in a foreign language'[122]. The neglect of local languages, moreover, remained

> 'a black mark on the whole record of African colonial education.' I called on writers in general, and African writers in particular, to work more in their native tongues. […] 'I don't believe for a moment that we can ever be a

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[118] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 122-123.

[119] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 123N

[120] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 126.

[121] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 130.

[122] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 129.

> nation worthy of the name until we [each] have a language […] in which our individual spiritual growth can be fully expressed.'[123]

Ngugi's engagement with older African writers under the auspices of *Transition* magazine and the Paris-based Congress for Cultural Freedom allow him to explore the possibilities for spiritual growth unique to a postcolonial context, but also to see beyond them to the universal demands and rewards of a literary calling. If African languages, and therefore countless concrete spiritual existences, had suffered at the hands of oppressive colonial education policies, there was at least the silver lining offered to the African Commonwealth of a shared English language which would facilitate a degree of constructive spiritual exchange among individuals from disparate African communities. This common language would allow Ngugi to reach, among others, a coveted Nigerian audience:

> When I received the conference invitation, I was deep in the inner world of my characters. Another prize offered itself now: the chance to show the manuscript to Chinua Achebe.
>
> This desire proved very stubborn; it was with me day and night. I had to get the draft finished in time.[124]

The Meaning of Independence

> *A man returns home from a concentration camp and looks forward to finding his old life the way he left it. […] But during his absence life has moved on without him; history marches on, people have developed in different ways; things can never again be as he imagined them. At first he feels wounded and abandoned, as if life and history have lied to him; he thinks of drowning himself in a river, but as he observes the water flowing beneath his feet, he gets the message, and finds the strength to live.*
>
> *[…] Earlier in my diary I had written: 'Won't give up. Will fight.' This attitude helped me later to look disaster in the face and find a way to survive another day.*[125]

Birth of a Dream Weaver ends where Ngugi's well-documented political troubles as an adult artist begin.[126] Even these problems, however, will have spiritual roots tracing back to the early 1960s, in a collective failure to build a society in the image

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[123] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 129-130.

[124] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 145.

[125] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 132, 150.

[126] See for example Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (London: Heinemann, 1981) and *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams: The Performance of Literature and Power in Post-Colonial Africa* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

of the great university. Celebrating Ugandan independence on 10 October 1962, the Chairman of Northcote Hall, Herman Lupogo, offered a toast, instead, to Makerere:

> Makerere, he said, was a microcosm of East Africa, a place where men and women from different regions and communities were able to live in peace with one another. The Ugandan student [and future Prime Minister] Apolo Nsibambi, however, issued a warning: now that we were no longer a 'protectorate', he said, we would have no one but ourselves to blame for our mistakes; this would be the measure of our maturity. Did he remember uttering these words of warning in a moment of such bliss? They would prove prophetic for postcolonial Africa as a whole.[127]

Rather than entering the political sphere directly, Ngugi preferred to dedicate himself instead to his calling ('I always had the feeling that political organisations ignored the element of culture'[128]). His play *The Black Hermit* (1963) focused on a character, Remi, who 'must choose between love, duty, community, tradition and religion', and ends up abandoning the city for his native village 'with the sole goal of breaking through the negative traditions, customs and ethnic chauvinism which were preventing his community from joining in the modernity of the new nation'[129]. Unlike novel-writing, however, the theatre is a joint, and therefore inherently political, enterprise: reluctantly taking the stage at the play's premiere, Ngugi insisted that

> my hesitation did not stem from false modesty. I was truly of the view that the night belonged to everyone who had helped to create it. It was a testament to the dedication and talent of men and women of different races, communities, regions and religions. […] Theatre is a collective creation; therein lies its beauty, and I said so. If anyone deserved to be singled out for recognition, it was Peter Kinyanjui, the President of the Makerere Students' Dramatic Society, because he had come up with the idea of doing it in the first place.[130]

Parallel to this busy hands-on creation of a new, cosmopolitan republic of letters in East Africa, Ngugi's private reckoning with colonialism, he realises, has not by any means ended. A meeting with a former schoolmaster, the missionary Carey Francis, leaves him bewildered at the man's staggering blindness:

> 'This mad chase after freedom, James, has been manufactured by a politician who is asking you to serve him instead of serving you.'
>
> 'No more and no less than colonialism demanded of Africa in general,' I said.

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[127] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 152-153.

[128] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 155-156.

[129] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 157.

[130] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 175.

> ‘The settlers perhaps, but not the missionaries and the more honest arms of the government.’
>
> ‘Can you not see that, for us, it was all part of the same system of oppression?’
>
> […] I thought of my encounter with William MacGregor Ross’s *Kenya from Within*, in which I had first read that the hymn ‘How Sweet the Name Jesus Sounds’ had been written by an English slaveowner. We had sung it in chapel at the Alliance High School, and now Ross was telling me that a certain John Newton had written in on a slave ship in 1749. I checked it out, and it was true.
>
> Understood in their original context, then, certain verses of the song were a complete joke. […] Christianity was the religion of a [British] global imperial system.[131]

As the Vietnam War waxed in intensity, Ngugi finds himself taking an even broader view of the problem of colonialism:

> I read Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American*, and the faith of its protagonist Alden Pyle in a third power, neither colonial nor communist, reminded me of John F. Kennedy’s speech to the American Senate in 1957: ‘The most powerful force in the world today is neither communism nor capitalism; […] it is the eternal demand of human beings for freedom and independence. The main enemy of this enormous will to freedom is, in short, imperialism [in all its forms].’[132]

These intellectual enquiries lead Ngugi eventually to the godfather of postcolonial literature, Joseph Conrad: ‘In his major works, [it is] the struggle over coal, rubber, silver, gold, the jewels in the bowels of the Earth [which holds centre stage]; narrative and racist structures lie at the heart of all imperial power.’[133] Instead of adopting the true posture of human equality unique to Spiritual Humanism, imperial systems everywhere distinguish themselves, Ngugi concludes, with a materialistic, ‘divide and conquer’[134] approach to both economic affairs and cultural policy, one which weakens the faith of individuals in the existence of their own autonomous spirituality by denying them free and direct contact with inspiring stories and examples, particularly in the native languages where they can have the most profound effect.

Growing Up and Going Home

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[131] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 182, 183-184.

[132] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 187-188.

[133] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 192.

[134] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 195.

> *I joined the [climbing] club because of my fear of heights. I wanted to overcome this phobia by climbing somewhere with professional support. Through the club I was able to discover the various landscapes and cliff formations in and around Kampala. This experience deepened my preexisting reverence for nature and my love of nature, which was a major source of inspiration for many of my stories.*[135]

Ngugi returns home at the end of the book with an advance copy of his first novel under his arm: 'My mother wanted to know if I had given my best to it, and was satisfied when I said that I had.'[136] Above all, however, Ngugi wanted to show the 'first East African novel' to Wabia:

> She was my half-sister, and severely disabled, but she had always remained trusting of life. She lived in the world of songs and stories, and she became a kind of collective memory bank for the whole community. I had grown up with her stories; she was the only person who could make them come fully to life both by day and by night. She couldn't see the daylight; she could only feel it in her shaky hands. She had formed my world in a way that only I could understand. She had formed the desire in me to become a storyteller.[137]

Wabia was for Ngugi the living reminder that 'the dictum that people create their own history, only not under self-chosed circumstances, applied to art and artists as well as everyone else.'[138] Ngugi's own journey to his 'profession' as a writer required conscious and difficult choices, the biggest of which was perhaps his decision to reject an opportunity to go to Cambridge:

> I had the chance to go to Cambridge on scholarship. Despite my admiration for the many positive qualities of Carey Francis, I still remembered one particularly nasty thing he said: no African student could ever get into Cambridge on merit alone. […] This Anglochauvinism was a major flaw in Francis's character, and it clouded his vision of the world. Even though I didn't take his prejudices too seriously, I didn't want to have the feeling of having been given an undeserved academic favour. I didn't want that shadow following me around.
>
> My mother expected of me that I measure my best by my own standards. For her, there was no limit to self-improvement: there was always room to be better. Wherever I ended up going, it had to be the place that

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[135] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 201.

[136] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 212.

[137] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 213.

[138] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 216.

> would allow me to do my best and to pursue my dream further. In the end, I decided that Leeds would be the best place for me.[139]

The second big decision was to leave his job at *The Nation* newspaper:

> My conversations with Njoroge from three years before came back ringing in my ears. I could almost hear his knowing laugh from the grave: 'I told you so! When you work for a newspaper, you have to work within the confines of its overall view of the world.'
>
> […] I slowly grew lost. I felt drained. Some part of me seemed to die every day. *The Nation* had offered me a career path, but would not be able to offer me the chance to reach where I wanted to reach in life.
>
> […] One morning, I woke up and wrote my resignation. […] I didn't give a reason. I didn't think anyone would understand, because it wasn't even clear to *me* what the real sticking point was.[140]

Ngugi was now a professional writer, but, in the nature of all true spiritual callings, his experiences and achievements up to that point were 'all a kind of preparation for becoming the writer that I was still yet to become. […] It was as if I had not yet written the novel that I wanted to write. The wish, however, to weave dreams, burned on, an integral part of my life.'[141]

Makerere would forever remain the place where this spiritual desire took concrete, adult form:

> 'We had no idea that we lived in Paradise,' Dinwiddy said years later. […] The 'paradise' that he was referring to was the Makerere of the '50s and early '60s. […] It was reflected in the parties organised by the different halls of residence and the dance evenings in the Main Hall, supplemented by excursions into the Kampala live music scene at clubs like Top Life and Suzana.
>
> […] In general, Makerere was the one place where different races, ethnic communities and even religions were capable of working together. It was the place where we had the feeling that we could compete with the best, with anything that the world's best universities - whether Cambridge, Oxford or Harvard - could offer.
>
> But the whole concept of Makerere filled Idi Amin with envy. As Chancellor, he awarded himself multiple Honorary Doctorates. Professors and students were murdered, while others fled into exile. […] The Kampala of literary salons and friendly adversarial debate disappeared.
>
> We lived in Paradise, it was true, but it was a Paradise built on unfair colonial structures that we had sworn to uphold. […] Still, Makerere was the place where I discovered my calling as a dream weaver.[142]

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[139] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 222.

[140] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 224-225.

[141] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 227.

[142] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, pp. 228-229, 233.

Ngugi dedicates the book to ‘Minneh Nyambura, who lives today in the granddaughters who carry her name.’[143]

[143] Ngugi, *Geburt eines Traumwebers*, p. 5.

4. Elias Khoury's *Awlad al-Ghetto: Ismi Adam*

> *[Ginzburg] goes on to describe how the acceptance of her womanhood was fundamental to her birth as an artist, but she is careful to point out that this was not conscription to a gendered view of life: rather, it was the self-acceptance crucial to enable anyone to speak with her own voice. The basis of Ginzburg's world view is equality.*[144]
>
> Rachel Cusk

Elias Khoury describes Adam Dannoun, the central protagonist of his 2016 novel *Awlad al-Ghetto: Ismi Adam (Children of the Ghetto: My Name is Adam)*, as 'invented but real': 'It was [Adam] who allowed me to discover another dimension of literature. I am only his shadow here,' Khoury tells William Irigoyen in a 2018 interview.[145] Just as Shakespeare - who may have been one person or many, or someone other than the current consensus holds him to have been - is in a sense less real than Hamlet (who undoubtedly exists as a human character), so too does Adam belong to a realm of 'literary truth'[146]: he exists regardless of the historical facts because he is a literary product of Khoury's spirit, and in an important sense more 'real' than the living, breathing Elias Khoury himself.

Khoury is a Lebanese writer who writes from without about the Palestinian experience of 'spiritual division'[147]:

> Irigoyen: *This notion recurs often in your books. You mentioned the quote from Mao in* Sinalcol*: 'One divides into two.' Division precedes conquest. Does this phrase focus particularly on the policies of successive Israeli governments which lump their citizens into categories?*
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> Khoury: In Spain, during the Inquisition, non-Christians had three options: convert, leave, or stay and die. The Israelis, animated by a racist conception, apply this principle. They have never imposed their religion or language on the Palestinians. There are, instead, specific programs in Arabic for Palestinians in Israeli public schools. This is a problem. Why? Since they correspondingly struggle in Hebrew, they find it difficult to continue their studies. The percentage of Arab Israelis in Israeli universities is very low. Israel strives continually to transform its citizens into sub-

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[144] Rachel Cusk, 'Violent Vocation', https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/violent-vocation-natalia-ginzburg/, 18/4/2018 (accessed 17/9/2018).

[145] Elias Khoury, in William Irigoyen, 'Elias Khoury dans les interstices du silence palestinien', http://lorientlitteraire.com/article_details.php?cid=31&nid=7142, March 2018 (accessed 17/9/2018)

[146] See Elias Khoury, 'Fushat Fikr', 27/9/2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtxZmzGgBTs (accessed 17/4/2019).

[147] See Khoury, in Irigoyen, 'Elias Khoury dans les interstices du silence palestinien'.

> citizens, to divide its population. And I am not even talking about the 'other' Palestinians, who are, in turn, sub-sub-citizens.[148]

This drama - the plight of a people he regards as part of the old pre-colonial nation of al-Sham (Syria, Lebanon and Palestine) - has been an integral part of Khoury's own spiritual life and development since his first direct encounters as a teenager.[149] *Ismi Adam* - his ride, concrete but imaginary, with the fluent Hebrew-speaking Adam Dannoun in New York - takes him an important step further on his own spiritual journey.

Preface

Pause is warranted already at Khoury's choice of Qur'anic verse (39:9) to open the Preface to the novel: 'Say: are those who know and those who don't know equal?'[150] Does Khoury feel that he, as omniscient author, knows more than Adam about his spiritual condition? Or does he feel that, on the contrary, Adam - like Hamlet an 'invented but real' character - becomes his spiritual teacher, despite the fact that Khoury, in his Preface, instinctively warns his young female Korean student Sarang-Li - who brings Adam's 'manuscript' to his attention - to be careful about her interactions with this extraordinary but unstable man, both of whom may or may not exist? Is the novel the introspective platform on which Adam may finally achieve the self-knowledge necessary for true equality and dialogue with the world, not in the sense of a full and final understanding of his heritage - buried in so much silence - but of an adult acceptance of its visible and invisible contours? Is Khoury offering a gift to allow those young Palestinians, Arabs and other readers who 'didn't know' about the plight of Palestinians who remained in Israel after 1948, in order that they might become 'equal in knowledge' with him? Is he admitting that he 'didn't really know' about Adam until Adam 'told' him his story? The Qur'anic citation is the perfectly ambigious choice here: the novel itself is the answer to these questions, not in the sense of a condescending authorial gift of charity, but rather as a lived example of the generous dialogical realm of spiritual existence itself,[151] one which

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[148] Irigoyen and Khoury in Irigoyen, 'Elias Khoury dans les interstices du silence palestinien'.

[149] See Khoury, 'Fushat Fikr'.

[150] Elias Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto: Ismi Adam*, (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 2016), p. 7.

[151] In a podium discussion on Spiritual Humanism at the 2018 Songshan Forum, Ludwig Nagl offered the following handy summation of Hilary Putnam's view of such dialogue:

> Putnam rejects not only all parochial 'exclusivism', but also the view of 'inclusivist' theologians who contend that the valuable elements of non-monotheistic religions are already included in their respective version of monotheism. [...] Every great religion,' Putnam says, 'contains, in its best form, modes of religious experience that are less developed in other religions.' [...] Religions misunderstand themselves, Putnam claims, if they act triumphalistically, denigrate and even fight each other: they should, on the contrary, seek to mutually learn from those modes of religious sensibility that they themselves have not been able to fully develop. (Ludwig Nagl, 'Philosophical Reflections on Religion in a Secular Age', *2018 Songshan Forum Proceedings*, p. 49.)

extends to exchanges with imaginary as well as real human beings. Khoury says in his preface that, as he was trying to 'rewrite' the text in his own name, 'I had the impression […] that my life was decomposing and inserting itself into the life of this man; his story grabbed me so strongly that I was starting to fear for my own independent spirit. I entered into the labyrinth of this man's memory, and that was when I gave up the idea [of claiming his story as my own]'[152]. Khoury asks us in 'his' Preface (signed 'Elias Khoury, New York-Beirut, 12 July 2015'[153]) to consider that it doesn't matter whether Adam's 'manuscript' was written by a real person other than 'Elias Khoury', or by 'Elias Khoury' himself; just as Hamlet does not need the ego of a given 'Shakespeare' or 'Shakespeares' to exist to us, and is in a sense greater than, or at least as great as, his creator, so too is Adam more than a product of Khoury's hungry writer's ego, even though the novel appears in his name (leaving the reader in no real doubt that the whole thing is really an invention of Khoury's 'spirit').

Awlad al-Ghetto will be, Khoury makes clear in his Preface, a deeply political novel, but not in any straightforward or propagandistic way:

> The manuscript did not have a title. I admit that I made up a list of possible titles before opting for *The Notebooks of Adam Dannoun*. The author would thus have succeeded where all other writers had failed: in becoming the hero of a novel which he himself had lived and written.
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> I changed my mind just before sending the manuscript to my editor, because I realised that the book uncovered a truth that no one had noticed: the Palestinians who had managed to remain [within Israel] were the descendants of small ghettos where the new [Israeli] state had held them after taking their homes and erasing the latter's names.
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> I finally decided on the title *Awlad al-Ghetto*. In this way I would have contributed, if only slightly, to the writing of a novel that I had not written myself.[154]

Adam's concrete (if imaginary) individuality is the indispensable spiritual prism through which this collective tragedy is witnessed, and to which Khoury's calling as a writer, like Ginzburg's and Ngugi's, compels him to want to give voice: Khoury wants to give Adam, and by extension millions of 'real', spiritually 'orphaned' Palestinians, the chance to exist as an equal with him and his readers. This can only be done, however, by deep spiritual engagement with *one* person, whether real or imagined. With his smoke-and-mirrors meta-business at the beginning here, Khoury asks his readers to suspend judgment on the exact historical and collective details of the case - to what extent did Israel, in the aftermath of 1948, really implement the experience of Holocaust victims in their treatment of the Arabs who chose to remain? - and to focus on another question: not what actually happened - important though that question remains - but the spiritual consequences of what is believed to have happened, or rather, of facts that have been obscured by 'silence',

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[152] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 16.

[153] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 18.

[154] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 17-18.

but whose spiritual consequences remain to touch the lives even of individual Lebanese authors and Korean students - real or imagined - living in New York more than sixty years later. As Khoury concludes his Preface: 'Finally I would like to extend my apologies to Sarang-Li for not having consulted with her prior to the publication of these notebooks as a novel written by Adam Dannoun, though I am sure she will be pleased to find herself among the heroines in the story.'[155]

Terry Eagleton's *Radical Sacrifice* (2018)[156] offers us a path into 'Adam's'novel' as Khoury understands it:

> 'The practice of sacrifice nurtures a wisdom beyond the rationality of the modern,' Eagleton asserts. In the name of the autonomous self who exercises an exchange-based rationality, the liberalism of the moderns rejects sacrifice and thus overlooks its redemptive and transfigurative powers. 'For conventional liberal wisdom,' Eagleton writes, 'self-fulfillment and self-dispossession are essentially at odds. This is not the case for a more radical outlook. One must take a remarkably indulgent view of humankind, as many liberals do, to assume that the self can come into its own without that fundamental breaking and refashioning of which sacrifice has been one traditional sign.'[157]

Khoury is trying, in his Preface, to describe literature as precisely this type of sacrificial act of the spirit. The conclusion reached by Molly Brigid McGrath on Eagleton, therefore, is not applicable to Khoury himself:

> Eagleton rightly emphasizes that, for sacrifice to work its magic, one cannot approach it transactionally. Pagan burnt offerings were often understood as deals, exchanges with the gods for goodies or bribes to obviate evil. The great monotheistic religions reject this *quid pro quo* attitude, even if some followers still fall into it. It is an impious form of piety, as Socrates points out in the *Euthyphro*.
>
> Eagleton suggests that, in order to unleash the transfigurative powers of sacrificial suffering, we must approach it as an ultimate act—worth doing even if we are in no way recompensed. Unless it is unconditional, the sacrifice is nullified, reduced to a self-serving strategy. Eagleton here endorses the ethics of the crucifixion while rejecting, or remaining agnostic, about its promise of an afterlife: "Only if the cross is lived in tragic resignation as final and absolute may it cease to be either. Only by living one's death to the full, rather than treating it as springboard to eternity, might it prove possible to transcend it."
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> By reading the resurrection metaphorically, as a hoped-for transformation in time rather than as guaranteed reward in heaven, Eagleton manages to reject the crucial doctrine of Christianity while still

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[155] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 18.

[156] See Terry Eagleton, *Radical Sacrifice*, (Yale University Press, 2018).

[157] Molly Brigid McGrath, 'The Useful Errors of Terry Eagleton', https://www.the-american-interest.com/2018/08/22/the-useful-errors-of-terry-eagleton/, 22/8/2018 (accessed 18/9/2018).

> taking it seriously. In other words, he expertly uses Christian scriptures but rejects the religion for which they are central, leaving the reader to wonder where any meaning occurs worthy of making a sacrifice.
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> So: a sacrifice *for what?* Eagleton doesn't seem to believe in souls, so his aim, and his object of analysis, is clearly not spiritual.[158]

This is not even true of Terry Eagleton or a post-Hans Küng Catholic theology, and it is certainly not true of Elias Khoury: the 'spiritual' transcends precisely the realm of 'for what' - whether 'a hoped-for transformation in time' or 'a guaranteed reward in heaven' - and becomes its own irresistible end ('learning for the self', in our Confucian formulation). One can take a 'spiritual' dimension seriously without believing in, or hoping for, either of these self-serving outcomes; indeed, it seems that the transcendence of such instrumental logic via a form of sacrifice - in Khoury's case here, the writing of *Awlad al-Ghetto* - is precisely what is required if we are to unlock the realm of 'Spiritual Humanism' at all.

Preface-Testament

Adam's 'own' 'Preface-Testament' shows us immediately why Elias Khoury finds Adam so dangerously and tragically unstable, and yet so compellingly, radically, and spiritually equal:

> I don't know how to describe my emotion as I stand at this window through which I observe my spirit shattering on the glass. It is my mirror; my reflection disappears into the background of the city behind it. I know that New York will be my last stop, that I will die here, that I will be cremated and have my ashes sprinkled on the Hudson. That's what I'm going to write in my will. It is true that I don't have a grave in the country that is no longer my own, and that I have no claim to be buried there, kissing the spirits of my ancestors. In this river, I will kiss the spirits of strangers instead, I will go and meet those who, in their meetings with other foreigners, will find a substitute spiritual network for their lost ties. […] No one will read these words after my death, because I will ask that these notebooks be burnt and scattered with my ashes in the river. This is the destiny of human beings and their words, because words die too, and let out a moan, just as our spirit does when it disperses in the final fog.[159]

Adam is, for understandable reasons which will become clear, unhealthily self-absorbed, and as such is initially incapable of viewing his 'work' as anything other than therapy for himself, a self that he in any case views as 'shattered' beyond repair and destined to 'disperse' in death. Khoury's 'sacrifice' is to give public voice to Adam's private spiritual pain and frustration, to express a confidence in Adam, via his 'sacrificial act' of writing, that Adam does not have in himself: 'I made a mirror of this window to avoid having to look at myself in a real mirror. My face gets lost in

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[158] Molly Brigid McGrath, 'The Useful Errors of Terry Eagleton'.

[159] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 21.

the faces and forms outside, my traits vanish, […] and I put an end to the dream of writing a novel that I haven't managed to write and for which I see no reason to write,'[160] Adam continues, as if telling the reader not to believe that he could have written the novel to come without Elias Khoury, as the reader indeed knows:

> The choice of solitude was deliberate. […] Writing is my solitude, my only calling: I failed to write the novel I was trying to write, because I wanted to create a giant metaphor, a cosmic metaphor, […] and I discovered that metaphors don't serve any purpose. […] Why should I write another metaphor to add to the pile that others have created?[161]

And yet Khoury himself wants to avoid taking any credit whatsoever for this whole thing, and to transcend any trace of condescencion despite the patent abjectness of Adam's spiritual situation:

> I started by writing the metaphor which I chose to express the history of my country of origin, then, deciding that metaphors were useless, instead of tearing my draft up, I reformulated certain passages in order to tell the story of the birth of the idea. Finally, fulminating with rage, I decided to abandon the metaphor completely, to give up on the novel and write my own story instead, focusing strictly on the facts and eschewing all symbols and metaphors. […] I don't remember having read anything on the relationship between anger and writing, but the decision to write my own story came from anger. […] I saw how the author of *Gate of the Sun* [Elias Khoury] presented himself as an expert on Palestinian history and ostensibly lied.[162]

The experience of 'spiritual division' has not deprived Adam completely of his sense of self: 'I am not certain that I want these pages devoured by the flames, but it is too late now, and so much the better. I am certain, on the other hand, that the tiny sun which illuminated a dark corner in the depths of my spirit will behave as it sees fit.'[163] Still, he has lost his faith, or perhaps never had any real faith, in that self's wider place in the world:

> I hesitated for a long time before deciding not to send these notebooks to an Arab publishing house, not because I thought they were without value, but because I have no faith in the link between the universe of writing and that of diffusion, in which writers jostle with each other to assure the perennity of their names. All is vanity, and we are the vanity of vanities, as Solomon said. I don't understand how poets and writers have had the balls to write anything after the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes! If the writer who was a prophet, monarch and poet, a lover of all women and a sovereign over the

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[160] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 22.

[161] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 23.

[162] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 23-24.

[163] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 24.

> kingdoms of djinns, had concluded that all was vanity, why would I want to go and add my vanity to his own?[164]

Wislawa Szymborska offered the definitive modern antidote to this fatalistic and nihilistic line of thinking in her 1996 Nobel Lecture:

> Inspiration is not the exclusive privilege of poets or artists generally. There is, has been, and will always be a certain group of people whom inspiration visits. It is made up of all those who have consciously chosen their calling and do their job with love and imagination. It may include doctors, teachers, gardeners – and I could list a hundred more professions. Their work becomes one continuous adventure as long as they manage to keep discovering new challenges in it. Difficulties and setbacks never quell their curiosity. A swarm of new questions emerges from every problem they solve. Whatever inspiration is, it's born from a continuous 'I don't know'.
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> There aren't many such people. Most of the earth's inhabitants work to get by. They work because they have to. They didn't pick this or that kind of job out of passion; the circumstances of their lives did the choosing for them. Loveless work, boring work, work valued only because others haven't got even that much, however loveless and boring – this is one of the harshest human miseries.
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> […] At this point, though, certain doubts may arise in my audience. All sorts of torturers, dictators, fanatics, and demagogues struggling for power by way of a few loudly shouted slogans also enjoy their jobs, and they too perform their duties with inventive fervor. Well, yes, but they 'know'. They know, and whatever they know is enough for them once and for all. They don't want to find out about anything else, since that might diminish their arguments' force. And any knowledge that doesn't lead to new questions quickly dies out: it fails to maintain the temperature required for sustaining life. In the most extreme cases, cases well known from ancient and modern history, it even poses a lethal threat to society.
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> This is why I value that little phrase 'I don't know' so highly. It's small, but it flies on mighty wings. It expands our lives to include the spaces within us as well as those outer expanses in which our tiny Earth hangs suspended. If Isaac Newton had never said to himself 'I don't know', the apples in his little orchard might have dropped to the ground like hailstones and at best he would have stooped to pick them up and gobble them with gusto. Had my compatriot Marie Sklodowska Curie never said to herself 'I don't know', she probably would have wound up teaching chemistry at some private high school for young ladies from good families, and would have ended her days performing this otherwise perfectly respectable job. But she kept on saying 'I don't know', and these words led her, not just once but twice, to Stockholm, where restless, questing spirits are occasionally rewarded with the Nobel Prize.
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> Poets, if they're genuine, must also keep repeating 'I don't know'. Each poem marks an effort to answer this statement, but as soon as the final

[164] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 25.

period hits the page, the poet begins to hesitate, starts to realize that this particular answer was pure makeshift that's absolutely inadequate to boot. So the poets keep on trying, and sooner or later the consecutive results of their self-dissatisfaction are clipped together with a giant paperclip by literary historians and called their 'oeuvre'.

[…] I sometimes dream of situations that can't possibly come true. I audaciously imagine, for example, that I get a chance to chat with […] the author of that moving lament on the vanity of all human endeavors. I would bow very deeply before him, because he is, after all, one of the greatest poets, for me at least. That done, I would grab his hand.

'"There's nothing new under the sun": that's what you wrote, Ecclesiastes. But you yourself were born new under the sun. And the poem you created is also new under the sun, since no one wrote it down before you. And all your readers are also new under the sun, since those who lived before you couldn't read your poem. And that cypress that you're sitting under hasn't been growing since the dawn of time. It came into being by way of another cypress similar to yours, but not exactly the same. And Ecclesiastes, I'd also like to ask you what new thing under the sun you're planning to work on now? A further supplement to the thoughts you've already expressed? Or maybe you're tempted to contradict some of them now? In your earlier work you mentioned joy – so what if it's fleeting? So maybe your new-under-the-sun poem will be about joy? Have you taken notes yet, do you have drafts? I doubt you'll say, "I've written everything down, I've got nothing left to add." There's no poet in the world who can say this, least of all a great poet like yourself.'

The world – whatever we might think when terrified by its vastness and our own impotence, or embittered by its indifference to individual suffering, of people, animals, and perhaps even plants, for why are we so sure that plants feel no pain; whatever we might think of its expanses pierced by the rays of stars surrounded by planets we've just begun to discover, planets already dead? still dead? we just don't know; whatever we might think of this measureless theatre to which we've got reserved tickets, but tickets whose lifespan is laughably short, bounded as it is by two arbitrary dates; whatever else we might think of this world – it is astonishing.[165]

By writing *Awlad al-Ghetto* at all, Khoury affirms his allegiance to this Szymborskian cohort, even if, as the sacrificial spirit of all true callings demands, he does so without endeavouring to usurp Adam's autonomous spiritual identity or claiming anything at all 'for himself'. He genuinely 'doesn't know' where his spiritual identity ends, and where the imaginary Adam's identity begins: he and his readers are in the very public process of finding out. Adam himself, however, is prematurely preoccupied with death[166], and with his own story; Khoury understands, respects, and is sympathetic to that, even as he wants to point beyond it to the 'astonishing' world outside, a world which the traumatised and 'spiritually divided' Adam is

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[165] Wislawa Szymborska, 'The Poet and the World (1996 Nobel Lecture)', https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1996/szymborska/lecture/, 7/12/1996 (accessed 18/9/2018).

[166] See Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 20.

deprived of seeing for himself, and which Khoury, through his spontaneous act of novelistic sacrifice, wants to make available to his 'real' readers without demanding recompense for it in either money or fame, and on the contrary eschewing both to the fullest possible extent. To make his point about the sacrificial nature of what we are calling 'Spiritual Humanism', however, Khoury had no choice but to put his own name on the novel rather than publish it pseudonymously under the name of Adam Dannoun; by the end, the reader of *Awlad al-Ghetto* must decide for herself whether she believes the sacrfice was authentic or not.

The Love Coffin

> *I don't like messages in literature, because, like love, literature loses its entire meaning when it becomes a vehicle for something else alleged to transcend it. Nothing transcends love, and no meaning is superior to the palpitations of the human spirit which beat in literature.*
>
> *Yes, literature transcends external meanings, and I would like Palestine to become a text which transcends its present historical situation. […] Nothing matches poetry except the silent pauses which harmonise its rhythm with the rhythm of the spirit.*[167]
>
> Adam Dannoun

The tale of Waddah al-Yaman, told by Adam in seven 'preambles' prior to the launch of his own autobiographical story, is a story or 'novel' in its own right. Khoury is stressing here that Adam's interest in Waddah al-Yaman, like his own interest in Adam, is not 'metaphorical' in the sense that it is not a mere means to the end of addressing the collective Palestinian experience, but an individual spiritual end in its own right. Anything less would be a disgrace, a cheapening of the spiritual autonomy of other people, real or imaginary, an inability to commune spiritually with them, a reduction of their suffering to a function of one's own ego rather than a genuine embodiment of the gateway virtue that Confucians call *ren*. Adam, like Elias Khoury, 'doesn't care' if Imru 'l-Qays 'really existed', and believes that 'Younus is more real than the Lebanese author [Elias Khoury] who deformed his image in *Gate of the Sun*.'[168] The figure of Waddah al-Yaman, likewise, transcends the identities of those in the Arab tradition who have written about him: 'Our relationship with poets starts from our love for their poems. Without this love, the poet loses his personal presence in our lives.'[169] Adam concludes that 'the error committed by the various chroniclers [of Waddah's story] was to have neglected what happened to

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[167] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 31-32.

[168] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 38.

[169] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 40.

the poet after his meeting with his beloved in the Valley of Death.'[170] Waddah's refusal to join Rawda in death upon seeing the state of her leprosy 'offers us another angle on the madness which arises from the fear of the consequences of love, or in other words the fear of life, the fear of death.' A 'new chapter' in the story begins when Waddah decides to take the pilgrimage to Mecca 'in order rescue his spirit from the demon which was inhabiting it'.[171]

Umm al-Banin, hearing of Waddah's beauty and the reasons for his journey to Mecca, convinces her half-mad prey that she is really a rejuvenated Rawda, and takes him home in a box to Damascus, where she proceeds to hide him from her husband, the Caliph. Adam asks:

> Was the first Rawda erased [in Waddah's spirit] so that a new woman could replace her? Or did the two figures melt into one in the poet's mind, as the author of these lines prefers to believe?
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> I prefer the fusion hypothesis because it allows me to avoid the former; exchanging a dead or dying woman for another one seems to me to be an immoral act capable of destroying the story. Writing about love cannot be the mirror of human violence […] because this would lay bare too many questions and reduce 'love' to a meaningless exchange.
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> […] It wasn't like this in our story. Waddah lost his mind the instant he saw the first Rawda in the Valley of the Lepers with her ruined skin and shattered spirit. Struck blind and dumb with the horror of it, he became incapable of distinguishing truth and illusion, reality and imagination. When Umm al-Banin, the second Rawda, appeared, everything in his spirit fogged up, he didn't know where he was anymore, who he was or with whom, except that he was stuck in a box.[172]

In the sixth Preamble, Adam stresses that 'the question my novel ought to ask does not concern the sterile discussion which has taken place around the historical and philological details of the story'[173]. Indeed,

> this insistence on hunting out such truth was one of the factors which prevented the birth of the novel in Arab civilisation until the moment when the imagination burst on the scene with the *Thousand and One Nights*. The strange thing is that Taha Hussein, the doyen of the moderns, fell into the same trap set by the ancients; he wasted his talent demonstrating that which had no need of demonstration by separating the short story from the domain of literature, as if literature could exist without it! Stories are the beating heart of literature. The funniest thing of all, however, is that this rationalist savant eliminated pre-Islamic poetry as a source of the Arabic language, focusing on the Qur'an instead as the main fount. His rationalism and atheism led him into the hole that the ancients had tried to avoid. […]

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[170] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 52.

[171] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 52.

[172] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 64-65.

[173] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 69.

> Taha Hussein's extreme rationalism led him into this very trap, turning rationalism into the other side of the religious coin.
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> […] My novel will focus instead on the relationship between death and love. The story of Waddah al-Yaman's entry into his coffin is well known, and has been told dozens of times; the echoes reach into our modern poetry. […] The point is not to know how Waddah got into his coffin, [… but rather] how he reread his own story in the clarity of that darkness, how he recovered his first Rawda […] and how his love for Umm al-Banin had died. His lover's despair, having become a living love, led him to silence.[174]

Khoury himself has spent decades trying to understand the 'organised silence' of both the First Lebanese Civil War and the Palestinian experience of Israeli occupation.[175] Why keep so quiet about it? Adam shows him the dignity entailed in this conscious choice in his notebooks, but also in his aborted novel draft on Waddah al-Yaman: 'Do I have the right to skip over the three months that Waddah spent [in silence] in the queen's coffer…? A novel reinvents life itself by way of imaginative effort so that the reader can experience the relationship between the beginning and the end as a chosen [spiritual] process, not as an unavoidable [material] destiny.'[176]

In the end, Adam is left with 'many questions', but only one that 'really sticks' with him: 'Why did Waddah keep his mouth shut? Why didn't he cry out to beg for the Caliph's mercy?'[177] Whereas others have addressed the 'Waddah' question of Palestinian silence 'from the outside', Adam's question

> comes from the darkness within [the coffin], where the darkness of the spirit meets the darkness of the world. Moreover, I will not ask any questions of my poet, who has today become my friend: his experience transcends questions and answers; […] it leaves me alone in the face of the eloquence of silence and death, and renders me incapable of leading his story in the direction of direct political or ethical meaning.
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> […] He understood that he was going to die in any case and that the only way of saving his love story was to repress his instinct for physical survival. Or perhaps he died buried in silence because strange feelings took hold of him and made him indifferent to the violence of his death? [… As Umm al-Banin made love to the Caliph in the same room], he felt like a tiny parenthesis not only in the life of the woman who had imprisoned him [in her coffer], but a sidebar to life in general.[178]

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[174] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 69-70.

[175] See Khoury, 'Fushat Fikr', 27/9/2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtxZmzGgBTs (accessed 17/4/2019).

[176] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 75.

[177] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 79.

[178] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 79, 86.

Adam himself does not want to draw a conclusion one way or the other; he wants neither to deny nor to forgive Waddah's victimhood, but rather to offer, as he has said, the equal hand of 'friendship' that literature can extend, via engagement with imaginary beings, from one real human spirit to another:

> Entering the coffin with the poet and writing the story in the darkness of the coffin puts me in front of a choice, and I do not feel like choosing. Did the poet keep his mouth shut to protect his beloved in such a way that his death might become a symbol of devotion and self-sacrifice? Or did he keep quiet because life had become a matter of indifference for him after the disappearance of love amid the cold lips and kisses [of Umm al-Banin]? Was death simply the most convenient end to his post-love life?
>
> My hesitation puts me in mind of Sheikh Osama al-Homsi, whom my mother engaged to teach me the Qur'an at home once those few who had remained in Lod had realised that everything Arab was threatened with extinction by the shadow of the new state which had taken over Palestine in its entirety. When I asked him a complex question of Islamic jurisprudence, he always gave me two answers, and when I asked him which one was the right one, he would always say: 'There are two answers; God is the Highest-Knowing'.
>
> I end my manuscript with these words from my venerable mentor, in the hope that I can write my novel in the same spirit, leaving time the latitude to rewrite it as it sees fit.[179]

<u>'Adam Dannoun'</u>

The final 300-plus Arabic pages of *Ismi Adam*, while representing more than three-quarters of the total text, are really the final third of Khoury's project, the third of the three novels within the novel. The exceedingly long and complex setup for Adam's own 'story' was meant to dissuade the reader from viewing *Awlad al-Ghetto* as 'just another book about Palestine', and instead to listen to Adam's story in its own right, even though he is only one victim among many, and even though - gulp - he doesn't actually exist. Khoury writes in such a way, however, as to leave no doubt that *he* believes in Adam's existence as a spiritual subject, created by him perhaps, but enjoying an autonomous literary existence. The key to all good fictional writing, Khoury echoes Natalia Ginzburg in arguing, is belief in the existence of the characters one creates; if one can achieve this degree of spiritual engagement as a writer, the reader will also come to believe in their existence.

It is seeing the film adaptation of Khoury's *Gate of the Sun* in New York which convinces Adam to abandon his novel project on Waddah al-Yaman and to write his own story instead:

> I decided to sign up for what I had always refused to do. My problem with many novels was seeing the way they make use of the novel form to write about some aspect or other of one's own autobiography. I had always

[179] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 88-89.

> considered this an illusion and an admission of a lack of talent. […] But I am not Waddah al-Yaman, I will not die in a box, and my beloved is called neither Rawda nor Umm al-Banin. Yes, I loved two women; the first is dead, and my love for the second died in my heart. […] In truth (I shouldn't use this word, which does not express the truth of things, because no one knows the truth of this forest of tangled branches which we call the spirit. Our spirit is a universe tarnished by obscurity, no one knows the truth of it, and when inspiration reigns over a poet, he believes he has reached the truth. But if inspiration is multiple, then truth is too.) In truth, the film and the debate which followed it awakened something inside myself which was waiting for the moment to explode.[180]

Khoury's *Gate of the Sun* enrages Adam with its falsehoods to the point that he takes up his pen, not to correct the historical record or engage in some sort of public, civic or altruistic exercise, but for purely private, and ultimately mysterious, spiritual reasons:

> I would like to explain the situation to myself above all. What I am writing has nothing to do with a novel or an autobiography, and is not addressed to anyone in particular; it would therefore be logical not to publish it in a book. But who knows? I will let myself dialogue freely with myself, with no preset rules. I won't change the names to give the impression of literature. […] I don't like what the critics call 'autofiction', just as I have no real time for 'autobiography'. […] I think that literature has the responsibility not to *reflect* life, but to *create* it via the limitless beauty of language.[181]

Adam's anger wasn't directed at the 'well-intentioned' Israeli director of the film, Haim Zilberman:

> I liked him because he was a director blessed with a conscience, who made interesting documentaries. My friendship with him deepened after I met his Jewish-American wife. Beyond her undeniable affability, this woman concealed a human depth which I noticed as she told me the story of her love for Haim. […] I had no particular ill-feeling toward Haim after the film, because I did not doubt his good intentions, and I felt that he had only been trying his best to make a film on the origins of the Second Intifada as a means of expressing his anger at the occupation. […] But art will never capture all facets of reality; this is why it is pointless to talk about realism in art. His error was believing that his research had opened the path to some sort of absolute truth on the whole thing.[182]

Adam's anger is squarely directed, instead, towards Khoury, though we, and he, do not yet know quite why; he plausibly excludes the hypothesis that he is jealous of

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[180] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 97-98.

[181] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 98-99.

[182] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 100, 102.

Khoury's relationship with Sarang-Li, and proceeds instead to tell us, or not to tell us, about the great love of his life, Dalia:

> I am not going to tell my story with Dalia; it is not that I intend to do so later, but because our story is a microcosm of all the other stories in my life. She was everywhere with me, and even when she wasn't, her absence furnished the room with a certain ambiguity. When I think of the ghetto where I was born, I have the feeling that she lived through the whole thing with me [even though I only met her later]. […] Perhaps that is what love is: living what we never lived as if we had really lived it. […] I live today in the memory of the fragrance that was, and it all seems a long way away, as if the life I lived was nothing but a repetition of the death that was waiting for me.[183]

The film, however, has brought something back; Adam's spirit must, in dialogue with itself, go out and find what that something is.

New York had 'finally' given Adam the chance to 'live and take advantage of life'; 'I told myself constantly that I had to live the present such as it was. I envied the Americans who managed to lose themselves in everyday details and forget the grand narrative objectives of their lives… […] All until the moment when everything got turned upside down at the cinema on that freezing winter evening'[184]:

> It wasn't the fact that the Israeli director was chatting about Palestine with the Lebanese author of the novel before the film - there was nothing to begrudge there - but rather the plot of the film itself, which was nothing more than a giant web of untrue sincerity. When the film evoked the suicide of Assaf after the death of his friend Dany in Gaza at the start of the Second Intifada, I literally felt as if my head was going to explode. Before that night, I had never known such pressure.[185]

And yet the real catalyst for this explosion, Adam admits to himself, came three nights before, when he 'met Ma'mun by chance':

> I am incapable of describing this meeting and I don't know if I will ever be able to put it into words, because it left me like a pile of rags smeared in perplexity and sadness. I literally felt hung, drawn and quartered. […] He had come from Cairo [to New York] to give a series of lectures on Palestinian literature and to explore the image of Rita in the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish.
>
> His [blind] eyes wrapped in dark glasses, he struggled to the stage, but once there, he became a cross between Taha Hussein and Edward Said. […] He started his lecture by recounting the Lod tragedy, which had taught him to read the silence of victims. He analysed the poetry of Mahmoud

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[183] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 107-108.

[184] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 110.

[185] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 112.

> Darwish, whose intervals of silence engendered a rich harmony of meanings.
>
> […] The child I had been in the streets of Lod appeared to me behind the veil of tears which hung in the corners of my eyes.
>
> There it was: I had stumbled again upon Ma'mun, the friend from my childhood, the guide who had betrayed me when I was seven to pursue his university studies in Egypt. I realised that what I was having such difficulty recovering was in fact nothing more than an illusion, because I was nothing more to him than a story that deserved to be told.
>
> Here is exactly what he told me when I agreed to have a drink with him in the lobby of his hotel after the lecture. He said that I had accompanied him through all his years abroad as a story worthy of constituting a metaphor [for the Palestinian people as a whole], that he had tried many times to write it but had never quite managed to bring it to fruition. He added that most stories do not find authors at all, and was sorry that he had not been able to write mine, not even in the memoirs that he was busy trying to finish before the final big departure.
>
> […] Ma'mun told me the story that he alone with Manal knew, and, surprised at my surprise, wondered why she had never told me herself. She should have promised to reveal the truth when I turned fifteen, he said, because every person needs to know his own truth in order not to live in illusion.
>
> I listened with my eyes, and I saw myself as a baby abandoned on the chest of its dead mother.
>
> God! Where had this old man fetched this story? Here I was, approaching the end of my life, discovering that I was not me, that my self, seen in the mirror of others, was nothing more than a pile of broken glass.[186]

Ma'mun and Manal had rescued Adam from the arms of his dead mother amid the chaos outside Lod and, instead of leaving, took him back to the Lod ghetto. They were not his parents. Adam somehow knew this, even though Ma'mun left when he was seven and Manal never explicitly said so; his decision to leave Manal as a teenager and effectively 'become an Israeli' before emigrating to America was a reflection of this, even though the 'novel' is in fact, as we will see, Adam's spiritual reckoning with this life-defining decision. His first reflex, however, is to project his guilt onto Ma'mun:

> To tell the truth, [as he spoke] a single thought possessed me: Ma'mun did not have the right to abandon me with my mother.
>
> […] He said he was sorry, and he hoped that I would visit him back in Egypt. […] To exist, I had to not exist. This was the riddle at the beginning of my life, and which had accompanied me for more than fifty years. I recomposed my adult life in six chapters. The first was my decision to leave [Manal] and go and work for the Jewish mechanic Khawaja Gabriel. The second was to enrol at the University of Haifa and get involved with the Orthodox Jews there. Then came my deep engagement with Israeli

[186] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 113-115.

> literature. The fourth was my turn to music journalism and my focus on Umm Kulthoum. The fifth was my relationship with Dalia. The sixth was my move to New York and the falafel shop. I realised now that I was in the middle of my seventh. […] I am the son of history and thirst; the source of my story is unfathomable and my thirst unquenched.[187]

Like the first human being cast down onto Earth, Adam will never know his parents, yet Khoury wants to affirm that he still has a rich and equal spiritual life which no degree of victimhood can erase:

> When [Manal] married Abdullah al-Ashhal, […] she told me that she didn't love him, that she had only ever loved one man, and that she got married for solely practical reasons. […] I was ten when I decided to leave this woman 'forever'. I don't know where the expression 'forever' came from, but I remember very clearly having uttered it to myself. I only executed the decision five years later, but that is another story, for it represents the start of my own personal journey. […] She seemed to regret that I didn't resemble the man she loved [Hassan], but Daoud. […] When I asked her about Daoud, she said that my father was a hero. […] Hajj Elia Batchoun, the head of the ghetto's residents' committee, insisted that I be called Adam because I was the first baby born in the ghetto. This was decided over Manal's objections.[188]

At the time of his departure from his new stepfather's house at the age of fifteen, Adam was preoccupied with leaving, and 'did not think to ask more questions':

> At two in the morning, I was invaded by a burst of anxiety, the rain made me feel like I was alone in the world and had to carve out my path on my own.
>
> […] To this day, I see Manal as a black shadow, and I see her lips as thirsty and cracked. I used to think that her lips had retained the traces of the months of thirst in the ghetto, but today I see things differently, and think that what she was really thirsty for was a kiss. […] I didn't cry when I heard that she had died alone in Aylaboun after her divorce and that she had asked to see me in her final days. I was busy getting drunk in a bar in Tel Aviv, and I don't know what devil possessed me to burst out laughing when I heard the news of her death. The face of the messenger, who had looked for me high and low to inform me that I was expected back in the village to offer my condolences, shrivelled in disgust before turning swiftly on its heels and murmuring insults back over its shoulder in my direction.
>
> Now, when I remember this episode, I feel tears inundating my eyes and their salt on my lips. I sob without tears, however, in vain, because tears have their time and place, and I missed the appointment.[189]

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[187] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 117-118.

[188] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 120-121.

[189] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 122-123.

Adam will return to Manal at the end of his notebooks; for the time being, he walks himself back through his years of adolescent identity construction in the new Israel:

> When people at the University of Haifa would ask me where I was from, I would say simply 'the ghetto'. I would get compassionate looks from people who all assumed that I meant the Warsaw Ghetto.
>
> I wasn't lying, because by now I knew the stories of the Warsaw Ghetto as well as I knew those of Lod. Ghetto stories resemble each other just as deaths do; the former were engraved in my memory because I had read them so many times, while the latter were tattooed directly onto my spirit. Stories that I had read, and others that I had heard not only with my ears, but with my entire body, absorbed through my mother and others.[190]

Adam is able to reinvent himself, against all the odds, through literature:

> For me, books represented the gates of entry to the world. My Hebrew lecturer appreciated my passion for the 'language of grace', and I was the only one in the class who knew the language of the Bible well. The language was my gateway to the world; I had never really been interested in children's literature, but I had access to a vast universe beyond, from the poems of Bialik to the novels of Yizhar. I was fascinated by Agnon too, blown away by Benjamin Tammuz, but my real passion was for Russian literature in translation.[191]

This passion and inner freedom, however, did not come from nowhere; Ma'mun himself had helped to put it there by working tirelessly to keep a school running in the ghetto and filling Adam's early childhood with stories, at least until his departure for Egypt[192]: 'When he left to pursue his studies, I felt orphaned. My universe collapsed, I was unable to make decisions anymore, and nothing seemed to have any meaning.'[193] Still, Ma'mun had left something positive as well as negative behind:

> At school in Wadi Nisnas, I found my refuge and my universe in books. The books of the Old Testament in particular fascinated me, not least the Epistle of Jeremiah, in which I found a reflection of the pain lodged between my own shoulders. My mother took me to an Arab doctor whose name I don't remember, and he said that there was nothing wrong with me, that it was only a psychosomatic symptom of trauma. […] I asked my mother what that meant, and she said she didn't know, but it did make me feel important. […] I only found out what it meant later, at the University of Haifa, in a course on the Nazi gas chambers.

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[190] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 124.

[191] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 125.

[192] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 129-130.

[193] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 131.

> […] The inhabitants of the ghetto lived as a single family, and I, Adam Dannoun, was the first-born child of the ghetto, so I was adopted in a way by everyone. But Ma'mun was the one person who remained engraved on my memory as a father figure. He had surrounded me with attention and taught me to read in the dark, then he left, abandoning me to my lot.[194]

Adam will learn to live without any definitive knowledge of his real father. The letter from his father - or actually, his Manchuria-stationed grandfather - which Manal gave Adam on his departure at the age of fifteen offered little real sustenance:

> When I first read it, I didn't understand it at all, and was unable to penetrate any deep secrets hidden within it. I even thought of tearing it up, but in the end I didn't dare to, because, like all the Palestinians who had lost everything in the process of losing their country, I didn't want to throw away anything which might eventually reconnect me to in some way or other to the memory that was already fast bleeding out. We are the slaves of our memory, and it is wrong to compare memory to music, as Jabra Ibrahim Jabra does. Memory is a perpetually open wound in the spirit, and you have to get used to blood leaking from it.[195]

For the moment, indeed, it is Ma'mun who above all others has let Adam down:

> I am me, and I refuse to become a symbol. I hate symbols. […] I refused to believe that Ma'mun had no other choice.
>
> […] It wasn't prudery which prevented me from asking him in New York about the nature of his relationship with Manal, but rather because I was dumbstruck by his ability to treat me not as the son that he had abandoned, but as subject-matter for a story. I felt terribly angry and powerless. I was a human being, not a story. But look at what I am doing now - what a paradox![196]

Manal too, however, was less than a mother, and there is nothing Adam can do about it: 'There is no film that a director could make where Ma'mun, Manal and I meet again; we are in full tragic mode here. […] There is nothing beautiful, and no door to hope, only one to a hell of infinite stories.'[197] And yet Adam is already slowly opening to the idea that there is something beautiful in Manal's sacrifice for him:

> Today, after her death, I remember her silence, and I am moved as if by an unspeakable passion. When I told Dalia that she was beautiful like silence, my Jewish friend looked at me in surprise and asked if we Arabs were in the habit of comparing beauty to silence. […] Beauty is without name, and Manal possessed that beauty. I am sad to have lost her, just as I am sad to

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[194] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 132, 134.

[195] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 136-137.

[196] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 138, 140-141.

[197] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 145-146.

> have lost Dalia. Sadness has nothing to do with regret; it is simply memory. Memory is not nostalgia; it is a tattoo in the deepest skin of our being.[198]

Literature for Adam, too, is a realm of silence harbouring the spiritual secrets of all possible worlds, a world where other people's experience quietly and invisibly becomes one's own:

> I have always lived with the inability to write, despite the firm conviction of my teachers at school in Wadi Nisnas that I was destined to become a poet or a novelist. […] The real reason was my being blinded by the wonder of it. Don't misunderstand me, it wasn't that I felt unworthy in the face of authors whose novels and poems I had loved; on the contrary, whenever I read something beautiful, I felt as if I had been a partner in the writing of it, or more precisely, its true author, while the writer was relegated to the status of a name in the background - strictly speaking, insignificant.[199]

What risks descending into narcissism is really Adam's - Khoury's - affirmation of literature as the realm of the free, individual human spirit:

> This feeling carried me off to distant realms, the existence of which I would never otherwise have imagined. I am a writer filled with texts that I have read/written, I consider them all as real, and I put the imaginations of others at the service of my own. In this sense, I am the writer who has written nothing because he has written everything. I thus surpass all writers who feel hemmed in by the aridity of their own selves; I, on the other hand, experience only pleasure and thirst for more fluid words.[200]

And yet something in Adam's over-defensive posture about his own story - his lack of willingness to publish it and contribute generously to the pile for others - has the ring of trauma and pathology attached to it, a halo which Khoury wants to diagnose and treat all at the same time, even as he senses that he, as an outsider, can never penetrate Adam's thick defensive skin, and that it would be obscene to pretend otherwise. The best he can do, through his own imaginative effort, is to bring Adam's story to the world, because Adam himself is unwilling to do so - and unable to believe that his own miserable quest for identity might be of spiritual value to others: 'There is always a novel in search of a reckless author willing to sell all of himself to write it. Palestine has been waiting for this for more than fifty years, and I would lose nothing to try. [… But] in truth, it was a personal reason, born from my experience with Dalia, which pushed me to write. It was the idea of the end of love, not its beginning.'[201] This battle to protect the authenticity of intimacy, even at the expense of silence and selfishness, wages itself on the pages of Adam's notebooks; the fate of his grandfather's letter is, in fact, a 'metaphor' for this

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[198] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 147.

[199] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 150-151.

[200] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 151.

[201] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 152.

spiritual struggle. The historian Hanna Gerios tries to secure Ali Dannoun's letter from Manchuria for official Palestinian archives, but Adam refuses:

> He replied that I was wrong to do so, because this letter belonged to the memory of the Palestinian people. […] Of course, I regret [my decision] now; if I had done [as Gerios had asked], I would have guaranteed my grandfather a place, however marginal, in the History of Palestine. Instead, [his study…] will not mention Ali Dannoun, the unlucky soldier who died, alone and foreign, in a faraway land.[202]

Adam is *not* a boring narcissist or psychopath; he simply wants to protect the realm of the spirit - above all, 'literature' - from the clutches of a dehumanising, public 'science' intent on securing and amassing outwardly convincing 'evidence' instead of trusting the honest spiritual testimony of individuals like him. As he tells Gerios, 'The history of the Nakba has not been written down. Are you telling me we didn't have one?!'[203]

Adam's complete lack of hard information about his father and the circumstances of his disappearance in the chaos around Lod nevertheless leaves him feeling abandoned:

> This may seem unfair to a man about whom I know nothing. He is a victim, and I am a victim of the victim. But I don't really like this sort of talk, because the fact of being a victim doesn't give you the right to sacrifice others; it rather confers double responsibility on you. This is what I have often tried to explain, without much success, to my Israeli friends. Dalia came up with an eloquent aphorism for it: 'The Palestinians are the victims of the victims, and Jewish victims [of Nazism] do not have the right to behave like torturers. In this sense, I am not only Jewish, but Palestinian as well.'[204]

Adam knows rationally that his father could most likely have done nothing to help him, and that, but for Ma'mun's act of rescue, he would have died of thirst on his dead mother's chest; nevertheless, he does not want to have to admit his own, or his people's, moral powerlessness, and prefers to defend himself, and them, by blaming his father and Ma'mun instead of the Israelis:

> Let us suppose that the young, blind [Ma'mun] had not saved my life and delivered me to Manal; I would probably have starved to death. I refuse to picture the description he offered me of the shrivelled little creature he picked up; it gives me chills just thinking about it. I have been suffering from strange migraines ever since he told me. My self has drowned in fog, and I have the impression that it no longer exists.
>
> My first father killed me; he fled, delivering me to death on the chest of a dead woman. That was my first experience with fathers. […] Today, in my

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[202] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 157.

[203] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 159.

[204] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 166.

> New York solitude, I realise that all my fathers have tried to kill me; they have all assassinated me at the symbolic level. I had to kill them to defend my own existence; […] And yet, opening the gates of this hell, I realised that I was surrounded by people hidden in my memory, pursued by a multitude of phantoms to whom I had to dedicate time, and whose entry into this story I had a responsibility to organise.[205]

Adam's notebooks are more than autobiography and more than metaphor; individuals from the Lod ghetto deserve to be heard, and Adam is in a position to tell their story, but he wants to get his own out of the way first, at least to himself; like Khoury, he does not want his own ego infecting the other autonomous characters. in the middle of the chapter devoted to 'The Fathers' Betrayal', Adam begins to tell a ghetto anecdote and then stops himself: 'I don't want to open that slice of time up yet; that's a story I have to tell in one go, without digressions.'[206] Despite Manal and Ma'mun's attempts to give Adam names of their own (Hassan and Naji respectively), in the end, he realises that 'the name Adam best reflected the truth of who I was'[207], namely the collective orphan and first true witness of the Lod ghetto tragedy in its full proportions. And yet, Adam's meeting with Ma'mun in New York convinces him once and for all that he can't write a 'novel' about it at all:

> I didn't open my mouth during the Q and A after Ma'mun's lecture. The comments from the floor were all effusive in their praise, with the exception of Prof. Naji, who offered a long monologue on the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, only to conclude that fantastic literature was better suited than realism when it came to capturing the multiple levels of reality. Afterwards, curled back up in his seat, he looked over at me as if I were the hero of some novel yet to be written. What barbarism!
>
> After this lecture, I was able confidently to affirm what I had always suspected but never had the courage to admit to myself: writers can be the worst people of all. Believing themselves to be capable of revealing the human condition, denouncing repression, torture, sadism and murder, they become voyeurs revelling in the very things they imagine and describe.
>
> This is why I will not write a novel.[208]

Will he, or can he, write about 'it' at all? A dream in which he is visited by Prof. Hanna Gerios reminds him of his priorities, loyalties and responsibilities:

> Does all this mean that I should give up writing at all? By deciding that my writing is not good enough, not destined to be published, I am gripped in moments of weakness by the desire to see my name next to the authors I love, and I dream, without letting myself get carried away, of publishing the text I am now writing.

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[205] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 161, 163, 165.

[206] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 166.

[207] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 168.

[208] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 181-182.

> The dream, however, forced me to retrace my steps to this point. I am not writing to be read by Hanna Gerios and his peers, or so that my story might be recognised as authentic by Arab and Israeli historians; my story requires no legitimation, it is engraved in hearts and places. Stones, trees, birds, rivers and seas tell it. Science can go and fuck itself if it wants to remain the prisoner of bullshit stories built on truncated documents.[209]

When Sarang-Li suggests, in New York fashion, that Adam might need a therapist after the double-whammy of Ma'mun's lecture and the fateful film screening, Adam is unequivocal in his response: 'I told her that I didn't believe in psychoanalysis.'[210] Adam's goal is not theoretical knowledge, not even detached and objective 'self-knowledge', but an embodied form of knowing which involves direct experience:

> I am writing now as if stretched out on the analyst's couch and freely associating. But it is not like that; the goal of plunging into oneself to find the direct or indirect cause of one's troubles does not appeal to me at all. I am not talking because I am looking for something; I am not closing my eyes because I want to reach the bottom of myself. My eyes are wide open in order to be able to observe the universe in the mirror of words. My words become my mirrors, I discover the world in them and compose it anew. […] That is where I think the value of literature resides. It is a means of bringing shadow to a world without shadows, of penetrating its secrets. The only goal of such discovery is a pure pleasure which has no horizons beyond itself. Don't believe writers who try to deliver a message; they are all false prophets and bad diviners. As long as the bearers of religious messages are basically ideologues who dream of breaching the distance between imagination and reality, they will continue to build universes of illusion, all of which decay, sooner rather than later, into repressive and despotic power structures. Among religions, therefore, I have chosen literature.[211]

Sarang-Li was unable to see that Adam's Gerios dream represented 'more than a psychological combat'; it was rather 'the condensed metaphor of my story with Manal, Ma'mun and Dalia'[212], a literary, humanistic or 'spiritual' problem rather than an objective, measurable, 'scientific' one. Naturally,

> Gerios would describe what I am doing (in 'The Ghetto Days') as 'literature'. He had used the term with disdain, as if it were some trivial endeavour. […] But [as a historian] he wasn't working in the natural sciences, rather in the human sciences, which in my view are really a branch of literature, though without much of the latter's charm or beauty. […] Hanna Gerios viewed reading as a character flaw, a way of filling the void of free time in an otherwise meaningless existence. I would have liked to tell Gerios that

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[209] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 185-186.

[210] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 186.

[211] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 188.

[212] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 189.

> Cervantes found his novel written in the language of Sheherazade, that the novel form had been born in his hands, translated from Arabic. […] He was probably lying when he said that he had bought the manuscript [of Don Quijote] from an Arab bookstore in the Toledo souq, but his lie was truer than the truth itself.
>
> Why had I had this damned dream with Gerios so many times? I wasn't going to let myself have it again. I decided to write the story of the ghetto.[213]

Adam was not beset, as Gerios tried to insinuate in Adam's dream, by the problem of 'nostalgia' - of lacking a warm 'refuge' of a first 'nest' in life, which he never had and therefore never had a chance to miss - but by a need to recover an outlook on the future by being true, once if not once and for all, to the spirits of those, including himself, caught up in the Lod tragedy.[214] No mere 'historian' could hope to achieve this mammoth spiritual task, just as no mere outsider or literary objectifier of others' experience - like Ma'mun or Prof. Naji - could. An intrinsically rather than extrinsically motivated narrative voice was needed - by Adam himself as well as Elias Khoury - before this story could finally, in some semblance of a good conscience, be 'told'.

'The Ghetto Days'

> *The future will teach you. You will understand what it means to be the descendant of a perpetual exile. That was the existential condition of Jews until Israel came along to suppress it and replace it with an absurd existence that has no meaning whatsoever.*[215]
>
> Dalia

The first detail which emerges from Adam's 'ghetto diaries' - for which, he acknowledges, Manal was the main source ('though it's true that she didn't tell me everything, and spared me numerous details of ghetto life that I collected from others to complete the mosaic of my early childhood'[216]) - is actually a story from three decades later. Adam foregrounds his own 'diary' with the story that inhabitants of the Sabra and Chatila refugee camps were made to 'dance' before the 1982 massacre, 'a testament to the ability of human beings to lose their spirits and get drunk on blood instead'[217]. An elderly woman, Umm Hassan, led the captives enthusiastically in their 'death dance'; and yet, rather than blaming her for this

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[213] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 193-194.

[214] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 190-191.

[215] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 208.

[216] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 207.

[217] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 208.

seeming moral capitulation, Adam 'loved her even more, and my admiration for her only grew'[218]. Umm Hassan's blind instinct to protect her people, even at the cost of her own utter humiliation, leads Adam to conclude:

> This woman […] was the only character who really grabbed me in the Lebanese author's *Gate of the Sun*. Her extraordinary wisdom, the spirit reflected on her wrinkled face, had led the 'death dance'. After getting to know her through words, Umm Hassan appeared to me to be a kind of perfect human being; she seemed to have been written with water rather than ink, such was the transparency of her dazzling spirit. After my meeting with Ma'mun in New York, would I have wanted this woman to have been the one to collect me in Lod? If that had happened, or if something similar had happened, my life would have been radically different, and today, I would have felt like I belonged to a mother who had given me life without having given birth to me, I wouldn't have been obsessed with the feeling of being a product of chance, and my life would not have been composed in the dust of illusion. […] I could see her dancing to the rhythm of the assassins' bullets! She led the dance, made everyone dance, made death dance. My God! Why did you put the woman who collected baby Naji and returned him to his mother to such a test?[219]

The whole point of this 'introduction' is to introduce a layer of authenticity into Adam's testimony, to point out that his 'ghetto diary' is 'true' without being true to the verifiable facts: resisting the temptation to compare the Lod tragedy, in which '50,000 people were forced by violence to leave the city', to Chatila, or any other tragedy, is to risk missing the individual spiritual meaning of tragedy itself:

> I don't like these sorts of comparisons which divert the meanings of things, and transforms the relationship between human beings and history into a series of monotonous repetitions which excuse individual criminals by turning them into versions of other criminals, turning war crimes into historical events and transforming victims into numbers which erase their individuality and the singularity of the destinies of each.[220]

Umm Hassan may or may not have been physically present in Lod, but Adam, Manal and the others were. Umm Hassan's 'dancing' in Chatila years later, as well as the soldiers' orders, were 'the bloody expression of passing emotions', while 'extreme barbarism […] engages in murder and repression without any emotion, with a cold, goal-oriented rationalism.' Adam's diary, by contrast, 'is not written with the purpose of being a complete, objective history': 'I am not exhuming the past out of nostalgia, for I abhor nostalgia; I am abandoning myself to my memory, which is busy settling its scores with me before it disappears at the same time as I do.'[221]

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[218] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 214.

[219] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 213-214.

[220] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 212-213.

[221] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 216.

Something - some truth drive - is ineluctably forcing Adam to push beyond the limits of his physical death. He is not writing for the temporal or temporary recognition of others - hence the whole question whether he should bother publishing the thing - but for some higher, more intimate and lasting goal.

Adam wants at all costs to distinguish between an appearance of 'spirit' connected to material well-being, on the one hand, and the real thing on the other. The ghetto at least had the virtue of bringing this contrast into stark relief. When he says of the thirsty ghetto-dwellers that they 'started laughing at their animal state', and that when water became available 'people had the feeling that they were reconquering some part of their spirits which had been devoured by shock'[222], what he really means is that the spiritual drama of the ghetto had only just begun. And yet we are not, when we read Adam's notebooks, in this collective drama at all; we are in the private hell of his own orphaned self:

> I don't know what happens when I try to write, it is as if it were not I who was writing at all, or as if the words ran through me on their way to dispersing in the wind. […] I let the words flow from my fingers, and as the black of the letters covers the white page, I observe my spirit decomposing in the whirlwind of a memory that I chose to abandon, and here it is coming back to devour me just because I decided to tell the truth in opposition to the lies which reigned in the Village Cinema, when the Israeli director became the accomplice of the Lebanese author in distorting Dalia's story.
>
> […] My love for this woman burned out for a reason that I do not know, or fear to admit, but my admiration for her remains as strong as ever. […] Dalia was a true artist, and the artist does not manufacture texts, she is merely the impotent creative medium for them. […] I was grabbed in my own turn, and found myself leaving Waddah al-Yaman's coffin to enter the coffin of my own memory. I had to go back to the beginning.
>
> The beginning led me to remember everything I had forgotten. The start was in the ghetto, where I had been born - that was what I was always told anyway - and at the beginning of the ghetto, a boy had died as he clung to the barbed-wire fence.[223]

Unable to establish the cause of the boy Moufid's death ('the ghetto's first martyr'), Adam contents himself with presenting all the 'plausible hypotheses' from the collected testimonies of his memory, but not without reflecting on his true 'goal':

> I sit in my little New York apartment, and from my window, I see the snow silently covering the noise of the city and I ask myself what I am doing. Am I searching for the truth or filling the void in my life with questions to which I cannot bring any answers?
>
> (If I told this story [of Moufid] to Hanna Gerios, he would forbid me from writing it. […] If I told him that all those who remained in Lod [in 1948] knew one version of the story or the other, he would reply: 'Doesn't matter. We need documents to write History.'

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[222] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 221.

[223] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 239-240.

> ‘But I’m not writing History!’
> ‘What are you doing then?’
> ‘I don’t know, something like literature. […] Nothing can justify the abandonment of babies under olive trees on the cadavers of their mothers. To continue living, I had to forget.’[224]

And yet Adam comes of age with little choice but to listen to the stories of Ma’mun and Manal, who *had* actually rescued him, even though they belonged to a past in which he had not consciously participated:

> [Manal] never told me the whole story [of the ghetto] in one go, but in bits and pieces here and there, as if she was weaving the story as she went along as the words came back on their own from the dark night of memory. She wasn’t telling *me* in particular - I just happened to be there - she probably didn’t even think I understood what she was saying. She would give me a pencil and paper to play with while she carried on talking with Ma’mun. I would watch them embark on this joint exercise of the memory of death; this is the right name to describe their nightly ritual. […] The story that I am trying to write swirls with ghosts and the edges of words that a man and a woman exchanged with each other in front of a child they believed to be playing. Without doing so knowingly, they were weaving a story and trying to live in a present that offered them nothing. Lovers without love, road companions without a common destination, their relationship was a past without a present, and they made a bed of memory for a love that had never existed.[225]

It is an Israeli author, S. Yizhar, who helps Adam to reach the ineluctable but ‘amazing’ conclusion that ‘the Palestinians had become the Jews of the Jews’[226]; ‘In order for Jews to become a “people” like all the others - a “European” people, naturally - they would need to invent their own Jews.’[227] The ghettoisation of Arabs in Lod in 1948 makes sense to Adam, and to Khoury, in precisely these terms; it is the Jewish Dalia who helps Adam to understand that there is spiritual life beyond, and indeed in opposition to, all ‘colonial’ structures of material domination, in a kind of cosmopolitan, egalitarian exile from such imperialistic ‘meaninglessness’:

> I wanted to write about the long night that besieged the inhabitants of Lod, and here I see that the story is leading me into unexpected terrain. […] I refuse to resort to mythology to glorify the tragedy of the people among whom I was raised, or to explain away their defeat, humiliation and shame. […] I am not going to fall into the trap of affirming that the miracle of the Jewish state was transforming myth into History, and that we should either

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[224] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 246-249.

[225] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 250-251.

[226] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 259.

[227] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 260.

> adopt their myth or find refuge in one of our own. The language which needs recourse to such myths is dead to me.[228]

And yet Adam had decided at the age of fifteen to leave Manal and her new husband, learn Hebrew, assimilate in the new Israel, and 'forget'. Dalia had promised to love Adam 'such as I was, with all my memory'[229], but he was afraid to believe her, for it seemed to require such a prolonged and ugly reckoning. Only the act of writing in New York made him see, all too late, his true spiritual predicament:

> My story began with a double crime; that of the Israeli soldiers who had turned Lod into a mountain of bodies, hunting the residents into exile and death; and that of my father, who had abandoned me on my mother's dead breast. And yet I couldn't really blame my father, who was probably just a helpless victim, and I learnt not to blame the Israeli soldiers, who had been victims [of Nazism] themselves. I am hence not the victim of a single victim, as Edward Said put it, but the victim of two victims. This is my present reality, which I have just discovered, but all too late.[230]

In his determination 'not to become a symbol'[231], Adam fought Dalia's call to resistance of Israel and revenge against injustice - her insistence in fact caused the 'death' of his love for her, even though she was 'usually right'[232] - and in fact came to a horizon of pacifism, beyond even Dalia's anticolonialism, in which he 'understood that human beings are also spiritual beings, and that our relationship with the dead is the only one capable of giving people a sense of meaning in life'[233]. This is not a denial of the present, or of the value of our relations with the living, but rather an affirmation of them: we are the continuation of something beyond ourselves, something which began well before us, and which will continue long after we are gone. The battle, as Adam concludes, is always over what survives of us:

> I don't like this [Arab] penchant for returning to the past, for it seems to me a way of fleeing the responsibilities of the present. This does not mean that I lack admiration for Saladin and his victories, but that I view this insistence on resuscitating the glories of the past as having prevented Arabs from conceiving of their present on the basis of a critical reading of their past achievements. […] Who says that the Israeli model, which carries within it the seeds of its own destruction, ought to be copied [by its enemies]?[234]

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[228] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 261-262.

[229] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 268.

[230] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 271.

[231] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 273.

[232] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 288.

[233] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 283-284.

[234] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 287-288.

Adam is constantly forced into digressions as he attempts to tell the story of the Lod ghetto 'in one go' (as he promised): 'I wanted to talk about one thing, and here I am slipping onto another. Words pull us along as they want; they are the soap of the spirit, they wash us and keep us sliding along.'[235] As Adam struggles to piece together the discrete chapters and choices of his life into a coherent whole, he realises that 'Dalia did not awaken the Palestinian that lay dormant in me, but she guessed he was there':

> If I were capable of saying things directly, I would say that my problems did not start when Dalia left but when she came into my life. […] She told me that I had to make a choice, because it wasn't possible to play at life anymore. […] In the beginning, there was the massacre, and I had to collect the echoes of its stories just as Ma'mun had collected the scraps of victims during the long night of the ghetto, just as I had to sketch the map of suffering that had inscribed itself on the face of my mother, Manal.[236]

After vaguely blaming Manal for being less than a mother to him, Adam is now forced to confront the reality of her fathomless generosity:

> I had to leave [at fifteen]; I read my departure in her eyes. She knew that her marriage would cause us to lose each other, and so she raised no objections at the moment of my escape. I didn't understand the meaning of the way she looked at me then, and even today I tell myself that I was too young to have been able to understand it, but it isn't true, I should have been able to read the death in her eyes: I was a coward, I fled, and instead of inviting her, obliging her to come with me, I took the letter she gave me and left.
>
> I am not a traitor… and yet perhaps I am. I wasn't a traitor at the time, but I feel the dards of treachery today. The eyelashes of this woman pierce my spirit, as Adonis wrote in one of his most beautiful early poems.[237]

Manal had been forced to live her entire post-ghetto life 'in the moment after tears', deprived of the 'veritable remedy' of lacrimation, 'a balm for the spirit just as olive oil is a lotion for the body'[238]: 'I should have asked Manal why they didn't flee in the face of the advancing Israeli Army, why they waited for the massacre to happen, but I turned my back on Manal and her stories, and built my life on my own'[239]:

> I am not Waddah al-Yaman, but I played the game of death with the poet, because, in his silence, I saw the metaphor of the victim tied up by love, paralysed by the idea that love was lost. When Ma'mun buried me in

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[235] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 288.

[236] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 290-291.

[237] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 294-295.

[238] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 298.

[239] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 304.

> silence, when I saw my universe double in on itself, I decided to flee metaphor and write my own story.
>
> But my own story - and this is the paradox - needs the stories of others to be told properly. These 'others' have either died or disappeared, but they are part of me. I feel their presence, I feel that my body has become too narrow for all of us, that I am struggling to bear the weight of their voices.
>
> […] I see Manal with the eyes of my imagination. I see my mother disappear behind the mask painted on her face, I hear her whispering voice telling me to close my eyes and go where I want in my dreams. This woman was the queen of my eyes; to my dying day I will remember her in this bedside image.
>
> […] Ma'mun's experience with the group charged with collecting and burying bodies turned him into a companion of the dead. He said [in his conference in New York] that the key to understanding the literature of the *nakba* was precisely what *wasn't* said. […] I think the survivors of this massacre decided not to speak about it because it was burned into the deepest part of themselves and had accompanied them every day of their miserable lives. They never felt the need to prove to anyone else what they had survived. They wanted to forget, and that was their right, for how can a human being carry his own dead body around with him and hope to lead a normal life?
>
> I, at least, chose to forget. I found my way out by exchanging my true identity for an Israeli one. I created a shadow for myself, and repeated the story so often that I came almost to believe it. It never occurred to me that this shadow might one day desert me; I even thought I would be buried in it when my time came. When I gave up on the fight for Dalia and arrived in New York to begin my retirement among falafels and Waddah al-Yaman, my shadow was with me all the way.[240]

And yet, having cast this shadow off, Adam is forced to confront the spiritual strength of his ancestors - not his direct blood ancestors perhaps, but those who had in any case given him the gift of his own life:

> I remain perplexed and unable to understand how my people had managed to invent a life for themselves, and for me, in the midst of all the death, despair and rottenness that surrounded them. What is this extraordinary force that allows the human being to take account of death and to live on in its midst?
>
> I could reply that it is the life instinct, and that life resists death to the end, but as I write such words, I feel that what we might call a 'life instinct' is really nothing more than our infinite capacity for animal barbarism. The bloodthirsty assassin becomes savage, just as the victim does in refusing to die.[241]

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[240] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 304-305, 314-315.

[241] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 325-326.

Manal, Ma'mun and the other 'Remainers' offered Adam a glimpse of the horizon of a certain humanism instead:

> A soldier approached the gate, opened it, […] and ordered the crowd to disperse.
>
> 'We're not moving,' Manal cried. We have thirsty babies. Just look at mine! He's as dry as firewood. What am I going to give him to drink?'
>
> As she recounted this episode to me, Manal added: 'Oh son, if only I could have given you tears to drink!'[242]

Adam is now faced with the prospect of a 'second childhood'; as a certain Dr. Zahlan tells him, 'we are all children my boy. We are born as babies and die as babies'[243]. At the same time, however, Adam

> realise[s] that, as I try to write about the collective catastrophe [of my early childhood], it is impossible to reconstruct the memory of it, and that I must face my second childhood alone, as if all death were an individual business. […] In order to write a book about the Lod tragedy, I would have to write an endless book, one which included all the details, and in which every name was an entire story of its own. I can't do that, and no one before me has managed such a thing. This is probably why prophets have preferred to write maxims and proverbs, and why authors of all stripes have preferred to place their own prophecies in the mouths of their characters. I am modestly trying to write my own story, but the memories I recall are mirrors to the worlds [of other people].[244]

While Adam himself had done all he could to run away and forget, he realises that others before him had done the exact opposite:

> It must be said that the number of those who left of their own free will after the formation of the ghetto could be counted on the fingers of one hand. A hundred or so people even arrived afterwards - some from neighbouring houses or nearby caves where they had been hiding, others from further afield. They had chosen this ghetto happiness as if the instinct to return was stronger than any fear or difficulty.
>
> Why would a person come of her own free will to live in the humiliation of the ghetto? […] I admit I don't understand.[245]

Then, in the midst of the devastation, there was the seemingly incomprehensible intimacy of the old and pious Christian Hajj Elia and the young and voluptuous Khouloud, for whom he converted to Islam: 'People said that the young widow had married the old man for his money. But she told Manal that she had never felt such

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[242] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 328.

[243] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 343.

[244] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 343-344.

[245] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 348.

love before. […] "It was unbelievable. I'll tell you the secret: laughing. Love is feeling that you want to laugh with a man."'[246] Even the blind Ma'mun remembered Khouloud's dance at 'the ghetto's first wedding': 'He had felt the waves of love emanating from the curves of her body. "I couldn't see, of course, but I was able to feel the aura of joy and desire spread over the whole occasion."' [247]

Adam, in short, has finally broken through the wall of his own self-absorption, his own blind and private search for roots, to reach a state in which he knows he is contributing to something beyond himself. He is even finally able to quote Ma'mun's New York lecture with approval:

> Understand, ladies and gentlemen, I do not wish to fall into the trap of saying that the *nakba* was a unique event in the course of History, for History both ancient and modern is a series of catastrophes visited on all peoples. I could tell you stories of the dead bodies we had to collect and pile up in the alleys of Lod, […] how the Israeli Iskandaroni Brigade forced local Palestinian residents to dig their own graves, and so on, but what good would it do? I don't even wish to talk about the crime of driving Palestinians from their land, because an even bigger crime was committed afterwards: silence was imposed on the people as a whole. I don't mean the posttraumatic silence of psychobabble jargon, but the silence imposed on the losers by the winners with all the power of the Hebrew language which reigned in the world, or in other words in the West, after the crimes of the Second World War and the Nazi human ovens. No one heard the moans of the Palestinians who died or were expelled. Literature has arrived to provide the victim with a new voice and a new language.[248]

This 'language' to which Adam wishes to contribute, as he has been saying all along, eschews numbers: 'I am incapable of entering into the "game of zeroes", and I do not wish to anyway. This game could be important for historians, […] but I hate evoking victims via recourse to statistics, because it deprives them of their names and their unique, discrete, individual identities.'[249]

Adam reaches the end, or rather the bottom, of his journey back to the Lod ghetto with his chance meeting with Mourad Alami and his wife I'tidal in New York. Mourad had lived through the Lod tragedy, but clearly, as I'tidal tells Adam, 'did not like to talk about it'. He remembered Ma'mun well enough ('I will never forget his beautiful spirit nor the school, the Lod Oasis, that he founded'[250]), but after Adam proceeded to bombard him with questions, Mourad was driven to the brink of spiritual collapse, and Adam saw, fully and finally, that his quest for 'information' about his origins was - though necessary - ultimately selfish and empty:

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[246] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 356-357.

[247] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 358.

[248] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 363.

[249] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 365.

[250] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 372.

> He spoke with difficulty, his voice gurgling in the back of his throat like he was drowning, But he looked at me as though *I* was the one who needed a water rescue. I was pitiless, and it was as if I was enjoying torturing him as much as I was torturing myself. A djinn had taken hold of me; I beat him with questions and electrocuted him with words; I waterboarded him in the memory of his grief, and only came to his aid when he was within an inch of his life. […] I saw the astonishment and suffering written all over I'tidal's face, and I became even wilder as I realised that he had never told his wife any of it. She sobbed in silence through the whole terrible ordeal.
>
> I am ashamed of myself when I remember that evening, and I understand why Mourad never came back to visit me at my falafel restaurant and stopped taking my phonecalls. I lost a good and noble friend just to hear more details of my own debacles and frustrations.
>
> That night, I understood why our parents called arak 'virgin tears': alcohol mixed with tears opens the doors of the spirit. […] He admitted that he had forgotten. 'Lod, my friend, is a blank page in my memory. I erased it just as I erased Palestine as a whole, but old age leads you back to childhood, and the end of life brings you back to the beginning. […] He added that his visits to my restaurant marked the beginning of this process: 'And now you want me to talk about it, and I don't want to. But I'm talking about it anyway. Do you understand?'[251]

Adam then decides to honour Mourad's sacrifice by recounting a series of 'scenes', summarisable in the following snippets, which Adam himself will come to regard as pornographic:

> 'Death is not death until the individual's character traits disappear, when you can no longer distinguish between people, when the bodies all resemble each other. I don't bear any real rancour towards the Jews; they die and become lifeless bodies just as we do. We are eventually no longer ourselves, and so are they. Why go around killing then? I don't understand; I don't hold a grudge, but why?
>
> […] As soon as we lifted the first body, the flies went everywhere. But that wasn't the problem; the problem was carrying the bodies to the mass grave we had been ordered to dig the day before, and then having no choice but to throw them in. Can you imagine what that meant? I couldn't describe it, and even if I could, what would be the point? My brother, know only that, in Lod, words were finished.
>
> […] Can you imagine? We were forbidden from crying. Have you ever heard of an occupying army threatening to kill its victims for crying? When you can't even cry for fear of being murdered, words have no use anymore.
>
> […] Don't get me wrong, I respect all religions, we all have an idea of Heaven, but I don't trust human beings who want to sell a version of it. To tell the truth, I didn't believe Khouloud when she said that the prophet al-Khodr had appeared to her, but I pretended to, because we had no choice in those terrible days but to cling to the threads of illusion.

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[251] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 373-374.

> […] Can you imagine starting your day, every day, with the smell of charred human bodies? I'm over 70 and I have to go out into the garden every morning to get rid of the smell, even when it's -15° outside. […] What more is there to say? […] You will understand it all in time.'[252]

Adam is ultimately angry with himself both that he forced Mourad to talk and that he 'wrote down what Mourad recounted':

> The tragedy should perhaps have stayed wrapped in silence, because spilling these details here risks robbing Mourad of his nobility. He was right to keep it to himself all these years. […] I am not trying to compare the *nakba* with the Holocaust, […] but what does it mean to put them side by side like this? […] Does it suggest that the Jewish question, as carried forth by the Zionist movement, has transformed Jewish settlers into executioners, and offered the cosmopolitan philosophy of existential exile to its Palestinian victims?
>
> I don't know the answer, I assure you, but I know that I am sad to die, as Jesus said, foreseeing the destiny of all the children of human beings.[253]

After a book full of complaining, Adam has finally reached the point where he will be 'sad to die': 'By writing about Lod, I had to adopt the position of the spectator and stop all my self-pitying. […] My writing all this out was necessary for me to remember it and to forget it, instead of being forced to live in it when the time for that had passed.'[254]

Suddenly confronted, in late middle age, with the 'threshold' of a 'new story', Adam is both suddenly scared of physically dying and excited at his spiritual liberation:

> My constant dream is to weave a text that, like music, has no materially defined edges. Its meanings would emerge in the rhythms of the spirit perceiving it. Unfortunately this is impossible, for language has been a prisoner of material definition for as long as human beings and gods have chosen it to communicate with each other. Those who use it have no choice but to rely on it as a currency to reach the moneyless essence of literature.[255]

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[252] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 376, 380, 383, 389, 405, 407.

[253] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 412.

[254] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, pp. 414-415.

[255] Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto*, p. 418.

5. Zinaida Gippius's *Literaturniy Dnevnik*

> *When Tolstoy was a teenager, he began questioning the opulence he inherited. […] Dressed shabbily, he was able to go undercover with the peasants who lived on Yasnaya Polyana, and he was shocked to hear their disdain for his family. […] Just two years after finishing* War and Peace*, Tolstoy told a friend he harbored no desire to live. Death, with its inevitability and permanence, made life, with its transiency and impermanence, seem pointless. […] He began ignoring his family and estate, disgusted at their greed and frivolity. How could any decent person harbor extravagant wealth while others lived in destitution — on the same property? […] He published the* Gospel in Brief*, where he whittled down the Bible to what he felt were Christ's true messages, devoid of any divinity or Resurrection. […] Gandhi first read Tolstoy's* The Kingdom of God Is Within You *in 1893. 'I was at that time a believer in violence,' he later remembered. 'Reading it cured me of my skepticism and made me a firm believer in [nonviolence].' […] Gandhi opened a fruitful correspondence between the two, in which they recommended each other books they had written and read; the last long letter Tolstoy ever wrote was to Gandhi.*
>
> Jordan Michael Smith

This anthology shirks the business of tackling the biggest names in the forbidding Russian canon - the Pushkins, Tolstoys, Dostoyevskies and Chekhovs - and focuses instead, and briefly, on two islands suggestive of the slightly later continental ferment from which they emerged: Zinaida Gippius (here) and Yevgeny Zamyatin (Chapter 11). We won't even take on the whole of Gippius's 1908 *Literaturniy Dnevnik (Literary Notebook)*, compiled between 1899 and 1907 (and our deepest trip into the past among all our chapters), but will focus instead on four essays - 'The Bread of Life' (1901), 'A Critique of Love' (1900), 'Modern Art' (1903) and 'On Vulgarity' (1904). Published under the pseudonym Anton Krainiy, the *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, Gippius notes in her introduction, was a document of years already past by 1908, but alive in another sense:

> There is a point of view which regards all collections - whether of poems, stories or essays - as meaningless. The author cannot but look back in alienated anguish at things she wrote before, and would not write today. […] But there is another, truer view: the historical or transhistorical. One must be able to feel time, to remember that history is everywhere, that everything is in history, in movement. The smallest detail is also a part of this history. […] To deny any part of one's past is dangerous; it leads to a loss of the present and future.[256]

[256] Zinaida Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, (St. Petersburg: Pirozhkov, 1908), https://imwerden.de/pdf/gippius_lit.dnevnik_1899-1907.pdf, pp. III-IV.

Gippius also stresses that the essays are more than a document of her own private past; they represent the collective struggles of the journal *Novy Put' (New Way)*, for which they were written, in its battle not only against the official censorship of secular Russian authorities, but also the 'spiritual'[257] censorship of a Russian intelligentsia committed to one fashionable form or other of materialism: 'The mere mention of "mysticism" was regarded as a form of madness, and the word "religion" as a form of treachery. The "New Way" was to be forged against such materialism, and our first task was to show that "religion" was not necessarily a synonym of "reaction". Our goal was, in essence, humble enough, but unachievable in the circumstances of that time [1903-1905].'[258] Even those 'decadents' who should have been most sympathetic to the cultivation of a 'third way' between deaf Orthodox traditionalism and blind modern materialism were alienated by the new journal's efforts:

> They were our friends, but we came out against them, because their religion - aestheticism, 'art for art's sake' - was not enough for us. We wanted to create other spiritual values, and did not regard artistic beauty as automatically the highest and most overarching. The time for such creation was not yet ripe (and is perhaps still not ripe), and the fact was that *Novy Put'* had no way of surviving against so many enemies. But its fledgling efforts had their meaning, however slight, and this 'notebook' of mine is a record of some of that, and of the conditions in which it emerged.[259]

Convinced that the time for a 'New Way' would come, in Russia and beyond, Gippius concludes her introduction to her *Literaturniy Dnevnik* on an optimistic note: 'It sometimes seems that life is slow to catch up with itself, but we know that it never stops. We are not going to be either slavish or ungrateful towards our past; it passes, and gives birth to the future. It passes, and as it does so it teaches us to live in the name of the future.'[260]

<u>'The Bread of Life' (1901)</u>

I cannot subjugate myself to God
If I love God.
He showed me the way
So how can I lead myself astray?
…
We are not slaves, but we are God's children
Free children, like Him.

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[257] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, pp. IV-V.

[258] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. V.

[259] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, pp. VI-VII.

[260] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. VIII.

Zinaida Gippius,
'Svoboda' (1904)

Gippius's plan for 'The Bread of Life' could not be clearer: 'I am going to talk about bread for the body and bread for the spirit, about their equal status and equal importance at every given moment for every human being, and about their ultimate inseparability as the preconditions for every human life.'[261] 'Bread for the spirit', however, can be slippery stuff to grasp:

> 'You need to love everyone! Everything… You have to start loving… Loving!' These seem like the oldest, most famous and most readily understood words in the world, and yet who, if she is honest with herself, can say that she understands what they mean? […] I want to speak about human nature, of this nature's healthy fulfilment, the current state of our understanding of what to do to make our lives better. In a nutshell, I am going to talk about what ought to be on the basis of what is.[262]

This is emphatically not a utilitarian or instrumental argument for self-cultivation: the 'bread of the spirit' transcends the physical bread of economics textbooks in ways that a Russian author of the succeeding generation, Vladimir Nabokov, would emphasise in his own way (most notably in *The Gift*, where he juxtaposes his own humanistic vision with the relentless and soul-destroying materialism of Nikolay Chernyshevsky[263]). Gippius herself starts from a similar place: 'What is there then? There are people and their history. And history is a story of human hunger. […] There have always been two hungers, organically connected to each other: […] bodily and spiritual.'[264] Physical and spiritual bread do not, however,

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[261] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 4.

[262] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 6.

[263] Gippius herself famously dismissed the teenage Nabokov as a writer without a future:

> The animosity between Nabokov and Zinaida Gippius was reciprocal. She initiated it by telling Nabokov's father after the publication of his son's first collection of juvenile poetry in 1916: "Your son that he will never be a writer." During their joint years of emigration, Gippius rejected Nabokov's novels on the same grounds she had for rejecting Anton Chekhov's fiction earlier: absence of mysticism and of Dostoevskian roots. (Simon Karlinsky, 'Nabokov and the Russian Modernist Poets', *Cycnos*, v. 12, No. 2, http://revel.unice.fr/cycnos/?id=1453.

My own postgraduate juvenilia (Jonathan Keir, 'The Power of Curiosity: Essays on the Metaphysical Urge', University of Auckland, Department of Comparative Literature, 2006) explored, under the wonderfully diligent supervision of Nabokov biographer Brian Boyd, Nabokov's anti-Platonism, his rejection of metaphysical dualism and his attempt, basically congruent with that of Gippius, to find a third way between blind religious traditionalism and modern materialism. May these two once litigious souls enjoy being brought back together here under the roof of the future, from which things look quite different.

[264] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, pp. 6-7.

> exist in total separation from one another in everyday life, for they are both conditions of life. […] Communal life, popular culture, science, social and economic structures, political struggles, relations between peoples, this all belongs, strictly speaking, to the realm of physical bread. […] The bread of the spirit, on the other hand, is one discrete thing: the understanding of God. The word 'religion' is too broad, and I am afraid to use it, so I need to define what I mean. Even the word 'God' is problematically vague. The bread of our spirit is our understanding of God as a parent, as having a relationship with us, with our spirit, and as such with our bodies and our daily lives. It is by the very weavability of this concept with our daily lives that we can judge its truth; equally, it is by the weavability, or the possibilities, of life with *it*, that we judge the extent to which our lives are morally true, honest and real.
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> The bread of our century is as hard as rocks.[265]

The problem, for Gippius, is that understanding God as the traditionalist, totalitarian Father who refuses to go away and continues to dictate beyond the grave - the target, straw man or otherwise, of Christopher Hitchens's *God is not Great* - is as hopeless as the materialist refusal of all 'spiritual bread' in the first place. The type of public education which regards the study of moral dictates and principles - whether traditionalist or secular - as useful, if for nothing else than for the promotion of 'public morality', is hopelessly lost regarding the true spiritual needs of individual human beings: such religious or moral education - the shoving of rules down the throats of the young - is 'as useful as a candle on a bright morning' to those receiving it ('poor teachers and poor students', Gippius concludes).[266] The challenge for the new century, in Russia as elsewhere, is the baking of spiritual bread which individual people will want freely to swallow. Gippius worries about the deification of art as well as science, not in the sense that true art is not a form of 'spiritual bread', but that the cult of 'art for art's sake' risks 'eating its own tail'[267]: 'Do we really fail to see that the only art that is truly alive, and that can be called true, is that which leads to a deepened understanding of God and weaves itself into Him? It does not itself become God, but rather joins Him; the bread of the body unites with the bread of the spirit to become the bread of life.'[268] A totalitarian religion based on understanding 'the Father' as the Great Other is wholly unsuited to this task: 'Such religion […] cannot, of course, strive to weave itself together with life, and is entirely oriented against life.'[269] Russian Orthodox Christianity was, by 1900, of little use to bourgeois Russians like Gippius and her peers:

> Those high school religion lessons have no relation with the rest of the student's life. At university it is the same story, only moreso, given that by

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[265] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 10.

[266] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, pp. 11-12.

[267] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 13.

[268] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 12.

[269] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 14.

> now I have a concrete goal, such as getting a law degree. After graduation, the worldly concerns multiply: bread, life, work. Then love; I get married. An ascetic, life-denying religion is pushed into big compromises here, but I don't really even notice. My children will be legitimate, so I'm not worried about that, but then suddenly I find my life overflowing with new, small, grey but important tasks. An ascetic religion offers me little help here, […] so I find myself not needing it. A stale crust is a stale crust; I don't forget that, because I suffer. I am hungry for something fresh, but where can I look for such spiritual nourishment? […] I believe that my efforts to put food on my family's table, my sources of fun, the enjoyment I derive from art, my work, my service, are all good; otherwise I could not freely serve. But as long as I run around in the dark like this, I don't get any happier. The rock-hard bread to which I have grown accustomed will never soften; I will gnaw away at it, but I will die hungry all the same.[270]

On the one hand, this spiritual hunger is a feature of human life almost by definition:

> When a person either dies or reaches a state in which she loses her ability to feel this hunger, perhaps then she can fall in love with loneliness and come to need it. Until then, people need other people, bread, work, duties and a freedom which takes the lofty form of 'not my will but Yours'. In this sense, as long as a person needs all this - as long as she remains a human being - she will need to maintain some sort of dialogical relationship with her own spirituality, and neither retreat into the loneliness of the desert (even a holy loneliness) nor into empty prayers or prayer for prayer's sake.[271]

On the other hand, however, no amount of merely calling for what is needed - recipes for bread rather than bread itself - can ever bridge the abyss that separates us from meaning:

> I am afraid of saying at this point that what is needed is love. Love cannot be created when it is not there, even when it is needed, and of course no one knows what 'love' means anyway. It is thus literally meaningless to say that you or I 'need love'.
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> […] And so we, the poor and hungry ones with our bread for the body, our science, culture, art, daily business, love for our children, service, duties, we don't want to give any of this up, but we need more than a religion of the Father to add fresh water to our rock-hard bread. Most of us have come to realise that this water involves the children as well as the Father.[272]

Gippius is of course most deeply and directly concerned with the Orthodox Christian tradition, in which Jesus and the Church come to play, theoretically if not

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[270] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, pp. 17-19.

[271] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, pp. 22-23.

[272] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, pp. 25-26.

historically[273], intermediary and facilitating roles in personalising the link between the individual and her own spirituality; the challenge she sets with her *Novy Put'* colleagues, however, is more universal, and seeks to speak to modern human beings everywhere: 'Parallel to the history of the world, there is the history of each of us. And the happiest people, if not the rest of us, will remember that they enjoyed such a fusion of life and religion in childhood. Besides the dual hungers of childhood, there were the dual satisfactions of fantasy and imagination as well.'[274] Nevertheless, individuals and civilisations as a whole 'grow up', and as such, 'we are forced to walk among the adults, who can only give us what they have', and that means 'culture, art, science': 'Life itself has grown up, left its childhood bedroom behind, but religion has been left behind in it. We are not happy about it, but we see that it is so, and we get used to the idea that religion […] belongs to children and our early ancestors.'[275] As we grow up, we may want 'a God that grows up with us', but 'we are told that there is no such God, and that the very concept of "God" is only for those as simple-minded as children and as gentle as doves. If you want life, live it without God.'[276]

There is, of course, something in this modern 'atheism', as the old Northern Irish joke goes[277], which is deeply Christian: although she is writing for Russians in 1900, Gippius could be writing in 2018 alongside the likes of George Scialabba as he confronts John Gray's *Seven Types of Atheism*:

> Very few, mostly marginal figures, in either East or West, have [Gray argues] achieved the detachment and disenchantment that would signal a genuine break with religious thinking. Most atheists have instead 'searched for a surrogate Deity to fill the hole left by the God that has departed.'
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> […] Some people identify atheism with scientific rationalism, but science cannot dispel religion—not least because religion is not a set of hypotheses to be disproven. Rather, it is anything—myths, rituals, even illusions—that makes sense of our passage through life. Others equate atheism with disbelief in the omnipotent God of Christianity and Islam; Gray counters that this notion falls short, since 'religion is universal, whereas monotheism is a local cult.' Still others imagine that religion was simply a stage in human evolution, now left behind, to which Gray responds: 'The human mind is programmed for survival, not for truth.'
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> […] Gray's next category, secular humanists, includes Mill, Marx, and Bertrand Russell, who for all their differences are alike in their 'vast hopes for social transformation.' Atheists of this sort think they have left religion behind, but they are wrong. The history of Christianity is shot through with

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[273] See Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, pp. 27-28.

[274] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, pp. 28-29.

[275] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 30.

[276] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, pp. 30-31.

[277] During the Troubles in Belfast, a driver is stopped at a Police checkpoint and asked: 'Catholic or Protestant?' 'I'm an atheist,' the driver replies. 'Well are you a Catholic atheist or a Protestant atheist?'

millenarian movements promising the end of history. After the Reformation, humanists dropped this apocalypticism in favor of gradual progress and swapped the aim of reaching the Heavenly City for the goal of building a utopia in this world through human effort. What Christianity and secular humanism share is more important than their differences: No other religious tradition—Jewish, Greek, Indian, Chinese—envisions history as linear rather than cyclical, or conceives of humanity as a unitary collective subject. The very idea of utopia—a place where everyone is happy—could not have occurred to people who took for granted that individuals have irreconcilable desires and ideals, and that conflict is therefore impossible to eliminate. Western universalism, Gray scoffs, is very provincial indeed.

[…] George Santayana was a philosopher of amiable imperturbability. […] 'A mind enlightened by skepticism and cured of noisy dogma, a mind discounting all reports, and freed from all tormenting anxiety about its own fortunes and existence, finds in the wilderness of essence a very sweet and marvelous solitude.' Gray calls him 'an atheist who loved religion.'

Joseph Conrad was as fatalistic and disillusioned as Santayana, but without Santayana's lightheartedness and sense of mischief. If Santayana was an Epicurean, Conrad was a Stoic, certain that Fate would eventually come for each individual and that all that mattered was how she met it. Gray quotes Conrad's famous letter to Bertrand Russell, who had asked his opinion of 'international socialism' and its prospects: 'I have never been able to find in any man's book or any man's talk anything to stand up for a moment against my deep-seated sense of fatality governing this man-inhabited world.' Conrad thought reason grossly overrated; competence and courage were enough to see one through. Santayana played with ideas; Conrad mistrusted them, sure that some fool would get hold of them and wreak havoc.

[…] 'Not looking for cosmic meaning, they were content with the world as they found it.' […] Gray asks [the same of] us: 'Other animals do not need a purpose in life.… Can we not think of the aim of life as being simply to see?'

With considerable respect for Gray (and for Conrad, Santayana, et al.), I would answer no. As long as so much of what we see is unnecessary suffering, we cannot be content with the world as we find it. Of course we should keep Gray's cautions well in mind. The catastrophic revolutionary ideologies of the past were ersatz religions. Scientific utopias and promises to transform the human condition deserve the deepest suspicion. Moral and political progress are always subject to reversal. Humans are animals; human nature is riven with conflicts; reason is a frail reed. But even if we can't set the cosmos right, we can't leave our corner of it the way it is. Whatever else may be an illusion, other people's suffering is not.[278]

The 'Spiritual Humanism' which Gippius, Scialabba, Tu Weiming and others presented in this book are driving at could be neatly summarised in that last

[278] George Scialabba, 'Bad Faith', https://newrepublic.com/article/151144/bad-faith-book-review-john-gray-seven-types-atheism, 1/10/2018 (accessed 5/10/2018).

sentence: this reality of other people (and other things) connects us both to 'Heaven' and our deepest selves. In Gippius's words, this is the meaning of a 'full life': 'One must go and look for this God not by abandoning life or by quitting work and blood.'[279] And yet, 'in our fear, we have become weak':

> The story of our hunger has developed to the point that even those who are most aware of the existence and equal status of the two types of bread behave as if only the bread of the body were real, hiding behind the fact that the death of the spirit can, on the surface at least, be invisible. From the feeling of subservience to physical need, there develops a sense of obligation - sometimes very strong - precisely to provide physical bread and physical bread alone. Modern social life holds together, to the extent that it does, by this thread.
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> Imagine that I adopt and raise a child. I am obliged to feed her, and if she dies of hunger, everyone, including myself if I am not ill or mad, would consider that I had failed in my duty to provide for her, and would judge me accordingly. But if I fail to give her spiritual bread, and don't even bother to point her in the vague direction of easily accessible paths where she might find it, then I myself, not to mention any observers, would decide that this is a matter of my free own will, and that I am free to raise her as I see fit. […] There are those who will say that the search for spiritual nourishment requires a certain 'mood', and they may even have such 'moods' themselves without realising that these states are always the result of some dynamic action [external to the mood itself].[280]

The sheer complexity and radical subjectivity of individual spirituality is such that it will always remain an individual business: Gippius concludes that 'two or three' people agreeing to search together at a certain time for spiritual nourishment may or may not actually show up to the meeting[281]. On the one hand, 'this is as it should be; the feeling of freedom in relation to the bread of the spirit is a true feeling that human beings have', but on the other,

> it is too readily associated with the question of private will, whim and caprice. There must be freedom, but it must also be reborn in a higher subordination than our isolated selves, a freedom that is not yet available to us. We vaguely taste what freedom means, but, failing to understand all its implications, we trade it in for servile consumerism, which is of course the most helpless form of slavery, only dressed up in ever freer-looking clothes.[282]

In a hypothetical future, however, 'when life and religion truly unite and become part of the same organic whole, our feeling of duty to a calling will naturally extend from

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[279] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 32.

[280] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, pp. 33-34.

[281] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 34.

[282] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 35.

the flesh to the spirit, and weave in with this foretaste of freedom that we now have.'[283] This may even have been, Gippius argues, the message that Jesus himself was trying to convey in his life.[284]

The elusive 20th-century philosophical goal of *praxis* - the perfect unity of thought and action - haunts Gippius too: 'To set things in motion requires the unity of both, and it is a shame that I have to write two consecutive words for this single concept.'[285] Still, she wants more than a new religion:

> We don't need any kind of sect. We don't want sectarian struggles of any kind, but for such peace to obtain, we need to avoid recourse to doctrinal distinctions, esoteric knowledge, secrets and fear, for we have wasted a lot of time and energy in fear. We have wasted time with propaganda and infighting too; we don't need advertising as some sort of standard-bearer for our cause. I mean, who do we have to convince? Everyone agrees. No one wants stale bread, or to have to fight for bread in fear. […] No one wants death; we all know about the death of the body, and we all sense the possibility of the death of the spirit if it is not properly fed.[286]

The argument here is not over the concrete meaning of the life of the spirit 'beyond' the obvious death of the body, whether the preferred metaphor is some sort of temporal or atemporal 'rebirth', eternal life, realisation in this-worldly time of 'unity with Heaven' or other humanistic fulfilment; Gippius wants simply to point to the fact that the spirit deserves to be taken to exist together with the body; on this basis and this basis alone, she tells us, is a modern 'World Ethos' thinkable and desirable.

Unsurprisingly (given the Orthodox Christian context in which she is writing), Gippius ends 'The Bread of Life' with a discussion of the theme of sacrifice, distinguishing it, much as Hannah Arendt will do later in the century, from the conscious, public charity of ordinary benefaction: 'A society which rewards loud public displays of charitable giving will never be able to exist in the name of That which wants everyone to help everyone else *incognito*. For when everyone gives to everyone else, no one knows where her gifts come from. People looking for the bread of life - salvation for themselves and others - will not find it in gaudy acts of public charity.'[287] The inward, spiritual turn at which Gippius is hinting here is not mere self-denial: 'We want salvation for ourselves as well as for others, exactly as much as we want it for others.'[288] Private, anonymous 'sacrifice' is in some sense a means to this end, not some twisted end in itself. She struggles to find a name for this 'fresh water of the spirit', and refuses to 'write a program or charter for society',

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[283] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 35.

[284] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 36.

[285] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 37.

[286] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, pp. 37-38.

[287] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 40.

[288] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 41.

but concludes that 'everyone is with me on this; they just may not know it yet'[289]. This is not as alarming or narcissistic as it sounds: 'Those who *do* know what I am writing about here, and who know more than me and see further than me - let them speak. I will believe them and listen to them.'[290]

'A Critique of Love' (1900)

> *I am frightened by the thought of what unqualified and unsuitable people may invoke my authority one day. Yet that is the torment of every teacher: she knows that, depending on circumstances beyond her control, she can become a disaster as well as a blessing to mankind. […] The worst readers are those who behave like plundering troops: they take away a few things they can use, dirty and confound the remainder, and revile the whole.*[291]
>
> Nietzsche

Gippius begins her *Kritika Lyubvy* ('Critique of Love') by addressing the question, surprisingly, of solitude:

> The need for exchange is primary, and each of us is born with it. Love for solitude and isolation develops later in our hearts, out of the conditions of life itself. Of course, shyness and a preference for privacy may be somewhat hereditary, but the deep reason for them stems from an unsatisfied thirst for exchange.
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> We each have an inner awareness of ourselves and the world which is reflected in our spirit. In each of us there is an irresistible urge to 'reveal' our spirit, to make it available to others, translate it into words, deeds, sounds, movements, bring it as a gift into the world of phenomena. I am not speaking of artists in particular, but of all people. We have all experienced, even if only in moments of love, the raging thirst to say and give everything about ourselves to someone else - the feeling of the need to do it, and the frustration whenever it doesn't work. But even the greatest artist feels this distance between what she sees inside herself and what she is able to communicate to the world beyond.[292]

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[289] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, pp. 41-42.

[290] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 42.

[291] For an outstanding new biography of Nietzsche, who died in the year this essay was published and who, like Tolstoy, lies outside the purview of our direct concern while remaining firmly in the 19th-century background to this 20th- and 21st-century discussion, see Sue Prideaux, *I Am Dynamite! A Life of Friedrich Nietzsche*, (London: Faber, 2018).

[292] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 46.

As if predicting the pathologies of the Facebook age, Gippius warns, however, of the dangers of thinking of spiritual life exclusively in unidirectional, transmit-only terms:

> Everyone is busy shouting at everyone else, and no one listens to anyone. […] It is only by becoming aware of how deaf we are that we can liberate our primal love and attention for people. Listening is just as necessary for us as speaking is. We always learn for ourselves by looking at others; they are a mirror for us. […] Every spirit has its own value; losing it, or the ability to hear it, we lose a part of ourselves. […] This loss of spirit leads eventually to a complete inability to continue living at all. We live in a time where almost everyone, regardless of her standing, occupation, abilities and intellectual privileges […] has stopped enjoying life, become permanently unsatisfied, and no longer has any specific desires - or if she does, mirages which fail to provide her with any lasting fulfilment.
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> The end of all this is the death of the individual in her own loneliness. […] There are, of course, many who are so unaware of all this that they haven't even started to be unsatisfied, and seemingly are not in search of anything in particular. […] Their spirit lies, in effect, dormant, but it will awaken one day, if not in them, then in their children, and the path of the spirit, once undertaken, is one and the same for everyone: they will come to the realisation and understanding of what is necessary for life, they will want authentically to express themselves, but if they can't listen to others and create life together, they will lose what spirit and life they have.[293]

One need not accept Gippius's pessimism about the state of humanity - in 1900 or now - to understand what she wants: a world of people who know how to care for both themselves and others rather than a world where neither of these conditions obtains. Luckily, on her view, far from being in any sort of competition with one another, the two primary activities of any 'Spiritual Humanism' - listening and speaking - on some profound level mutually reinforce each other. The ability to be simultaneously good to others and oneself is hence seen here as a kind of muscle; the challenge is training the muscle as a whole, not agonising over which half to start with, as if such an approach to weight-training could ever really even make sense.

Reason is in any case powerless to achieve any sort of spiritual transformation on its own:

> Cruelty is only possible when love is also present. [… Conversely,] try demonstrating the most uncontroversial and reasonable truth to someone, and she won't see it unless you also love her. Reason alone - and how strange it is that this is so - has no active spiritual ingredients, no power to win people over. […] Despiritualised, abstract decisions, however seemingly cruel or kind, create nothing and go nowhere.[294]

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[293] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, pp. 47-48.

[294] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 53.

This seems an odd thing to say: one can clearly hate a teacher and feel forced to accept the weight of evidence she presents, and surely the entire Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution were based on the kinds of 'despiritualised, abstract decisions' that 'changed everything' and defined our modernity. Yet this is all, for Gippius, so much 'bread for the body'; it advances our spiritual lives in no real or direct way at all, even if the 'bread of life' is always some combination of the two. Perhaps the analogy with weight-training might be continued; the muscle cannot grow if it is not fed, but it is always the combination of diet and exercise that leads to growth. In this sense, as interesting as they can be, 'scientific' investigations of 'spiritual' themes, such as they might be explored in such fields as moral psychology or the sociology of religion[295], are only ever one half of what is needed to bake 'the bread of life'; a genuine 'Spiritual Humanism' is always embodied and transmitted via acts of felt generosity and sacrifice.

Describing this is one thing; embodying it is quite another, though Gippius, like Tang Junyi, Tu Weiming and the other names in this book, was hoping to achieve both diagnosis and cure in her work. Faced with the 'poetry' of Aleksandr Dobrolyubov, for example, Gippius concludes: 'His poems […] are not literature, and have no relationship with art or literature at all. […] They are merely the cries of a single human spirit, which is in pain as ours sometimes is.'[296] Dobrolyubov's decision to quit the St. Petersburg literary scene for a monastic existence is understood by Gippius as a failure of the city's 'religion':

> Dobrolyubov, of course, is only as foolish as we all are. He shouted, tortured himself, clung to the hope that people who seemingly suffered as much as he did (and he was not wrong about that) would understand him, but as he did so, he remained, so to speak, caught in his own solitary funk. And he grew deeper into his own solitude, creating for his inner destiny an external, ascetic destiny to match. To put it all more simply and straightforwardly, people in our time grow desperate and sink - sometimes consciously, sometimes not - because they cannot live without God. We have lost God, and we don't know where to find Him. A religion without dialogue, of asceticism and solitude, goes against our deepening awareness of the fact that there is a will to life in human nature, close to God's wishes for us. We want a religion which somehow justifies, sacralises and accepts life - a religion not of loneliness, but of exchange, a harmony of many voices. But our consciousness in this whole dimension remains weak, and so we seek exchange, however painful and frustrating, solely in order to narrate our own experiences to others, thinking that we will get to the top when we are really only ploughing our way to the lonely, hellish bottom. We don't know how to listen to others and give them signs that we understand them, acts of generosity which simultaneously save us and them.[297]

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[295] See Philip Jaekl, 'The Inner Voice', https://aeon.co/essays/our-inner-narrator-gives-us-continuity-and-a-sense-of-self, 13/9/2018 (accessed 10/7/2018) for a contemporary example of what science both can and will never achieve in this area.

[296] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 56.

[297] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, pp. 57-58.

How can the writer - by definition engaged in an act of 'transmission' - simultaneously convince her reader that she is also offering to *listen*? And yet, as Gippius will show in the next essay in her 'literary notebook', such an offer of a friendly ear is not quite enough on its own to constitute 'love' either.

'Modern Art' (1903)

After attending a 'modern art' exhibition in which 'everything was wonderful', Gippius has a dream which evolves into a nightmare:

> I dream that I have lot of money - a lot, millions upon millions of rubles. Artists are on my payroll; they paint and create. I get the best interior decorators in, and together they create rooms as wonderful as those in the exhibition, and lo and behold, I go and live in them. […] All around me, everything, every detail is wonderful. I lie on a gorgeous turquoise couch, write at a silver desk. Everything has been carefully and lovingly crafted for me; all I have to do is go and live in it and enjoy it. I move in, and it's terrifying. […] I don't dare die here, because everything has been made for life alone; there is no place for death, or for that which pours out from the edge of life, not even for ironically winking ancient gods, let alone for the kind of serious, modern God who might welcome my spirit in its current state. Without the presence of such a living God, it is not possible to die, and it is not possible to live either. This has always been true. This is how it is today. This is how it will be for all future people too.[298]

While she would, if she had to, 'dare and know how' to die at home among her 'unmatching furniture, shelves of old books, bright curtains and picture of Jesus in the corner', a certain kind of 'modern art' offers Gippius no kind of solace whatsoever: 'Just as modern science - rightly described as "positivistic" - tells us that "everything is here and now, from the beginning to the end, and beyond that there is nothing", so too does a "new" form of art affirm that a certain kind of beauty exists within which it is possible to build a clean and wonderful life, but only a life.'[299] The same thing can be said of the majority of scientists, artists and moralists alike who populate Gippius's St. Petersburg milieu: 'They think they are creating life itself, but all they are doing is creating more modern and seemingly hygienic conditions for it to begin. […] If only to live! Instead, life passes us by without getting started.'[300] The problem with such positivistic doctrines of 'ethics for ethics' sake' and 'art for art's sake' is that they deprive the humanities of their 'wings': 'The most reasonable thing of all, [the positivists say], is not to wish for the impossible.

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[298] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, pp. 69-71.

[299] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 72.

[300] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, pp. 73-74.

Whatever is, is. Enjoy it, make the best of it, live and let live. But what, then, is death all about?'[301]

'On Vulgarity' (1904)

> *The frightening thing is that no one lives,*
> *We all just sleep;*
> *[…] And most frightening and unbearable of all*
> *Is that we don't love each other.*
>
> Gippius, *'Strashnoe' (1916)*

Among the world's great untranslatable cultural concepts - *saudade*, *yuanfen*, *kitsch*, *jihad* and so on - the Russian *poshlost'* ('vulgarity', at least of a certain kind) - occupies a proud place. A generation before Vladimir Nabokov introduced the term into English[302], Gippius tackled the problem of *poshlost'* on her own terms: just as the artist who is uninterested in listening will never be heard, the problem with being too ready to listen, or too ready to give people what they want, is that one risks making a prostitute or mercenary of oneself. The bursting 'self-help' sections of modern online bookstores can by definition provide no help here: authors who set out with the goal of giving you what you already think you might need have as little to do with the 'spiritual transmission' of true art as the poets who, like Dobrolyubov, don't care about helping or learning and only want to be understood themselves.

The true, 'diabolical' vulgarity which Gippius associates with *poshlost'* is the call to love everything in the world *as it is*, to find lasting comfort in the present state of things. 'The Devil says: "Things ought to be as they are." We say: "Things ought to be as they ought to be."'[303] *Poshlost'* on this definition is 'anti-life': it denies the 'movement' and dynamism which is inherent to life itself, and seeks refuge instead in some sort of false stability or fixed narrative of life as a whole making some kind of permanent sense. This is 'anti-love' as well as 'anti-life'; Gippius's attachment to the 'God' concept, and her hopes for a new understanding of 'religion', stem from precisely this aversion to *poshlost'*: life and love can only ever be *re*experienced and *re*affirmed: they can never be pinned down in theory or crystallised into ritual practice. This is not to deny the importance of ritual, habit and routine in one's life; on the contrary, repeating a given ritual in the right inner state can heighten our awareness that it is different every time because we are different every time. 'Paradise' for Gippius is the movement and dialogue which life and time offer, not the rest which death provides[304]; to seek such 'rest' in life is the essence of

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[301] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 74.

[302] See, for example, Vladimir Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol*, (New York: New Directions, 1944).

[303] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 219.

[304] See Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, p. 218.

vulgarity. To wonder and dream about the ultimate meaning of our movement, meanwhile, is part of the heavenly bargain.

We will leave aside Gippius's questionable discussions of Dostoyevsky and Chekhov in this essay; interestingly flawed as they are, they open more side-doors than anything else. Her final thesis on *poshlost'*, however, is worth quoting at the end here for our purposes:

> In order to 'love', one must understand, but before one can understand, one must *want* to understand. Let us not speak of 'love' yet, but rather of 'feeling at home' in our own movement towards love, towards Heaven. The whole world is ours, its own, necessary, and dear; one has such feelings, but it feels preachy and strange to talk about them. It is impossible to gravitate simultaneously towards every corner of the map of the world without sacrificing the myriad details which make the whole thing possible. But in our striving for love, as we understand more and more, and through life experience come to trust and affirm the movement inherent in life itself, we demand more and more intensely that the pattern be improved, completed, perfected through our own activity. […] Stagnation and *poshlost'*, on the other hand, fix all the world's stones, big and small, into a single, ossifying pattern.[305]

If Spiritual Humanism is anything, Gippius helps us to grasp, it is the dynamic opposite of such scientistic 'ossification'.

[305] Gippius, *Literaturniy Dnevnik*, pp. 218-219.

6. Mario Vargas Llosa's *La llamada de la tribu*

> *A* satyagrahi *ought to give "his opponent the same independence and feelings of liberty that he reserves to himself, and he will fight by inflicting injuries on his own person." Maritain correctly described* satyagraha *as "spiritual warfare." Gandhi claimed that those engaged in satyagraha were "true warriors," fearless enough to never resort to arms—as opposed to the cowards driven by fear to violence.*
>
> *This was a new way of achieving moral agency in the most oppressive circumstances. […] All this seems far removed from the rational debates and discussions that we assume are the way to build public consensus and inform government policy in democracies. But Gandhi realized that democratic politics, as the philosopher Martha Nussbaum has pointed out, "must learn how to cultivate the inner world of human beings, equipping each citizen to contend against the passion for domination and to accept the reality, and the equality, of others." […] Gandhi believed that society is much more than a social contract between self-seeking individuals underpinned by the rule of law and structured by institutions; it is actually founded upon sacrificial relationships, whether between lovers, friends, or parents and children.*
>
> *Gandhi could see that public life organized around a morally neutral conception of private interests is always likely to degenerate into ferocious competition and violent coercion.*[306]
>
> Pankaj Mishra

Mario Vargas Llosa (1936-), the failed Peruvian Thatcherite Presidential candidate turned Nobel Prize-winning novelist and octogenarian literary socialite, can be judged, like all our authors, on many fronts; inclusion in this anthology does not imply uncritical endorsement or condemnation of any individual's overall legacy. *La llamada de la tribu* (2018) is a novelist's celebration of his favourite liberal thinkers, but it can also be read as a sequel to *La civilisación del espectáculo* (2012), in which Vargas Llosa lamented, from a perspective distinct from the more familiar leftist arguments of the Adorno-Horkheimer tradition, the degeneration of modern 'culture' into the mere consumption of entertainment products. Before we seek to understand Vargas Llosa's aversion to the 'call of the tribe' and his defence of the individual spirit against it, it behooves us to understand his vision of 'culture' as laid out in this earlier book.

La civilisacion del espectáculo

[306] Pankaj Mishra, 'Gandhi for the Post-Truth Age', https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/22/gandhi-for-the-post-truth-age, 22/10/2018 (accessed 24/10/2018).

Vargas Llosa begins, much we do here, with a feeling of disorientation: 'The hours have lost their watch,'[307] he quotes Vicente Huidobro as saying, admitting already in his introduction[308] that the present age lacks the compass of 'culture' - not an instrument or 'blueprint' or canon as such, but an embodied *style*,

> a way of being in which forms matter as much as content. 'Knowledge' has to do with advancement in science and technology, but 'culture' precedes such knowledge and is an inclination of the spirit, a sensibility and cultivation of form which gives meaning and orientation to knowledge.
>
> Culture and religion are not the same thing, but they are not separable from each other either, because culture was born within religion, […] and will always remain tied to it through a sort of umbilical cord.[309]

Just as Gippius is anxious to keep this living link between religion and culture alive, so too is Vargas Llosa, a century later, adamant that dead books alone, for all the 'knowledge' they might contain, are worth nothing, or at least nothing strictly 'humanistic', on their own:

> Postmodernity has destroyed the myth that the humanities humanise by themselves. It is simply not true, as so many optimistic educators and philosophers have believed, that a liberal education accessible to all is a guarantee of future progress, peace, liberty and equality of opportunity within a modern democratic framework. [In the words of George Steiner], 'libraries, museums, theatres, universities, and research centres devoted to both the natural sciences and humanities can prosper in proximity to concentration camps.' Within a single individual, as well as within a society as a whole, 'high culture', refinement and intelligence can coexist with the fanaticism of the torturer and assassin.[310]

While on the one hand 'a large share of our poetry, religion and art has disappeared from the realm of personal immediacy' - and 'that which used to live within individuals' will now be confined to the 'custody of specialists' and the 'artificial life of the archive' - such culture does not civilise on its own anyway; the individual must actually be prepared to engage with it.[311] Vargas Llosa worries out loud, moreover, about the unknown effects of the growing predominance of audiovisual images over words, a hectic 'musicalisation' of popular culture through which the background hum of an individual's inner life is profoundly influenced.[312] In this context, 'book culture' as a whole

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[307] Mario Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, (Alfaguara, 2012), p. 12.

[308] See Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, p. 14.

[309] Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, p. 16.

[310] Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, p. 20.

[311] Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, p. 21.

[312] Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, p. 21.

> continues to lose vitality, and exists more and more at the margins of contemporary public life, which itself has broken more or less completely from its classical humanistic roots - Hebrew, Greek and Latin - confining the latter to refuge in the work of a handful of effete specialists writing in hermetic jargon and asphyxiating erudition, when not in the language of outright mad 'theory'.[313]

While such 'culture' may struggle to survive in a technocratic era privileging scientific and vocational knowledge, it is not destined to die in the same way that other fields of human endeavour may be overtaken by computers and robots: 'It is possible that culture is no longer possible in our time, but it will not be for this quantitative reason, for culture was never about the quantity of one's knowledge, but always about the quality and sensibility of the individual's engagement.'[314] Distinguishing his project in *La civilisación del espectáculo* from that of Guy Debord in *La Société du Spectacle* (1967), Vargas Llosa insists:

> *La civilisación del espectáculo* is devoted to the question of culture, understood not as a [neo-Marxist] epiphenomenon of economic and social life, but rather as an autonomous [spiritual] sphere of its own, made up of ideas, ethical and aesthetic values, and works of art and literature which interact with the life of society and often provide, more than mere mirrors, active *sources* of social, economic, political and even religious phenomena.[315]

This 'culture' is not straightforwardly 'consumable'; on the contrary,

> mass visits to the world's great museums and monuments do not represent, on their own, a genuine interest in such 'culture' at all, but rather a mere snobbery, since the fact of having been to these places assures membership of the postmodern globetrotting class. Instead of arousing interest in the past and its art, such visits may actually exonerate the visitor from the need to study and engage with them further. […] A simple quick trip is enough to give her a good cultural conscience.[316]

Vargas Llosa's goal in *La civilisación del espectáculo* is to counter the philistine reduction of 'culture' to touristic 'entertainment', and to undermine the mercantile logic which accompanies it, though it often seems as if he is writing as much of an obituary for 'Spiritual Humanism' as an argument for it:

> The distinction between price and value has been abolished, with the former absorbing and eliminating the latter. Good culture is that which is bought, and bad culture is that which isn't. […] The disappearance of the old

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[313] Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, p. 22.

[314] Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, p. 23.

[315] Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, p. 25.

[316] Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, p. 29.

> concept of culture with which I grew up implies a corresponding loss of a concept of [spiritual] value. The only true value culture can have today is seemingly the one the market gives it.[317]

While there is nothing wrong with 'entertainment' as such - 'only a fanatical puritan' could reproach the members of a society for wishing to 'enjoy themselves' - 'converting [entertainment] into a supreme value has unavoidable consequences: a banalisation of culture, a dissemination of frivolity, […] and generally irresponsible journalism.'[318] Instead of promoting a full and authentic spiritual life for individual citizens or offering the promise of durability - and hence a certain 'immortality' - for artists, the 'entertainment civilisation' has, in its determination to 'avoid that which truly perturbs, disturbs and otherwise brings anguish' to the customer-spectator (who is by definition always right), developed a 'spirit' of its own, 'that which Ortega y Gasset called "the spirit of our time": the tasty, freebie-offering and frivolous god to which we all, knowingly or not, have been rendering alms for half a century or more, and every day with seemingly greater gusto'[319]. Together with a 'well-meaning' desire to build a society of equal opportunity in which the barriers to entry to the world of 'culture' and spiritual self-cultivation could be minimised, the resulting vacuum left by the retreat of edifying but hard-to-consume works of art leaves the individual, divorced from her own spiritual self-cultivation, open to the 'call of the tribe', whether in the form of music festivals or football matches:

> A game of football can be, for the true fan (and I am one myself), a thing of beauty, skill and harmony. […] But in our time, football matches serve above all, as Roman circuses did, as a pretext for the venting of irrational energies, for a regression of the individual to her animal condition as a member of a hunting pack, protected by the anonymous warmth of his tribe in the stands. Free rein can be given to aggressive instincts of rejection of the other, of symbolic (and sometimes even real) conquest and annihilation of the adversary.[320]

In the absence of any call to spiritual 'work', drugs, too, come to fill the void, acting for many people not as supplements to the life of the mind or spirit, but as substitutes for it:

> The mass consumption, in our time, of marijuana, cocaine, ecstasy, crack, heroin and other hard drugs reflects a cultural climate in which quick and easy pleasures can legitimately be sought which immunise the individual from responsibility and worry, instead of spurring her to the eminently

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[317] Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, pp. 31-32.

[318] Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, pp. 33-34.

[319] Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, p. 34.

[320] Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, pp. 39-40.

> personal business of reflection and introspection which a ludic consumer culture tells her is boring and irrelevant.[321]

Reflecting on the proliferation of ersatz religions and spiritualities (from yoga to Scientology and New Age megachurches) in a supposedly 'secular' West, Vargas Llosa concludes that the privilege of access to critical self-understanding remains the province of a minority:

> The positive effect of the secularisation of modern life is that liberty is now deeper than when ecclesiastical dogma and censorship stifled and strangled it altogether. But those who believe that 'religion' in the old, dogmatic sense has disappeared just because fewer and fewer people self-identify as 'Catholic' or 'Protestant' are severely mistaken. One may get such an impression from the official statistics, [but] in reality only a limited number of human beings have been able to do without the security blanket of religious dogma altogether; the overwhelming majority still turn to it in one form or other as a way of facing the otherwise total extinction which awaits them. […] Only small minorities have ever emancipated themselves by filling the existential void with culture - philosophy, science, literature and the arts - rather than dogma. But the culture which can fulfil this function is, in an important sense, 'high culture', or at least a culture which tackles existential realities instead of seeking mere distraction or entertainment, and which tries to give serious rather than merely commercially viable answers to the great enigmas, question-marks and conflicts which surround human existence.[322]

Something about our contemporary 'entertainment civilisation', Vargas Llosa insists, tugs at the very roots of our spirituality; just as 'intellectuals' and 'high culture' have disappeared from public life, so too, at the same time, has eroticism vanished from private life, drowned in waves of quickly consumable pornography: 'Brought out into the public sphere and thereby vulgarised, sex is no longer a vehicle for spiritual and artistic humanisation as it once was. […] It may satisfy a biological need, but it does not enrich the lives of participants. […] Instead of liberating men and women from solitude,'[323] it leaves them lonelier and more existentially frustrated than before. In the midst of this wasteland of condemnation to 'mere entertainment', 'the most talented and authentic artists often fail to find their way to a mass audience because they are either unbribable or simply inept when it comes to walking in the dishonest jungle where artistic "success" and "failure" are now decided.'[324]

Parallel to this rampant industrialisation and commercialisation of public 'culture' (and financed directly or indirectly by it), the academic humanities have retreated to the safe ground of political correctness:

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[321] Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, p. 41.

[322] Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, pp. 42-43.

[323] Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, p. 53.

[324] Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, p. 63.

> [It was] the anthropologists who, in the best faith in the world, [insisted on] a will to respect and understand the foreign societies they were studying. They established that a 'culture' was the mere *sum* of beliefs, knowledge, languages, customs, artifacts, family structures and so on - in short, everything a people says, does, fears and worships. This definition was not only used to create a method for exploring the specificity of one culture in relation to others; it also squarely aimed to obliterate the prejudicial and racist ethnocentrism of which the West never really tires of accusing itself even as it continues to be guilty of it. The goal could not have been more generous, but as we know, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. For it is one thing to believe that all cultures deserve consideration because they can all potentially make contributions to human civilisation as a whole, and quite another to believe that all cultures, for the mere fact of existing, are equal. […] If ethnologists and anthropologists established this flattening of the cultural plane, diluting the traditional meaning of 'culture' to the point of abolishing it, sociologists - or at least those engaged in literary criticism - have carried out a similar semantic revolution.[325]

Terrified of distinguishing between 'cultured' and 'uncultured' even in the realm of 'culture' itself, 'we have achieved a pyrrhic victory, a cure worse than the disease' which modern egalitarianism and postcolonialism sought to cure: 'We live in the confusion of a world in which, paradoxically, since there is no acceptable way to define what "culture" is, it has become everything and nothing'.[326] While we live in an era where, for example, 'literacy rates are the highest they have been in human history', such 'progress' has merely multiplied the number of 'vocationally trained specialists' rather than expanding the cohort of 'broadly "cultivated" individuals'.[327]

<u>'Una mujer contra el mundo'</u>

> The Guardian *not long ago published a list of the world's one hundred best books in English. [...] Such lists reveal a yearning for a direct route to wisdom. Brace yourself for the bad news: None is available. If one wanted to establish expertise in a restricted field—economics, say, or art history, or botany—such a list might be useful. But for the road to acquiring the body of unspecialized knowledge that sometimes goes by the name of general culture, sometimes known as the pursuit of wisdom, no map, no blueprint, no plan, no shortcut exists, nor, as I hope to make plain, could it.*
>
> *[…] 'From books all I seek is to give myself pleasure by an honorable pastime; or if I do study, I seek only that branch of learning which deals with knowing myself and which teaches me*

[325] Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, pp. 66-67.

[326] Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, p. 69.

[327] Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, p. 70.

> *how to live and die well.' What Montaigne sought in his reading, as does anyone who has thought at all about it, is 'to become more wise, not more learned or more eloquent.' As I put it elsewhere some years ago, I read for the pleasures of style and in the hope of 'laughter, exaltation, insight, enhanced consciousness,' and, like Montaigne, on lucky days perhaps to pick up a touch of wisdom along the way.*[328]
>
> Joseph Epstein

La civilisación del espectáculo is in many ways a bleak book, and our goal here was not to cover the whole thing or to review it on its own frequently fatalistic terms, but simply to provide some background context to Vargas Llosa's *La llamada de la tribu*, a book which, despite its title, is in fact a celebration of the individual spirit as he finds it alive and well in his favourite modern liberal thinkers. *La llamada de la tribu* is an extension of his conclusion in *La civilisación del espectáculo*: 'As much as the air is getting thin and life in general is making it hard for them, certain dinosaurs might find ways to survive and be useful in an unfriendly age.'[329] Vargas Llosa's 2007 essay 'Una mujer contra el mundo', on Octavio Paz's biography of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651-1695), *Las Trampas de la Fe* (1982), provides a natural bridge here between the two books, and offers an idea of what Vargas Llosa thinks 'literary criticism' of a certain kind can do, or 'embody', in this or any age:

> Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was a free spirit avid for nourishment. The study which Octavio Paz has dedicated to her is probably the best work of literary criticism ever to have emerged from Latin America. […] By 'literary criticism' I mean essays in which rigorous investigation, imagination, good taste and expository elegance come together to shed true light, not only on, but *over* a literary work. […] I am not entirely dismissing the value of those specialist studies - philological, stilistic, structuralist, deconstructionist etc. - which lie largely outside the reach of the lay reader, but if I have to choose, I will always go for works which are themselves halfway between analysis and artistic creation, and which pick up the ball of the existing work and run with it, just as poetry and the novel do with reality itself, thereby constructing something which transcends the original and itself brims with creativity.
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> […] The picture of Sor Juana which emerges from the pages of *Las Trampas de la Fe* is extraordinarily moving. Her courage, vigour and adaptability to suffering are all as great as her raw intelligence and talent. The chapters which describe the colonial society in which she was born and raised, a labyrinthine pyramid of nevertheless rigidly stratified castes, races and classes in which […] the indigenous base kept its ancient myths, beliefs and customs alive, have the energy and vitality of the greatest historical murals and period dramas. They also have the virtue of allowing us to

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[328] Joseph Epstein, 'The Bookish Life', https://www.firstthings.com/article/2018/11/the-bookish-life, November 2018 (accessed 17/10/2018).

[329] Vargas Llosa, *La civilisación del espectáculo*, p. 226.

> understand and appreciate this woman better, to admire her even more fervently as a woman blessed with a free spirit, curious, determined to learn, and engaged in a quest to understand and absorb the best culture of her time in spite of all the obstacles thrown at her.
>
> To be born into this milieu in 1651, an unpropertied, bastard child as the humble Juana Inés Ramírez de Asbaje was, meant facing off against an entire repressive, threatening and virtually all-powerful apparatus determined to convince such a young woman that she was an inferior being, a reproductive and domestic animal at whose feet, above all, blame for the fall of *men* could be laid.
>
> The fact that, in spite of all this, Juana Inés found a way to teach herself to read, write, and learn more than perhaps any of her contemporaries, even going so far as to draft a short text on the right of women (utterly unrecognised in her society) to scientific and humanistic education, shows that, beyond her learning and creativity, she also possessed a monumental force of will and an ability to survive and prosper in exceedingly unfriendly political circumstances.
>
> […] A great work of literary criticism whets the appetite and impels us to read the original which itself inspired such contagious pages. I had never managed to finish Sor Juana's *Primero sueño*, although I had enjoyed bits and pieces of her work here and there. Now, thanks to Paz's book, I have gone back and enjoyed this unforgettable and profound reading experience in full. […] Among other things, it has shown me that the baroque excesses which seduced her and many of her contemporaries were not a matter of formalist escapism. They had a justification which went beyond the aesthetic and literary, for they were a subtle way of saying the otherwise unsayable and thinking the otherwise unthinkable, a way of keeping independence of spirit and the hunger for liberty alive in a world of fundamentalist guardians who believed they had killed off such threats once and for all.[330]

La llamada de la tribu

Our interest in *La llamada de la tribu* begins where Vargas Llosa ends *La civilisación del espectáculo*: namely, with the great enemy of the 'enemies of the open society', Sir Karl Popper (1902-1994). First and foremost, Vargas Llosa wants, like Popper, to rescue the notion of 'spirit' from Hegel and his descendants, and to return it to the free individual:

> For Hegel, the Spirit, source of life, always in movement, advances with the progress of history in the incarnation of the State, the supreme form of modernity. This State, a manifestation of the essence of all that exists, is superior to the sum of individual human beings who compose it: the

[330] Mario Vargas Llosa, 'Una mujer contra el mundo', https://elpais.com/diario/2007/12/30/opinion/1198969213_850215.html, 30/12/2007 (accessed 17/10/2018).

> pinnacle is the monarch, an absolute sovereign to whom total obedience and submission are owed.[331]

Like Vargas Llosa himself, condemned to live through failed Latin American experiments in socialism from the Cuban revolution to the Bolivarism of Hugo Chavez, 'Popper affirms in his biography *Unended Quest* that "if a socialism combined with individual liberty were conceivable, I would still be a socialist"'[332]. Without by any means dismissing political progressivism, and on the contrary embracing gradualist 'reformism' over utopianism of all stripes, Vargas Llosa prefers to side with Popper and Dostoyevsky instead ('it is not possible to love one's neighbor without sacrificing to him something of one's labor'[333]): it is the emergence of the *individual* spirit which characterises all that is great about modernity:

> At the beginning of human history there were no individuals, only tribes and closed societies. The sovereign individual, emancipated from the jealously guarded social totality necessary for self-defence in a world of wild animals, […] malign spirits and the innumerable general dangers of the primitive world, is a recent human achievement, wedded to the emergence of the critical spirit - the discovery that life and the world are problems that can and must be solved by the individual - which entails the need to exercise rationality independently of religious, political and economic authorities.[334]

Though Popper's theory of the 'open society', with its focus on Greece and Western civilisation generally, has been critiqued by philosophers and historians of the 'Axial Age'[335] alike,

> the core of his thesis remains valid: at some moment, by accident or as a result of complex processes, knowledge for certain individuals stopped being a matter of received superstition, a body of sacred beliefs protected by taboo, and instead became an embodied spirit of its own, one which submitted all received truths to the tribunal of individual experience.[336]

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[331] Mario Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, (Random House, 2018), Kindle Locations 1723-1725.

[332] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 1763-1765.

[333] For a discussion of Dostoyevsky and socialism, see Gary Saul Morson, 'The Idiot Savant', https://www.newcriterion.com/issues/2018/5/the-idiot-savant-9753, May 2018 (accessed 19/10/2018).

[334] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 1972-1976.

[335] We diplomatically avoid the sprawling discussion of the relationship between the so-called Axial Age and the present day - and whether 'Spiritual Humanism' should be seen as part of some 'Second Axial Age' - in order to avoid opening any distracting side-doors in a book which is not intended to be either historiographical or social-scientific in nature. For a short recent discussion on the meaning of the Axial Age in the 21st Century, see Hans Joas, *Was ist die Achsenzeit? Eine wissenschaftliche Debatte als Diskurs über Transzendenz* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2014).

[336] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 1979-1982.

The ‘call of the tribe’, however - a life of mysterious ‘spirits’ (plural) and blind submission to local tradition rather than individual ‘spirit’ and responsible (and therefore burdensome and tiring) freedom - will always be attractive on a more basic mammal level; the ‘open society’ of sovereign individuals with spiritual lives of their own will always have enemies, including ‘serpentine’ modern foes who espouse sophisticated and scientific-seeming forms of ‘historicism’ (the conviction that the meaning of history is known in advance and defined once and for all), instead of conceiving of life, as individual artists do, as the business of ‘permanent creation’.[337] The courage of such ‘Spiritual Humanism’ does not entail a simple magic cancellation of our primordial fear of the meaninglessness and chaos of radical contingency, but rather implies, as all courage does, a triumph *in spite of fear*:

> Popper’s views on history remind me of what I have always taken the novel to be: an arbitrary organisation of human reality which defends individual authors and readers from the unmitigated anguish of perceiving that the world, and our lives in it, are a vast disorder. […] These imaginary constructions, in which the author’s free will is radically exercised, are acts of imaginary disobedience against the limits which the human condition appears to impose. Fortunately, our modern fear of our condition as free individuals has not only created new, cynical tyrants, totalitarian

[337] See Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 2032-2045.

> philosophies, dogmatic religions and 'historicism' generally, but also great novels.[338]

In distinguishing between totalitarian 'historicists' and reformist 'humanists' (who can call themselves 'socialists' if they want), Vargas Llosa argues that only the latter can offer true justice to free human beings; just as Dostoyevsky realised that 'if everyone were simply given whatever they might desire, as [totalitarian] socialism promises, life would lose all meaning'[339], so too does Vargas Llosa insist that 'the "reformist" does not aspire to bring happiness to people', because she knows that only direct individual experience, not government structures, can produce meaning, and happiness is only one possible form that such embodied meaning can take. The key to reformist politics is hence to strengthen 'the moral fibre of a given society', by which Vargas Llosa means 'the profound sense of justice and human social sensibility' of individuals at any given time:

> This delicate substance, formed by the deep psychology and spiritual structure of individuals, cannot, as the revolutionary might wish, be abolished or swiftly replaced. The success or failure of social institutions always hinges, in the final analysis, on their degree of correspondence with the grain of this fibre. However intelligently conceived, such institutions will

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[338] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 2115-2119, 2143-2153. One example cited by Vargas Llosa, namely Dostoyevsky, carries this 'rebellion' to its logical extreme:

> Critics from Aristotle to the present have presumed that great literary works exhibit structure. In art, unlike life, each detail has a reason for being there. We expect an effective ending to tie up all loose ends and earlier events to anticipate later ones. In the opening chapter of Dickens's *Great Expectations*, the young hero gives a pie to an escaped convict, and we can be confident that this act will mean something or the author would not have included it. In life, such confidence would be absurd because no author has shaped events into a satisfying pattern. But in art, events are not only pushed by prior ones but also pulled by later ones, which is why, as we approach the end of a book, we can guess who will marry whom and rule out endings that would not complete a good structure. Literary works allow for foreshadowing, in which earlier events happen because later events are going to happen, but life precludes such backward causation.
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> All these facts of artistic structure make it almost impossible to represent time as open. One could have characters assert a belief in free will or a future with many possible outcomes, but the reader knows that in the very act of doing so they are contributing to an ending already planned and recorded. Irony discrediting belief in freedom is almost unavoidable. As Tolstoy as well as Dostoevsky recognized, to represent freedom the writer must overcome what might be called *the bias of the artifact*, a bias in favor of determinism and closed time.
>
> That is just what *The Idiot* does. Unlike Dickens's masterpiece, it bakes no pies. Every time the other shoe fails to drop, we sense that in this work, as in life, nothing is given in advance.
>
> […] The novel's overpowering suspense depends on this intensely felt presentness. Reading most works, we cannot help reflecting that suspense is illusory since the author is driving events to a planned ending, but readers of *The Idiot* rapidly suspect that the author knows outcomes no better than the characters. The novel's most famous chapters seem to arise from nowhere, just as they occurred to the author. (Gary Saul Morson, 'The Idiot Savant')

[339] Gary Saul Morson, 'The Idiot Savant'.

> only achieve the goals they set forth if there exists a harmony between them and the ineffable, unwritten but decisive 'moral fibre' of the individuals who compose a given society.[340]

Vargas Llosa ultimately concludes, however, that Popper's overcommitment to philosophical 'clarity' and his false belief in the analytic neutrality of language, while leaving him healthily resistant to the fashionable rhetorical excesses and nonsenses of 'philosophical charlatans' of all stripes, blinded him to the power of language to create this 'moral fibre' in the first place:

> It is true that these beliefs about language immunised Popper from the disease, to which many of his intellectual contemporaries fell victim, of obsession with minor human problems instead of major ones. […] But there is no doubt that his work as a whole is adversely affected by an underestimation of words, and by the brazen assumption that one could use them as if they did not matter. […] Hayek, for example, objected to his use of the word 'engineer' to describe social reformers because of the unconscious association with the Stalinist definition of artists as 'engineers of souls'. […] It is right that philosophy […] remain more than a self-referential linguistic orgy, because such absorption in one's own narrow purpose leads to sterile and byzantine outcomes. Every writer must concede to her instrument of choice - language - the attention necessary to become the owner of her own words, the governor of her own arguments, and not remain a mere passive servant. Popper's work, for all its originality and suggestive power, contains this flaw: words, which he so obviously disdained, sometimes twisted and deformed ideas which he was unable to express with the rigour and nuance that his depth and originality deserved.[341]

It is at this point that Vargas Llosa, offering a thinly veiled justification of his own vocation as a novelist, transcends Western philosophy - both analytic and continental (represented by Popper and Roland Barthes respectively) - to arrive at the horizon of a modern literary humanism:

> Popper's bland and functional language lacks the salt of words, that perfect balance between the meat of content and the sauce of form which,

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[340] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 2221-2236.

[341] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 2312-2340. Vargas Llosa's portrait of Popper chimes in particular with a more intimate version provided by John Horgan in 'The Paradox of Karl Popper', https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/cross-check/the-paradox-of-karl-popper/, 22/8/2018 (accessed 22/10/2018):

> I began to discern the paradox lurking at the heart of Karl Popper's career when, prior to interviewing him in 1992, I asked other philosophers about him. Queries of this kind usually elicit dull, generic praise, but not in Popper's case. Everyone said this opponent of dogmatism was almost pathologically dogmatic. There was an old joke about Popper: *The Open Society and its Enemies* should have been titled *The Open Society by One of its Enemies*.

> paradoxically, he himself thought he was achieving by recourse to 'simple and clear' language in which he gave no thought to words at all. In his books - even in those where the depth of his reflection and wisdom are most evident - there is always this nagging gap between the form and the content of a philosophy which never reaches us in its full splendour, but rather always stunted, muted, and even partially deformed by the lazy convolution of the writing. [… Indeed], the juxtaposition of Popper and Roland Barthes is not by any means capricious, for the two represent equally costly excesses. Unlike Popper, who believed that language didn't matter, Barthes believed that *only* language mattered. […] An essayist of immense talent but also given to bouts of frivolous self-absorption, […] Barthes went so far as to affirm - nay, to 'demonstrate' - that human beings did not speak at all, and that language spoke, as it were, *through* them, and forced them to live under a vague and invisible dictatorship. […] But it isn't true that language is the seat of all power; it is, in fact, ridiculous to say so. Power kills without asking, while words, at most, can bore, hypnotise or scandalise us. Barthes's iridescent prose style gave his superficial thought the appearance of penetration and permanence, while Popper's profound system of ideas was constrained and devalued by means of expression which were never at the height, or depth, of that which they were striving to express. For although Barthes was right to say that ideas are made of words, if one fails to choose the words which embody and therefore communicate them as they ought to be communicated, the ideas will never be all that they could be.[342]

Despite his unrivalled admiration for Popper ('I would not hesitate to describe *The Open Society and Its Enemies* as the most fertile and enriching work of philosophy written in the 20th Century'[343]), Vargas Llosa is frustrated with both Popper himself and those who would, through equally 'lazy convolution', inadvertently threaten the spiritual life of the liberated individual:

> It is an inalienable right to complain about the ills of consumerism, but, if they want to be consistent, those who indulge in such complaining must accept that the austere society they propose by default, where people only buy what is indispensable for their survival, […] would be a primitive, hungry world ruled by the will of the strongest, in which the precarity of day-to-day existence for the overwhelming majority would leave little room for spiritual and intellectual life. The call of the tribe would thus be consummated. For the bare truth is that [… in industrialised consumer societies] there is more education and more room for leisure, and without either of these there is little spiritual or intellectual life that can be had by anyone.[344]

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[342] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 2337-2363.

[343] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 2375-2377.

[344] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 2363-2373.

Popper's railings against the dangers of unregulated commercial television are nevertheless met by Vargas Llosa with a certain caution; the 21st Century must strike a sensible balance in its regulation of social media and the Internet:

> If such regulations go so far as to provide the state with a means of controlling online media, the result would be, inevitably, the instrumentalisation of the latter in the interests of power, or in other words, a violence so destructive for the free life of the spirit as to be worse than anything the state might hope to censor. Whatever the statistics say, I suspect that, as with books, the oft-cited violence of contemporary entertainment is more an effect than a cause; it is not by blocking access to it in mediatised forms but by combatting it in real life and through humanistic education that one can oppose it most effectively.[345]

Although, as he admits, 'this is complex territory, and perhaps has as much to do with the dirty and violent corners of the human spirit' as with the content of art itself, Vargas Llosa comes down firmly on the side of liberals like Isaiah Berlin - the other figure in *La llamada de la tribu* who will warrant our attention here - in the Cold War-era struggle against Stalinist 'engineers of souls'. The chief political lesson of the 20th Century, Vargas Llosa argues, and the main reason for his alleged 'Thatcherism', is that large-scale, centrally planned spiritual engineering projects fail, fail and fail again. The difference between Berlin and Popper (and Berlin and Barthes) could not be clearer:

> Berlin believed passionately in ideas and the influence they could have over individuals and societies, although he also - good pragmatic spirit that he was - remained aware of the space which can open up between ideas and the words which claim to express them, and between ideas and the facts which give them material form. His books, for all their intellectual density, never descend into frivolous abstraction - as those of Barthes and Foucault are wont to do - […] but remain firmly tied to the experiences of ordinary people.[346]

Heaping praise on Berlin's *Against the Current* (1979) despite its author's obvious late-colonial biases[347], Vargas Llosa concludes that 'each essay in this magisterial volume reads like the chapter of a novel in which the action takes place in a world

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[345] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 2418-2428.

[346] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 2828-2834.

[347] See Pankaj Mishra, 'The Liberal Establishment is a Stranger to Self-Examination', https://www.thenation.com/article/culture/qa-pankaj-mishra-bland-fanatics/, 23/11/2020 (accessed 5/12/2020):

> [The] curious charge that nonwhite peoples are vulnerable to a sterile identity politics or politics of recognition was, of course, made well before Lilla and Fukuyama turned it into useful talking points for the mainstream scribes. It pops up in Isaiah Berlin's famous discussion of liberty…

of thought, and where the heroes and villains are ideas rather than individuals'[348]. Outflanking a philosopher once again, however, Vargas Llosa shows that Berlin's sense of 'fair play', which allows his narrative voice to 'disappear' into the words of others (thereby offering the reader the illusion that he has no ideas or arguments of his own), is really just one rhetorical strategy among many:

> A body of thought which does not appear to exist in its own right, and which arrives to us indirectly via that which concrete individuals from different times and cultures thought at certain points in their own lives, or which pretends to be born not from the creative effort of a single individual but rather from the contrasts among the philosophical and political ideas of others and from the errors and gaps in these conceptions, can in fact be more convincing than that which presents itself, explicit and arrogant, as a theory of its own. Berlin's discretion and modesty are, in reality, a mark of his talent.[349]

This 'discretion and modesty' are also movingly evoked by Vargas Llosa to describe how close the world came to missing out on Berlin's work altogether: 'If, for all his genius, Berlin had not also aroused so much warmth and sympathy around himself,' his work and reputation as one of the century's great conversationalists might have been lost; the engagement of graduate student Henry Hardy and friend Michael Ignatieff, in particular, saved Berlin from the dust of academic philosophy journals: 'His case is unique for the Olympic disinterest with which he regarded the publication and dissemination of his essays; he believed quite sincerely that they did not deserve the honour.'[350] Ignatieff's biography in particular is 'an affectionate and loyal book, but also an independent one, true to Berlin's own principle of fair play; it does not hesitate to highlight errors and shortcomings as well as virtues and excellences'[351]:

> Behind the dinner guest able to charm and regale his hosts with the richness and diversity of his anecdotes, the fluidity of his expression and the power of his memory, there was a human being torn by the moral conflicts of his age, which he diagnosed earlier and better than anyone else - the genuine tensions between liberty and equality, order and justice, atheism and religion - clinging as he did so to a liberalism fearful of an unrestricted liberty in which the wolf can enjoy all the lambs he can eat. […] In late October 1997, just a few days before his death, Berlin called his biographer to his Oxford home to correct a few details that his memory had jogged free, and to remind Ignatieff, in no uncertain terms, that his wife Aline had been the centre of his life, and that he owed her an unpayable debt.[352]

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[348] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 2842-2843.

[349] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 2857-2864.

[350] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 2874-2881.

[351] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 2900-2901.

[352] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 2908-2921.

Vargas Llosa's portrait of Berlin will endeavour - in a spirit embodying both British philosophical 'fair play' and a Peruvian novelistic dash of more - to capture the main lessons from Berlin's intellectual biography, from episodes of anti-Communism to Zionism ('he defends the creation of Israel with solid arguments, but fails even to mention the prior existence in Palestine […] of the Arabs'[353] etc.), all with a view to creating a a front of resistance to the 'call of the tribe' and a broad defence of the life of the individual spirit (or what an Oxford intellectual like Berlin might have preferred to call 'the life of the mind'). Loyal to Berlin's 'indirect method', Vargas Llosa himself, in this chapter and in *La llamada de la tribu* as a whole, explores his own views 'via other thinkers, in which he finds clues and oracles'[354] of his own thought ('reading Isaiah Berlin, I saw with clarity something I had only ever vaguely intuited,'[355] he says of Berlin's critique of utopianism). Given the ultimate incompatibility of human values, the goal of humanistic engagement is to secure space for the individual human spirit to make its own free and 'embodied' choices ('harmony without uniformity', one might say), rather than to force consensus through the violence of an imposed value catalogue:

> *Liberté. Fraternité. Égalité.* The generous movement which claimed to be establishing the rule of reason on Earth and bringing these simple and uncontroversial values to life proved to the world, with its repeated butcheries and multiple frustrations, that social reality was more tumultuous and unpredictable than the abstractions the *philosophes* proposed in their prescription formulae for human happiness. The most unexpected of results emerged from this experiment, though many still refuse to accept it: namely, that these three values, far from enjoying a relationship of deep and magnetic attraction, actually repel each other in practice.[356]

These irreducible moral dilemmas play out, however, not only at the level of society, but also, crucially, at the level of the 'intimacy itself of individual conscience'[357]: Machiavelli and Montesquieu are among the early modern 'oracles' of this 'optimistic scepticism' which, by denying utopian and historicist visions of human destiny, returns spiritual freedom to the individual; Alexander Herzen is a more modern voice in this ongoing human conversation: 'Herzen was one of the first to reject the idea that there is a glorious future for humanity to which present generations must be forced to sacrifice themselves. Like Herzen, Berlin often reminds us that no justice in history has resulted from political injustice, and that no liberty has been born from oppression.'[358] The liberated individual, in other words, is the only possible root of ethicality: 'If there is no single utopian solution to our

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[353] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 2950-2951.

[354] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 2959-2960.

[355] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 2865-2866.

[356] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 2973-2978.

[357] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 2985-2986.

[358] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 2993-2997.

problems, but rather only multiple shifting solutions, our obligation is to live on constant [spiritual] alert.'[359]

This is, as Confucius himself admitted, hard work, though one may intuit the existence and 'call' of the burdensome Way, of a 'unity in virtue with Heaven', all the same, even as one gives way to earthly pleasures. Berlin himself was no exception to this rule: 'There is no doubt that his social life made him happy, and that he enjoyed the conversation and company of people not always as learned as he was, but at least powerful or rich.'[360] Nevertheless, on the odd occasion that the great philosopher and cosmopolitan diplomat encountered an intellectual and spiritual equal, he admitted that he could be transformed: the self-proclaimed 'most important event'[361] of Berlin's life was his famous all-nighter with Russian poet Anna Akhmatova - the head of the 'spiritual and poetic resistance to Stalinist tyranny'[362]- in Leningrad in 1945.

And yet, the great defender of 'negative freedom' would insist that individual 'freedom *from*', not intrusive and paternalistic 'freedom *to*', was the ultimate guarantor of such intimate spiritual encounters:

> The less external authority is exerted over my conduct, and the more I can determine this conduct in an autonomous fashion by recourse to my own motivations - my needs, ambitions and personal fantasies - and without the interference of foreign wills, the freer I am. This is [Berlin's] 'negative' concept of liberty.
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> It is more an individual than a social concept, modern *par excellence*. It is born in societies that have reached an advanced stage of civilisation together with a certain affluence. It supposes that the sovereignty of the individual must be respected because it is, ultimately, the root of human creativity, of intellectual and artistic development, and of scientific progress. If the individual spirit is suffocated, conditioned, or mechanised, the source of creativity dries up, and the result is a grey and mediocre world of ants and robots.[363]

Note, however, the words 'a certain affluence': the freedom of movement, Vargas Llosa admits, can mean little to someone (like Akhmatova in 1945) with no money or political freedom to travel.[364] Both negative and positive freedom, moreover, can be, and have been, perverted by dictatorial governments: the challenge is to 'achieve a non-zero-sum transaction between the two liberties', a 'very difficult and always precarious' task.[365]

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[359] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 3000-3002.

[360] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 3037-3039.

[361] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 3062.

[362] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 3056.

[363] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 3077-3083.

[364] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 3101.

[365] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 3118-3129.

Of equal relevance to the emergence of 'Spiritual Humanism' as more than an another -ism, and as a dynamic 'World Ethos' of 'harmony without uniformity', is Berlin's insistence on the importance of Archilocus's ancient distinction between 'hedgehogs' - those creative minds with one big idea which can devolve into a boring and totalising explanation of life as a whole - and 'foxes' - full of diverse stories and interests but without an overarching, transtemporal vision of context and meaning. With Berlin's help - and therefore with the indirect help of all those on whom Berlin himself is humble enough to call - Vargas Llosa charts his own course between the Scylla of foxdom and the Charybdis of hedeghoghood:

> Berlin shows, with the example of Tolstoy, how a hedgehog and a fox can coexist in the same person. The genius with the greatest ever eye for novelistic detail, the voracious describer of human diversity and the protoplasmatic differentiation of the individual events which together form our daily reality, the fierce opponent of philosophical and historicist abstraction and rationalist synthesis - the fox - lived under the hypnotic temptation of a unitary and central narrative for life, and ended up falling to it twice, first in the historical determinism of *War and Peace*, and then with his religious turn in his final years.
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> I believe that the example of Tolstoy is one of many reminders that we foxes live in a certain envy of hedgehogs. Life is ultimately somehow more livable for them. Although we both face the same fate, for some reason suffering and dying is easier, less intolerable - easy even sometimes - when one feels one is in safe possession of a universal and central truth, a sharp stone within this mechanism of life whose function one feels one understands. But the existence of foxes is also, for hedgehogs at risk of growing fat and bored, an eternal challenge, like the Sirens' call of future novelty which seduced Ulysses. For while it is easier to live in clarity and order, it is an irredeemable human attribute to be willing to renounce this ease, and to risk shadow and disorder for something more.[366]

All truly 'novel' encounters with such 'Sirenic' people and art exercise their influence on our very conceptions of our own past and of the meaning of our lives as a whole up to the present moment. To lose this sense of the 'open society' as an extension of the 'open self' is to fall victim to the false security and eternity - and ultimately to the boredom and sterility - of the static and infinitely repeatable 'call of the tribe': good foxes, it is true, cannot resist hedgehogging, but good hedgehogs, Vargas Llosa concludes, will never want to give up foxing either. To do either would be to renounce, altogether, the life of the individual spirit.

This is not, however, to give up on the idea of a 'World Ethos' in some moral sense; on the contrary, such 'precarious' balancing acts as those between positive and negative freedom, hedgehogging and foxing, and the other conflicting claims in Berlin's polyphonic and changing universe, make ethical engagement over time meaningful and possible:

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[366] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 3196-3207.

> History is not made by politicians alone, and consists of more than public events. In Berlin's civil pantheon, scholars, thinkers and teachers all feature prominently. [… And] although he never says it in so many words, one sees from his apportioning of garlands that he thought it was difficult, and perhaps impossible, ever fully to dissociate an individual's intellectual and artistic greatness from her moral track record.[367]

This does not mean, however, that one should limit oneself to the study of friends; Berlin made a career of listening to his enemies as well. One example is the seemingly unpleasant J.G. Hamann (1730-1788):

> Hamann's truly unique contribution to the human conversation, Berlin argues, was his offer of a conception of human nature at a time when the *encyclopédistes* and *philosophes* of the Enlightenment were busy promoting a progress-driven and rational vision all around him. The individual human being for Hamann […] was sovereign and unique, and could not be dissolved in any collectivity, despite the claims of those who invented theories of collective progress ('fictions', in Hamann's brisk assessment) in which the possession of science alone would bury ignorance and abolish injustice. Human beings are distinct, and so too are their destinies; their primary source of wisdom is neither reason nor scientific knowledge, but rather their own lived experiences and the ever-accumulating sum of their embodied existence as a whole.[368]

The flipside of listening to one's enemies, naturally enough, is the simultaneous willingness to turn one's critical gaze on [in Berlin's case liberal] friends: 'Berlin always held social-democratic doubts about *laissez-faire* and repeated them one last time just weeks before his death. […] He could not bring himself to defend unrestricted economic freedom without a certain anguish because 'this is what filled our coalmines with children.'[369] The principle of 'fair play', then, applied - at least in the intellectual corner of spiritual life - in every direction; Vargas Llosa can only repeat his admiration for Berlin's borderline-superhuman ability to embody this principle:

> How was it possible that such an unbribable defender of the democratic system, so hostile to every form of collectivism, was able to write one of the most impartial studies ever of Karl Marx? Likewise, this visceral enemy of intolerance was able to pen the greatest essay of his day on Joseph de Maistre and the origins of fascism. His disgust for nationalism did not prevent him, and on the contrary induced him, to study Herder […] with a zeal which it would not be altogether wrong to describe as amorous. The explanation is very simple, and describes Berlin in a single quick stroke. As a form of intellectual discipline, he said, […] it was ultimately better to read

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[367] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 3245-3248.

[368] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 3294-3299.

[369] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 3332-3335.

> the enemy, for this might actually put our intellectual defences to the test. I have always been interested in discovering where the ideas I have today are weak and wrong. Why? So that I can improve or abandon them.' Those who have taken the time to read Berlin will know that he is not just posturing here, and that his thought really *was* refined and enriched by all this sparring with his enemies.[370]

Vargas Llosa offers corresponding praise for Berlin's 'Stendhalian' prose style, which 'gives his essays a certain novelistic quality and contagious human warmth'[371], and yet concludes that even Berlin, for all his energy, was unable to capture life as a whole.[372] No individual human spirit could; even the 'dark, confused, sick and fevered conception' of a Georges Bataille, for example, for all its distance from the 'optimistic scepticism' of Berlin and the other modern liberal figures portrayed in *La llamada de la tribu*, will always deserve its seat at the humanities' conversation table: 'I have the suspicion that life is something which ultimately smelts such enemies into a single diamond.'[373]

Before it does so, however, Vargas Llosa wants to thank one of his friends and 'teachers', and to highlight the sharp old Confucian rod linking gratitude and shame:

> I had written a series of short articles on him which would later serve as a prologue to the Spanish edition of *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, in which I committed the barbaric error of saying that he had been born in Lithuania instead of Latvia. 'Well, never mind son,' he said kindly; 'When I was born it was all Russia anyway.' *Gracias, maestro.*[374]

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[370] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 3337-3346.

[371] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 3359-3361.

[372] The ills of Western imperialism represented a particular blindspot. Mishra again:

> Preferring freedom from interference over the power of self-determination, Berlin did not or could not engage with what positive liberty might mean to newly liberated or forged societies and nation-states, except Israel. To do so would have meant acknowledging Europeans and Americans as racist imperialists—simply inconceivable when you are fighting this allegation from your adversary in the Cold War. So all Berlin said—and he never even uses the words "colonialism" or "anti-colonialism" while writing at the height of decolonization—is that the nonwhite peoples wish to secure "recognition" rather than true liberty, which, of course, white males like him are busy figuring out. One sign is that they prefer to be rudely treated by people of their own race than those "cautious, just, gentle, well-meaning administrators from outside"—Berlin's code words for white imperialists. (Pankaj Mishra, 'The Liberal Establishment is a Stranger to Self-Examination')

[373] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 3371.

[374] Vargas Llosa, *La llamada de la tribu*, 3373-3376.

7. David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*

> *Wealth, if it is to be generated, must trickle all the way down. Only such a rule, Rawls thought, could maintain society as a cooperative venture between willing participants. Even the poorest would know that they were being helped, not hindered, by the success of others. 'In justice as fairness'—Rawls's name for his philosophy— 'men agree to share one another's fate.'*
>
> *[…] The more that group identity is elevated above universal values, the greater the threat. In America some on the left describe those who have adopted their views as 'woke'. Some fans of Donald Trump […] say they have been 'red pilled' (a reference to the film* The Matrix*, in which a red pill lets characters realise the true nature of reality). In both cases, the language suggests some hidden wisdom that only the enlightened have discovered. It is not far from there to saying that such a revelation is necessary to be truly free—an argument that Berlin warned is an early step on the path to tyranny.*
>
> *The good news is that pluralism and truly liberal values remain popular. Many people want to be treated as individuals, not as part of a group; they attend to what is being said, not just to who is saying it. […] Backers of liberal democracy would do well to remember that the great postwar liberals, in one way or another, all emphasised how individuals must be free to resist the oppression of large groups. That, surely, is where liberal thought begins.*
>
> *The Economist*, 30/8/2018

'Souls cross ages like clouds cross skies'; so reads the blurb to David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), as if the novel will offer the same pound-shop recipe for reincarnation that the 2012 Hollywood film adaptation does. Such too-easy sentimentality could not, however, be further from the truth of this extraordinary work of fiction: Mitchell boldly endeavours to tie the six 'novels within the novel' of *Cloud Atlas* together in the conscience of the individual reader, and to return her to her present life not with a sense that history has an inexorable or collective goal, but rather that the individual moral life - from the 19th-century Chatham Islands to 20th-century Anglo-American adventures and a dystopian futuristic Korea and beyond - has a significance beyond its immediate consequences, something close to Philip Larkin's 'what will survive of us is love'.

<u>The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing</u>

Adam Ewing is an upright guy in a frontier land: 'I do not break my Sabbath fast in a whorehouse,'[375] he declares, before we know exactly where and when in the 'Pacific' we are. We find out soon enough:

> Henry asked if missionaries were now active in the Chathams, at which Mr Evans & Mr. D'Arnoq exchanged looks, & the former informed us, 'Nay, the Maori don't take kindly to us *Pakeha* spoiling their Moriori with too much civilisation.'
>
> I questioned if such an ill as 'too *much* civilisation' existed or no? Mr D'Arnoq told me, 'If there is no God west of the Horn, why there's none of your Constitution's *All men created equal*, neither, Mr. Ewing.' The nomenclatures 'Maori' & 'Pakeha' I knew from the *Prophetess*'s sojourn in the Bay of Islands, but I begged to know who or what 'Moriori' might signify. My query unlocked a Pandora's Box of history, detailing the decline & fall of the aboriginals of Chatham.[376]

What 'moral' does Adam draw from the story he hears of Maori slaughter of *mana*-preserving Moriori pacifists? Since the Maori had proven themselves such 'apt pupils of the English in "the dark arts of colonisation"', then perhaps, Adam decides, 'peace, though beloved of our Lord, is a cardinal virtue only if your neighbours share your conscience.'[377] Later the same night, however, after an evening of drinking and political discussion in the local tavern, Adam records in his journal that he has heard 'as many truths as men. Occasionally, I glimpse a truer Truth, hiding in imperfect simulacrums of itself, but as I approach it, it bestirs itself & moves deeper into the thorny swamp of dissent.'[378] Still, Adam takes the Moriori story, as it is narrated to him, more or less to heart: 'The prospect of Walker & his ilk felling the trees and selling the dendroglyphs to collectors offends my conscience. A sentimentalist I may be, but I do not wish to be the agent of the Moriori's final violation.'[379] And yet he admits to being deeply resentful ('I am guilty on *no counts* save Christian trustingness and relentless ill fortune'[380]) when pressured to save the life of a concrete Moriori stowaway, Autua:

> Cursing my conscience singly, my fortune doubly and Mr D'Arnoq trebly, I bade him sheath his knife & for Heaven's sake conceal himself lest one of the crew hear and come knocking. […] I was tempted to make a dash for the door & howl for help, but in the eyes of God my word was my bond, even to an Indian.
>
> […] The savage thanked me for the kindness & ate that humble fare as if it were a Presidential Banquet. I did not confess my true motives, *viz.*, the

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[375] David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2014(2004)), p. 7.

[376] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 10.

[377] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 16.

[378] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 17.

[379] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 21.

[380] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 26.

> fuller his stomach, the less like he was to consume me, but instead asked him why, during his flogging [at the hands of his Maori owner], he had smiled at me. 'Pain is strong, aye - but friends' eyes, more strong.' I told him that he knows next to nothing about me & I know nothing about him. He jabbed at his eyes & jabbed at mine, as if that single gesture were ample explanation.[381]

Mitchell is asking us to put to one side any specialist knowledge we may have here of the historical record, and to focus instead on the relationship between two imagined human beings. The itinerant Moriori seaman Autua has 'seen too much o' the world' and therefore 'ain't good slave', but he was 'called' back to slavery in his native land 'so I see her death so I know the truth. […] Then last week, Missa Ewing, I see you & I know, you save I, I know it.'[382]

Meanwhile, a predatory onboard doctor, Henry Goose, is busy trying to kill Adam in medicinal instalments. Adam will eventually be forced to pick sides; despite his apparent racist aversion towards Autua and gratitude towards Goose ('my doctor is an uncut diamond of the first water'[383]), the modern reader intuits the path the story must take before Adam himself does: although Henry 'warns' Adam that 'it is one thing to throw a blackie a bone, but quite another to take him on for life', and that 'friendships between races […] can never surpass the affection between a loyal gun-dog and its master'[384], Autua and Adam will, in their own unique, concrete and therefore actually inspiring way, prove otherwise.

<u>Letters from Zedelghem</u>

> *What value are education, breeding and talent if one doesn't have a pot to piss in?*
>
> R.F.

Robert Frobisher, 'Son of an Ecclesiastical Somebody', is entitled almost beyond belief, but also immediately likable ('sobering to think how one accursed night of baccarat can alter a man's social standing so irreversibly'[385]). The aspiring musician is determined to do it his own way, but this means risking ruin and relying constantly on the charity of others, chiefly his friend Rufus Sixsmith, to whom his letters (dated 1931) are addressed: 'No, before you say it, I *can't* go running back to Pater with yet another *cri de coeur*. Would validate every poisonous word he said about me.

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[381] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 27-29.

[382] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 31, 33.

[383] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 37.

[384] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 38.

[385] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 44.

Would rather jump off Waterloo bridge and let Old Father Thames humble me. Mean it.'[386] Frobisher would prefer to risk death than live an inauthentic life: if others help him, great; if not, well, at least he tried:

> My daydream had me travelling to Belgium, persuading Vyvyan Ayrs he needed to employ me as an amanuensis, accepting his offer to tutor me, shooting through the musical firmament, winning fame and fortune commensurate to my gifts, obliging Pater to admit that, yes, the son he disinherited is *the* Robert Frobisher, greatest British composer of his time.
>
> Why not? Had no better plan. You groan and shake your head, Sixsmith, I know, but you smile too, which is why I love you.[387]

Such transparency can scarcely be described as manipulation; Frobisher is asking Sixsmith for help *after* he needs it, not before:

> Three mighty blasts on the fog-horn, engines changed timbre, felt the ship cast off, went on deck to watch Albion withdraw into drizzly murk. No going back now; consequences of what I'd done struck home. R.V.W. conducted *Sea Symphony* in the Orchestra of the Mind, *Sail forth, steer for the deep waters only, Reckless, O Soul, Exploring, I with thee, and thou with me.*[388]

Unable to purchase transport in Bruges to reach Ayrs's house, Robert soon wins over local help:

> No bus, no train-line, and twenty-five miles was the devil of a walk. Asked if I could borrow a policeman's bicycle for an indefinite period. Told me that was most irregular. Assured him *I* was most irregular, and outlined the nature of my mission to Ayrs […] in the service of European music. Repeated my request. Implausible truth can serve one better than plausible fiction, and now was such a time.[389]

On the way, Robert feels the presence of his older brother Adrian, fallen in the Great War ('Adrian would never have marched along the road I bicycled out of Bruges (too deep in Hun territory) but nonetheless felt an affinity with my brother by virtue of breathing the same air of the same land'[390]). Arriving at Zedelghem, Robert is once again able to 'charm 'em sufficiently', though without revealing his true financial situation ('the more desperate the case, the more reluctant the donor'): 'The old goat wants me, it seems, but only if I'm pathetic with gratitude. If my pocket book had allowed me to go, I'd have hired a cab back to Bruges and renounced the

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[386] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 44.

[387] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 45.

[388] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 46.

[389] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 48.

[390] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 49.

whole errant idea.'[391] As it is, however, Frobisher has no better place in the world to be; he locks his financial, professional and romantic destiny to Vyvyan Ayrs, his wife Jocasta, and their teenage daughter Eva.[392] What could possibly go wrong?

At least as far as his vocation as a musician is concerned, Robert is initially delighted with his decision to stay:

> Sometimes Ayrs will ask for an artistic judgment, something like 'D'you think this chord works, Frobisher?' or 'Is this passage in keeping with the whole?' If I say no, Ayrs asks me what I'd suggest as a substitute, and once or twice he's even used my amendment. Quite sobering. People in the future will be studying this music.
>
> […] Old, blind and sick as Ayrs is, he could hold his own in a college debating society, though I notice he rarely proposes alternatives for the systems he ridicules. 'Liberality? Timidity in the rich!'; 'Socialism? The younger brother of a decrepit despotism, which it wants to succeed'; 'Conservatives? Adventitious liars, whose doctrine of free will is their greatest deception.' What sort of state *does* he want? 'None! The better organised the state, the duller its humanity.'
>
> Irascible as Ayrs is, he's one of few men in Europe whose influence I want my own creativity informed by. Musicologically, he's Janus-headed. One Ayrs looks back to Romanticism's deathbed, the other looks to the future. This is the Ayrs whose gaze I follow. Watching him use counterpoint and mix colours refines my own language in exciting ways. Already, my short time at Zedelghem has taught me more than three years at the throne of Mackerras the Jackass with his Merry Band of Onanists.[393]

As the unavoidable adventures with the secretive Eva (and eventually her more forthcoming mother too) play out slowly in the background, the connection between Adam Ewing and Frobisher at last becomes clear, and Frobisher wants to know more:

> Poking through an alcove of books in my room I came across a curious dismembered volume. […] From what little I can glean, it's the edited journal of a voyage from Sydney to California by a notary of San Francisco named Adam Ewing. Mention is made of the gold rush, so I suppose we are in 1849 or 1850. […] Something shifty about the journal's authenticity - seems too structured for a genuine diary, and its language doesn't ring quite true - but who would bother forging such a journal, and why?
>
> To my great annoyance, the pages cease, mid-sentence, some forty pages later, where the binding is worn through. Searched high and low for the rest of the damn thing. No luck. […] Would you ask Otto Jansch on

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[391] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 50-51, 53.

[392] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 56.

[393] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 60-61.

> Caithness Street if he knows anything about this Adam Ewing? A half-read book is a half-finished love affair.[394]

As Frobisher's love affair with Ayrs descends into bitterness and rivalry ('an old sick prig is still a prig'[395]) and the absurd love affair with his wife Jocasta culminates in 'bedroom farce' ('"my husband loves you," said the wife, dressing'[396]), Frobisher is forced to start drawing his life lessons from a chapter slowly drawing to a close:

> My employer's profoundest, or only, wish is to create a minaret that inheritors of Progress a thousand years from now will point to and say, 'Look, there is Vyvyan Ayrs!'
>
> How vulgar, this hankering after immortality, how vain, how false. Composers are merely scribblers of cave paintings. One writes music because winter is eternal and because if one didn't, the wolves and blizzards would be at one's throat all the sooner.
>
> […] Have agreed to V.A.'s proposal that I stay on here until next summer, at least. No cosmic resonance entered my decision - just artistic advantage, financial practicalities, and because J. might have some sort of collapse if I went.[397]

<u>'Half-lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery'</u>

> *'Forgive me for flaunting my experience, but you have no conception of what a misspent life constitutes.'*
>
> R.S. to L.R.

One is relieved to find that it is the patient and generous addressee of Frobisher's 'letters from the Front', Rufus Sixsmith, who is responsible, thirty-odd years later, for humanity's nuclear fate. Sixsmith cannot, however, save humanity on his own; Frobisher helped make him who he was ('these letters are,' decades on, still 'what he would save from a burning building'[398]), and Sixsmith's own scientific report on the profit-seeking misadventures of the Seaboard Corporation will only reach the public if other individuals sacrifice themselves along the way. The first of these is journalist Luisa Rey, with whom Sixsmith is trapped in a California elevator at the height of the drug-addled Hippie movement. But a dead man - Luisa's father - is the key who unlocks their friendship:

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[394] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 64-65.

[395] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 71

[396] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 81.

[397] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 82, 86.

[398] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 112.

> ‘I subscribed to *Illustrated Planet* in 1967 to read your father’s dispatches from Vietnam. Many thousands did. Lester Rey was one of only four or five journalists who grasped the war from the Asian perspective, so I’m fascinated to hear how a policeman became one of the best correspondents of his generation.[399]

After an hour of storytelling and joking (‘while her mother and stepfather crisp themselves to toast on the beach in the name of Leisure, [my niece] Megan and I knock around [astrophysics] equations in the bar’[400]), Sixsmith, running on instinct (‘I feel I’ve known you for *years*, not ninety minutes’[401]), comes to the point:

> ‘A hypothetical question Miss Rey. What price would you pay, as a journalist I mean, to protect a source?’
>
> Luisa doesn’t consider the question. ‘If I believed in the issue? Any.’
>
> ‘Prison, for example, for contempt of court?’
>
> ‘If it came to it, yes.’
>
> ‘Would you be prepared to … compromise your own safety?’
>
> ‘Well…’ Luisa does consider this, ‘I guess I’d have to.’
>
> ‘Have to? How so?’
>
> ‘My father braved booby-trapped marshes and the wrath of generals for the sake of *his* journalistic integrity. What kind of a mockery of *his* life would it be if his daughter bailed when things got a little tough?’
>
> *Tell her.* Sixsmith opens his mouth to tell her everything - the whitewashing at Seaboard, the blackmailing, the corruption - but without warning the elevator lurches, rumbles, and resumes its steady descent.[402]

Like most if not all other authors in this anthology, Mitchell wants to make a deep point about the meaning of vocation in *Cloud Atlas*: without a sense of it, our individuality means nothing, and few people - too few - seem to have it. Seaboard insider and eventual whistleblower Joe Napier will, however, eventually join the cause of Sixsmith, Megan and Luisa:

> *The real miracle, Joe Napier ruminates, was getting eleven out of twelve scientists to forget the existence of a nine-month inquiry.* […] *Like Grimaldi says, every conscience has an off-switch hidden somewhere.* […] *And Joe Napier? Has his conscience got an off-switch?* He sips his bitter black coffee. *Hey, buddy, get off my case. I’m only following orders. Eighteen months till I retire, then it’s off to fish in sweet rushing rivers until I turn into a goddamn heron.*

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[399] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 92.

[400] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 96.

[401] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 97.

[402] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 96-97.

Milly, his deceased wife, watches her husband from the photograph on his console desk.[403]

This clear reference to the classic film *Twelve Angry Men*, which dramatises one juror's ability to use moral authority to persuade those who would prefer a more convenient outcome, takes us to the absolute heart of *Cloud Atlas*, and to the meaning of any 'Spiritual Humanism': 'Do, Luisa says finally, whatever you can't *not* do.'[404] This line between what is acceptable and what is not, however, is different for each of us, and will depend on our moral - though perhaps 'sentimental' or 'humanistic' or 'spiritual' is the better word here - educations; those able to resist offers of fame and fortune in the name of sacrifice for something beyond themselves will *all* have personal examples of people who have embodied such sacrifice: for Sixsmith, it is, in his own self-aware way, Frobisher; for Luisa, it is her father; and for Napier, it is both Luisa *and* her father: Napier recognises, after working with the honest cop-cum-journalist Lester Rey all those years ago, that he cannot but forgo his retirement package and help Rey's daughter when destiny brings her to his door. It is not a rational argument which eventually convinces him, in other words, but a concrete narrative embodiment of a wider spiritual principle. Mitchell arguably overdoes the supernatural stuff with his mentions of Napier's dead wife looking on, Luisa's birthmark (which resembles the one described by Frobisher - 'I just don't believe in this crap,' Luisa says) or her claim that she has heard Frobisher's surviving *Cloud Atlas Symphony* somewhere before (and myriad other contrived, Nabokovian 'coincidences' in this episode and across the novel as a whole), but on the other hand, they all serve reflexively to point to their own redundance. The extent to which one 'believes in this crap' is beside the point: what matters is the spiritual content of individual relationships between concrete beings. These can take intercultural forms (Ewing and Autua), epistolary forms (Frobisher and Sixsmith), intergenerational forms (Sixsmith and Luisa), professional forms (Napier and Lester Rey), and even, as we will see, interspecies forms. This intimacy of trust, moreover, can emerge in minutes or even seconds under the right background conditions (observe Megan's relationship with Luisa), when two strangers know they share the story of a third trusted person (this is, of course, how art in general spreads, and how teaching in the humanities - as distinct from the sciences - works). Autua's story, and the story of his people, survives because Adam Ewing - the 'first man' in the galactic world of *Cloud Atlas* - believed him *and acted on it*, Frobisher believed Ewing *and acted on it*, Sixsmith trusted Frobisher *and acted on it*, Luisa Rey trusted Sixsmith *and acted on it*, and so on throughout the novel: true to the refrain that 'a good teacher never knows where her influence stops', Mitchell wants to persuade us that Spiritual Humanism is its own reward, and that we can have no conceivable idea where our local spiritual deeds will end (witness the mindboggling links and centuries of intimate causation from Autua to Zachry, or Adam to Zachry - A to Z in any case - in Mitchell's mad concoction of a novel). The enemies of such 'Spiritual Humanism' are utterly clear: the 'reliable

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[403] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 103-104. Italics original.

[404] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 135.

deity' of 'market research'[405], cosy retirement packages in return for silence, and a general refusal to whistleblow when a situation to which we 'cannot say no' arises. Joe Napier himself, reluctantly but inevitably, will reach this conclusion, just as Sixsmith does: '*You couldn't buy me, so you tried intimidation. I let you, Lord forgive me, but no longer. I'm not sitting on my conscience any longer.*'[406]

Like Frobisher, Luisa Rey's vocational pursuits are initially thwarted by a lack of money: she is forced to accept a job as a gossip columnist ('ah, but is it *well-written* simpering gossip?'[407] Sixsmith asks her in the elevator). Seaboard assassin Bill Smoke, by contrast (and unlike Frobisher), is *coldly* uninterested in money, as no one with a true 'vocation' ever really should be ('because you don't do it for the money, you forgot how easily littler mortals can be bought,'[408] Seaboard lackey Fay Li says of Smoke much later in the story); there is, Mitchell wants to stress, an important humanistic divide between *sacrificial* indifference to money and the straightforward psychopathy which revels in violence for its own sake.

A true sense of 'vocation', moreover, entails a willingness to think beyond fixed moral rules: 'Luisa wonders: *What level of deceit is permissible in journalism?* She remembers her father's answer, one afternoon in the hospital garden: *Did I ever lie to get my story? Ten-mile-high whoppers every day before breakfast, if it got me one inch closer to the truth.*'[409] Bill Smoke, on the other hand, represents the logic of self-justifying conformity and evil which Mitchell wants to attack with all his might, and from every possible angle, throughout the novel: '*A tragedy to loved ones, a big fat nothing to everyone else, and a problem solved for my clients. I'm just the instrument of my clients' will. If it wasn't me it'd be the next fixer in the* Yellow Pages. *Blame its owner, blame its maker, but don't blame the gun*.'[410] *Cloud Atlas* is one long, desperate cry of the autonomous individual spirit against this culture of corporate excuse-making, an attempt to prove how untrue Smoke's 'Yellow Pages' claim ultimately is, even in a hypercapitalist modern society: moral exceptionalism and crafty whistleblowing, though utterly worthwhile for their own sakes, also survive in the most mysterious, indirect and beautiful ways, while blind service and violence, however amply remunerated, never do anything to change the existing structures of the world, and ultimately disappear from the world altogether, annihilating their perpetrators in the process.

This unlikely thesis, however, is only made plausible by a specific narrative linking one source of spiritual goodness with another: Frobisher's letters to Sixsmith are the link between Autua and Ewing, on the one hand, and Lester and Luisa Rey on the other, and so on into the rest of the book. Beyond our religious or superstitious convictions, it is demonstrably our 'spiritual humanity', Mitchell argues - our unpredictable existence in the stories of others - which survives of us to convey retrospective meaning on our lives. There is, in the end, relatively little of

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[405] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 102.

[406] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 108.

[407] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 94.

[408] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 437.

[409] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 140 (italics original).

[410] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 113 (italics original).

interest in the figure of Bill Smoke or your favourite real-life villain, for all evil is boringly conformist, selfish and gratuitous. Ewing, Frobisher, Sixsmith and Luisa, by contrast, are each interesting in their own ways, and their relationships with each other all mean something - if not to them (indeed, they don't even exist, and don't even see the whole of which they are a part), then to Mitchell himself and the readers of *Cloud Atlas*, who undeniably do. In Mitchell's story, Luisa 'steps into the shower, but her mind walks the passageways of Zedelghem chateau'[411], just as Frobisher is brought by Vyvyan Ayrs's library to thoughts of Adam Ewing.

Parallel to all this, Seaboard boss Alberto Grimaldi, 'bored by an interminable story about Henry Kissinger's schooldays' being told to him by the head of the Environmental Protection Agency, 'addresses an imaginary audience on the subject of power':

> *'"Power." What do we mean? "The ability to determine another man's luck." You men of science, building tycoons and opinion formers: my jet could take off from La Guardia, and before I touched down in BY you'd be a nobody. You Wall Street moguls, elected officials, judges, I might need more time to knock you off your perches, but your eventual downfall would be just as total.'* Grimaldi checks with the head of the EPA to ensure his attention isn't being missed - it isn't. *'Yet how is it some men attain mastery over others while the vast majority live and die as minions, as livestock? The answer is a holy trinity. First: God-given gifts of charisma. Second: the discipline to nurture these gifts to maturity, for though humanity's topsoil is fertile with talent, only one seed in ten thousand will ever flower - for want of discipline. […] Third: the will to power. This is the enigma at the core of the various destinies of men. What drives some to accrue power where the majority of their compatriots lose, mishandle, or eschew power? Is it addiction? Wealth? Survival? Natural selection? I propose these are all pretexts and results, not the root cause. The only answer can be, "There is no 'Why'. This is our nature." "Who" and "What" run deeper than "Why".'*[412]

I take this to be a deep commentary on the nature and function of humanistic education: Mitchell is arguing, both here within the novel and with the novel as a whole, for a vision of the humanities as actively character-*forming*: what we spiritually experience has a direct influence not only on what we observably *do*, but on who we most intimately *are*. Those who reach for power instead of eschewing it do so because their life experience has not taught them to *be* any better. Those who, like Ewing, Frobisher, Sixsmith, Luisa and others in the novel understand the spiritual nature of a true vocation do so because they have been sentimentally educated for it through concrete human relationships and intimate artistic experiences; their examples provide a light, in turn, for others, but only if their stories are told in a language the individual reader can emotionally grasp: not all readers of *Cloud Atlas* will understand it as the loud call for Spiritual Humanism that I have described here. Mitchell is doing what he can, but the battle is always to find personalised narratives to counter power-seeking evil wherever one encounters it,

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[411] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 124.

[412] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 131-132 (italics original).

not to find a generalisable scientific formula for eradicating it once and for all. *Cloud Atlas* is self-consciously striving, as all art does, to be a kind of 'multiplier', but in reality, the business of character formation cannot be medicalised or massified, at least not in any 'portable' sense[413]: it is always and everywhere an individual experience, not a scientific description, formula or product.

Luisa erupts into Joe Napier's life like an unavoidable spiritual volcano:

> He recalls Luisa as a precocious little six-year-old. *Must be two decades since I saw you at the last 10th Precinct Station reunion. Of all the professions that lippy little girl could have entered, of all the reporters who could have caught the scent of Sixsmith's death, why Lester Rey's daughter? Why so soon before I retire? Who dreamt up this sick joke?*[414]

'The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish'

> *'Tell her to go to hell,' warned my spirit, 'or you'll regret it later.'*
> *'Tell her what she wants to hear,' shrieked my nervous system, 'or you'll regret it now.'*

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[413] See Terry Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God*, (Yale University Press, 2015) for an expanded discussion of the humanities' failure to assume this modern mantle as a sufficiently 'portable' bearer of 'spiritual' values for a 'post-religious' civil society. While rejecting Eagleton's fatalism, the reality of limited resources and insufficiently powerful 'multipliers' is real, hence the justification for books like this and umbrella labels like 'Spiritual Humanism' and 'World Ethos': not to describe, replace or otherwise outsource humanistic experience, but urgently to *provide* it.

[414] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 137 (italics original). This section was drafted in October 2018 as the global news agenda was dominated by the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul. One of the briefly sung heroes of *From Global Ethic*, Robert Fisk (Ch. 16), had the following to say about Khashoggi as I was busy rereading 'The First Luisa Rey Mystery':

> I knew just what Jamal Khashoggi's murder really meant in the context of the Middle East last week when I realised just who I'd have to call to explain it to me. Whom would I telephone to learn what was going on? Why, of course, I'd call Jamal Khashoggi. And that's why his murder is so important. Because he was, as he knew, a lone and important Arab journalist who did not listen – not any more — to His Master's Voice. And that, of course, was his problem. […] Yup, it's about money and wealth and power – […] Jamal Khashoggi knew all about power and danger. Almost a quarter of a century ago, he turned up at my hotel in Khartoum and drove me into the Sudanese desert to meet Osama bin Laden – whom he met during the Afghan-Soviet war. 'He has never met a western reporter before,' he said as we sped past ancient Sudanese pyramids. 'This will be interesting.' […] Even when he was an adviser to the Royal Family and an editor and journalist in Saudi Arabia, he spoke about the 'facts of life' as he would call them. […] He always talked about the cynicism and venality of the western powers who propped up the Arab regimes and then destroyed them if they did not obey, of how Arabs in general were not a free people. Which is true. And maybe what he would have repeated to me if I could have talked to him before that 'mistake' occurred in Istanbul. Dead men, however, don't talk. And the Saudis must be mighty pleased about that. (Robert Fisk, 'Jamal Khashoggi: Did They Bury Him With His Body Facing Mecca?', https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/khashoggi-latest-saudi-arabia-murder-yemen-consulate-istanbul-turkey-mecca-a8600886.html, 26/10/2018 (accessed 30/10/2018))

The spirit was willing but the flesh was weak.[415]

T.C.

Mitchell continues his meditation on wealth, power and the meaning of literature by turning to publisher Timothy Cavendish's imprisonment in a Hull rest-home somewhere in the not-too-distant future of 2004: forced into hiding by a mixture of likable, Frobisheresque financial incompetence, London Irish thuggery, and his ruined brother's malicious sense of humour ('We're brothers! Don't you have a conscience?' 'I sat on the board of a merchant bank for thirty years'[416]), Cavendish must suddenly confront the reality of his new abode:

> 'This is the best hotel you'll ever stay in, boyo! […] Meals get provided, all your laundry is done. Activities laid on, from crochet to croquet. No confusing bills, no youngsters joy-riding in your motor. Aurora House is a ball! Just obey the regulations and stop rubbing Nurse Noakes up the wrong way. She's not a cruel woman.'
>
> '"Unlimited power in the hands of limited people *always* leads to cruelty."' Warlock-Williams looked at me as if I had spoken in tongues. 'Solzhenitsyn.'[417]

Before doing what he 'can't not do' - i.e. plan his escape - Cavendish walks the reader back through the circumstances of the incarceration: the horrific and public murder of book reviewer Felix Finch by Cavendish's rough-as-guts vanity client Dermot Hoggins ('SO WHO'S EXPIRED IN AN ENDING FLAT AND INANE BEYOND BELIEF NOW?'), the spike in sales of Hoggins's book prompted by all the publicity ('I will not deny a nascent sense of silver lining to this tragic turn,' [418] Cavendish admits), the threatening visits from Hoggins's brothers demanding royalties that Cavendish's still indebted firm cannot pay, his own brother's reluctant offer of a 'refuge' in Hull (or Hell, as it will transpire), and the strange, drug-clouded train journey from London (Cavendish inadvertently smokes some marijuana offered by a 'black Virgil' in a provincial train station bathroom). In the real foreground, however, is a portrait of Mitchell's England in terminal civilsational decline. This starts in the world Cavendish knows best: 'Literary London at play put me in mind of Gibbon on the Age of the Antonines. *A cloud of critics, of compilers, of commentators darkened the face of learning, and the decline of genius was soon followed by the corruption of taste.*'[419] The trains linking London with the rest of the country are a corresponding mess of privatisation, fake politeness and bad

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[415] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 180.

[416] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 159.

[417] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 182.

[418] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 152.

[419] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 149 (italics original).

manners ('England has gone to the dogs, oh, the dogs, the ruddy dogs'[420]), a symptom of all that is wrong with the land as a whole:

> Essex raised its ugly head. When I was a scholarship boy at the local grammar, son of a city-hall toiler on the make, this county was synonymous with liberty, success and Cambridge. Now look at it. Shopping malls and housing estates pursue their creeping invasion of our ancient land. […] 'Um,' said the intercom. 'John, is this on? John, what button do I press?' Cough. 'SouthNet Trains regrets that this service will make an unscheduled stop at the next station due to … a missing driver. This unscheduled stop will continue for the duration that it takes to locate an appropriate driver. SouthNet Trains assures you that we are striving hard' - I clearly discerned a background snigger! - 'to restore our normal excellent standard of service.' Rail rage chain-reactioned down the compartments, though in our age crimes are not committed by criminals conveniently at hand but by executive pens far beyond the mob's reach, back in London's HQs of glass and steel.[421]

Cavendish's journey to Hull/Hell entails a direct confrontation with Luisa's 'misspent life' question:

> Cambridge outskirts are all science parks now. Ursula and I went punting below that quaint bridge, where those Biotech Space Age cuboids now sit cloning humans for shady Koreans. Oh, ageing is ruddy unbearable! The I's we were yearn to breathe the world's air again, but can they ever break out from these calcified cocoons? Oh, can they hell.
>
> […] Despondency makes one hanker after lives one never led. Why have you given your life to books, TC? Dull, dull, dull! The memoirs are bad enough, but all that ruddy fiction! Hero goes on a journey, stranger comes to town, somebody wants something, they get it or they don't, will is pitted against will. 'Admire me, for I am a metaphor.'[422]

Shortly afterwards, however, Cavendish is led to an honest lie which inadvertently reveals the real meaning, beyond mere fiction and metaphor, of his life, which will culminate in his 'ghastly ordeal' in Hull:

> 'Centrallo Trains regrets that due to a breaking-systems failure this train will make a brief stop at this' - sneeze - 'station. Passengers are directed to alight here … and wait for a substitute train.' My fellow passengers gasped, groaned, swore, shook their heads. 'Centrallo Trains apologises for any' - sneeze - 'inconvenience this may cause, and assures you we are working hard to restore our normal excellent standard of' - huge sneeze - 'service. Gi'us a tissue, John.'

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[420] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 162.

[421] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 163-164.

[422] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 170-171.

> […] I groped my way to the ammonia-smelling gents' where a joker had stolen the bulb. I had just unzipped myself when a voice arose from the shadows. 'Hey, mistah, got a light or sumfink?' Steadying my cardiac arrest, I fumbled for my lighter. The flame conjured a Rastafarian in Holbein embers, just a few inches away, a cigar held in his thick lips. 'Fanks,' whispered my black Virgil, inclining his head to bring the tip into the flame.
>
> 'You're, erm, most welcome, quite,' I said.
>
> His wide flat nose twitched. 'So, where you heading, man?'
>
> My hand checked my wallet was still there. 'Hull…' A witless fib ran wild. 'To return a novel. To a librarian who works there. A very famous poet. At the university. It's in my bag. It's called *Half-lives*.'[423]

Cavendish's encounter with Luisa Rey's story (initially as an unpromising manuscript sent to his publishing firm by 'one dubiously named Hilary V. Hush […] (nutcase ahoy)'[424] will end up, by the end of Cavendish's ordeal, somehow back in the centre of his life as a newly free man ('we got on the email to Hilary V. Hush to express our interest in *Half-lives*, and the postman delivered Part Two not an hour ago'[425]). What exactly does Cavendish have in common with Ewing, Frobisher, Rey and company? Mitchell doesn't want to say it - and perhaps can't say it - directly, but he wants to show how their individual spirits - in each of their various embodied forms - survive right down to us and *in* us, their readers. The imaginary link - unconscious to Cavendish perhaps, but far from 'witless' on Mitchell's part - between Luisa Rey's story and the 'famous poet' working as a librarian in Hull is of course the best-known Philip Larkin line 'what will survive of us is love', for Hull's 'famous librarian-poet' can be none other than Larkin himself.

Who does Cavendish love? It is not made entirely clear to us in the first installment of Cavendish's ordeal, but *that* he loved - and something important - will be clear decades into the future, when he becomes an unlikely literary hero to an escaped Korean slave.

An Orison of Sonmi-451

> *Those since-fallen buildings, those long-decayed faces, they engrossed me. We were as you are, they said. The present doesn't matter. My fifty minutes in front of the cinema screen with Hae-Joo [watching an old film adaptation of 'The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish'] were an xercise in happiness.*[426]
>
> Sonmi-451

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[423] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 171-172.

[424] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 158.

[425] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 403.

[426] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 244.

The genetically engineered slave 'fabricant' Sonmi-451 has the same birthmark as Frobisher and Luisa Rey, and will have some strange *déjà vu* experiences from lives seemingly not her own, but this is all entirely beside the spiritual point of her story: she is able, given a bit of luck, external contrivance, extraordinary personal effort and eventual human contact, to educate herself out of slavery.

Sonmi's story - told to a rogue junior 'Archivist' shortly before her execution - begins as a 'server' in a Papa Song diner, somewhere in 22nd-century Korea:

> *Is it true, fabricants really dream, just like us?*
>
> Yes, Archivist, we really dream. […] Both in Papa Song's and in this cube, my dreams are the single unpredictable factor in my zoned days and nights. Nobody allots them, or censors them. Dreams are all I have ever truly owned.[427]

Nevertheless, Sonmi's diet of Papa Song Soap, with its 'soporifix' and 'amnesiads', 'deadens curiosity; we preferred not to wonder.'[428] Even with all the experimental stringpulling going on behind the scenes of her hermetic diner world, it is only contact with human curiosity in the embodied form of an 'ascended' slave colleague, Yoona-939, which allows Sonmi to begin on her own spiritual path:

> Her inner character had colours that attracted me; she reciprocated my desire for friendship. […] I could not ascertain when the xperiment on Yoona-939 was triggered; but from my own xperience, I believe ascension only frees what was suppressed by Soap. Ascension doesn't implant traits that were never present. Despite what purebloods strive so hard to convince themselves, fabricants' minds differ greatly, even if their features and bodies do not. […] To enslave an individual distresses the conscience, but to enslave a clone is merely like owning the latest mass-produced six-wheeled ford. In fact, all fabricants, even same-stem fabricants, are singular as snowflakes. Pureblood naked eyes cannot discern these differences, but they exist.[429]

In other words, even clones can have individual, free spiritual lives if Soap does not suppress them, and if social and educational conditions allow for such individual flourishing:

> The first outward sign of Yoona's ascension was her speech. This began around Month Six. First, she spoke more. […] Even in the hygiener, as we imbibed our Soap. It amused all of us, at first, even the Ma-Leu-Das.
>
> Yoona's language then grew more complex; she became difficult to understand. Orientation teaches us the vocabulary we need for our work, but the amnesiads in our Soap erase subsequently learnt words. Yoona's

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[427] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 189.

[428] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 189.

[429] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 190-191.

> speech was filled with blanks the rest of us could not register. She sounded pureblood. […] Yoona-939 mimicked the consumers. When we mopped the diners' hygiener, Yoona pretended to be an ill-mannered pureblood. She yawned, chewed, sneezed, burped and acted drunk. She hummed Papa Song's Psalm in absurd deviations. She took pleasure in making me laugh. Laughter is an anarchic blasphemy. Tyrants are wise to fear it.[430]

Papa Song's 'Psalm' and 'Catechisms' are the opposite of curiosity and free thought; in case the daily diet of Papa Song Soap is not enough, fixed value catalogues are needed by the 'corpocracy' to prevent individual 'ascension':

> Catechism Three teaches that for servers to own anything, even thoughts, denies the love Papa Song shows us by His Investment. I wondered, did Yoona still observe *any* Catechism? […] I asked how [she] had found the secret room.
>
> 'Curiosity,' she said.
>
> I didn't know the word. 'Is curiosity a torch, or a key?'
>
> Yoona said it was both. […] Most of the words in this interview I could not have employed when I was a server.[431]

Doubt is shown to be inherent to this business of vocabulary acquisition:

> Ten Tenth Nites, or fifteen, Yoona woke me and took me to her secret. […] Pondering over the Book of Outside, she voiced doubts that shook my faith in every aspect of what I held to be true.
>
> *What shape did these doubts take?*
>
> Doubts about the sureties of the fabricant world. How could Papa Song stand on a plinth in Chongmyo Plaza Papa Song's and walk the Xultation's beaches at the same time? Why were fabricants born into debt but purebloods not? Who decided Papa Song's Investment took twelve years to repay? Why not eleven? Six? One?[432]

Yoona's newfound Spiritual Humanism is well summarised in her behind-the-back reply to her supervisor, Seer Rhee: even though purebloods are implanted with 'Souls' which offer them access to all manner of 'upstrata' privileges above ground, 'it is better to be 'a Soulless clone […] than a Souled roach.'[433] In other words, Yoona prefers her status as a fabricant with an inner sense of vocation and self - made possible by the art in the 'secret room' - to moneyed slavery in any 'corpocracy' ('Seer Rhee was a corp man, to the bone: his ultimate goal was to attain the strata of xec in the Papa Song Corp'[434]). As Yoona learns in the secret

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[430] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 191-192.

[431] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 196-197.

[432] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 197-198.

[433] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 199.

[434] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 194.

room, and as Sonmi herself realises later watching 'The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish', 'the present doesn't matter'; what somehow matters and survives of us is free belonging to this transtemporal community which all art offers.

Sonmi's own 'ascension' continues after Yoona's failed escape attempt ('do what you can't *not* do'):

> First, a voice began speaking in my head. It alarmed me greatly, until I learnt nobody else heard it; the voice of sentience.
>
> […] Second, my language evolved, much as Yoona-939's had. When I meant to say 'good', my mouth uttered *favourable*, *pleasing* or *correct*. I learnt to edit and modify every single word I used.
>
> Third, my own curiosity about Outside increased. I eavesdropped on diners' sonys, conversations, AdVs, weather reports, Boardmen's speeches.
>
> Fourth, I suffered alienation: other servers avoided me, just as they had done with Yoona-939 - one's sisters know, even if they don't know they know. […] How I envied my uncritical, unworried sisters! I dared not mention my metamorphosis to any of them.
>
> *You knew what not to do. What did you intend to do?*
>
> What could I do but wait and endure?
>
> Two ascensions, side by side, suggested a program with a purpose. I had to avoid reorientation or a fate like Yoona-939's to learn what this purpose might be. [435]

Mitchell is not claiming here that free spiritual life can be built on anything other than a certain basic cocktail of physical preconditions: he is simply making the point that the 'what' of our natures at any given time - a time which ultimately 'doesn't matter' - is always a compound of nature, nurture and individual free will. Sonmi is an inspiring anomaly to the researchers watching her progress because of her extraordinary surfeit of 'spirit'; following her transfer from Papa Song's to the 'care' of psychogenomics postgrad Boom-Sook Kim, Sonmi is warned by fellow ascended fabricant Wing-027 that 'to survive for long […] you must create Catechisms of your own'[436]; faced with the sheer bewildering enormity of the world beyond Papa Song's, Sonmi

> needed intelligence: ascension would provide this. I needed time: Boom-Sook Kim's own idleness would give me time. But I also needed knowledge.
>
> I asked, how is knowledge found?
>
> 'You must learn to read, little sister,' [Wing] said.[437] […] By Boom-Sook's return from Taiwan on Fifth Day I had mastered the sony's usage and graduated from elementary school. By Sixth Month I completed xec secondary school. You look sceptical, Archivist, but remember, I was a starving servant at a banquet. My appetite deepened as I dined. The sony's

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[435] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 205-206.

[436] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 215.

[437] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 216.

> pathways led me thru university and corpocracy libraries. We are only what we know.[438]

It may indeed be that 'we are only what we know', but 'what we are' in any given present, as Sonmi will herself discover later in her education, is not ultimately what matters or survives of us. If Yoona-939's death had already touched her spirit, the murder of Wing-027 will erupt in it: 'I retreated to the anteroom. We fabricants lack both the means and the rights to xpress emotion, but the notion we cannot xperience it is a widespread myth. […] Fury forges a steel will. I see now, that day was the first step to my *Declarations*; to this prison cube, and to the Lighthouse.'[439] In contrast to the cynical, instrumental intelligence which can 'chisel open the faultlines of personality and so xploit people [… by] practising law in one of the twelve capitals'[440], Sonmi's ironclad Spiritual Humanism is immune to such temptation: 'Billions of research dollars had been spent in private labs by corps, unsuccessfully, to achieve what, simply, I was, what I am.'[441] Others may recognise the instrumental value of such 'inner émigrés' with '*truly* eclectic reading habits' ('such émigrés are *very* promising material for Unanimity agents,'[442] as Boardman Mephi puts it), but Sonmi will not have her freedom bought by any side in the conflict within Mephi's 'beloved body corpocratic'; she will, like all the other heroes in this story, prefer death to the secure ease and spiritual slavery of the tribe.

Still, at a certain point on her journey, Sonmi faces an existential crisis all her own:

> My curiosity is dying, I told Professor Mephi during our seminar on Thomas Paine.
>
> […] My mentor said we had to identify the source of this illness, urgently.
>
> I said something about reading not being true knowledge, that true knowledge without xperience is food without sustenance.
>
> 'You need to get out more,' remarked the professor.[443]

Mephi organises an 'xcursion' for Sonmi with a young postgrad, Hae-Joo Im, over whom he 'held the power of life and death'[444]; for all the unfreedom of the situation, the two do at least develop a human bond ('at first he irritated me a lot, […] but he paid me the compliment of referring to me as a "person", and not even Yoona-939

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[438] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 216-217.

[439] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 219.

[440] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 222.

[441] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 229.

[442] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 227-228.

[443] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 233.

[444] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 233.

had spoken with me so spontaneously'[445]). Agreeing to a 'return match' (Hae-Joo admitted he 'hadn't known what to xpect, but insisted he'd enjoyed himself'), Sonmi realises that next time she must return with him to Papa Song's:

> *So the [first] xcursion* [with Hae Joo] *helped dislodge your sense of ennui?*
>
> I understood that one's environment is a key to one's identity, but that my environment, Papa Song's, was a key I had lost. I realised I wanted to visit my x-dinery under Chongmyo Plaza. I'm not sure I can xplain why, but an impulse can be both vaguely understood and strong.
>
> *… It could hardly be wise for an ascended server to visit a dinery?*
>
> I am not saying that it was wise, only that it was necessary. Hae-Joo was also dubious, ten days later, worrying that it might unearth 'buried things'.
>
> That, xactly, was my point. I had buried too much of myself.
>
> He agreed, and showed me how to upswirl my hair and apply cosmetics.[446]

The visit culminates in a very simple but definitive, lived conclusion: 'In Papa Song's I had been a slave; at Taemosan I was a slightly more privileged slave.'[447] Hae-Joo, for all the coercion implied by the situation, is genuinely and humanly supportive, and Sonmi doesn't forget:

> Later, back in my quiet apartment, Hae-Joo paid me this compliment. 'If I had ascended from server to prodigy in twelve straight months, my current address wouldn't be a guest quarter in the Unanimity Faculty, it'd be deep in the heart of La-la-la Land. You say you're 'depressed' - all I see is resilience. You are *allowed* to feel messed up and inside out. It doesn't mean you're defective - it just means you're human.'
>
> We played Go until curfew. Hae-Joo won the first game; I, the second.[448]

Hae-Joo also offers Sonmi access to the film adaptation of *The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish*, made in 'a long-deadlanded province of the abortive European democracy, […] lit by sunlight captured thru a lens when your grandfather's grandfather, Archivist, was kicking inside his mother's womb'[449]. Then, as now, 'dystopia was a function of poverty, not state policy': 'Elderly people waited to die in prisons for the senile and incontinent; no fixed-term lifespans, no euthanasium.'[450] Education for spiritual freedom requires certain material preconditions, in other words, but via the vigorous exercise of individual will and dashes of timely,

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[445] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 235.

[446] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 238-239.

[447] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 241.

[448] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 242.

[449] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 244.

[450] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 244.

unbuyable human friendship and solidarity, Cavendishes, Sonmis, Reys, Sixsmiths, Frobishers, Ewings and Autuas can emerge from even the unlikeliest and unfriendliest soils. This fact, however, once grasped, paradoxically makes social and political reform in the direction of justice - a true 'World Ethos' - more, not less, urgent. Quite how *Cloud Atlas* leads the reader to this inexorable and intimate realisation is less important than the fact that it does.

Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After

> *I couldn't stop mem'ryin'n'yarnin' while we ate, nay, 'bout my family an' Pa'n'Adam too, it was like if they lived in words they cudn't die in body. I knowed I'd miss Meronym diresome when she was gone, see I didn't have no other bro on Big I who weren't 'ready slaved. […] I wondered where'd my tribesmen's souls be reborned now Valleyswomen'd not be bearin' babbits here. […] I wished Abbess was there to teach me 'cos I cudn't say an' nor could Meronym. We Prescients, she answered, after a beat, b'lief when you die you die an' there ain't no comin' back.*
>
> *But what 'bout your soul? I asked.*
>
> Prescients don't b'lief Souls exist.
>
> *But ain't dyin' terrorsome cold if there ain't nothin' after?*
>
> Yay*, she sort o' laughed but not smilin', nay,* our truth is terrorsome cold.
>
> Z.

Zachry and Meronym will embody the fragile dialogical flame of true 'Civ'lise' here, centuries into a seemingly ruined future. Sonmi's eggy 'orison' has survived the 'Fall' of humanity; she is revered as a God in Zachry's tribal Hawai'i, to which Meronym returns as an anthropologist-spy in desperate search of refuge for her own technologically superior but plague-threatened tribe. Megan Sixsmith's Mauna Kea Observatory waits to be rediscovered by this unlikely pair, and the comet birthmark will make its reappearance on Meronym's shoulder, but yet again, Mitchell's deeper goal with the 'Zachry and Meronym story' is to get 'beyond the Enlightenment mentality' and show that, for all the obvious totalitarian dangers of birthmark-worshipping superstition and wish-thinking generally, 'civilisation' is not a 'cold' disdain for spirituality or an embrace of determinism; what really survives of it is more than technology, and more than birthmarks or skin hues ('Smart'n'civ'lise ain't nothin' to do with the colour o' the skin, nay'[451]).

Zachry and Meronym are equals, or rather *achieve* equality with each other despite Meronym's anthropological gaze and Zachry's inferiority complexes and superstitious mistrust. As a child at Sloosha's Crossin', he watches his father die and his older brother be captured and enslaved by the feared Kona tribe ('painted

[451] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 270.

savages'[452]); he lives with the shame and fear of retribution at the hands of 'Old Georgie', a devil-figure tied to the local volcanic mythology. The encounter with Meronym will turn Zachry's world upside-down, or almost; even after his ordeal, he still believed Sonmi saved his soul: 'I'll be tellin' you how,' Zachry promises us, though we know by now that Mitchell's invisible narrator sees much further than Zachry himself can.

Until Meronym's arrival, Prescients and Valleysmen interacted as annual bartering partners ('they bartered fair an' never spoke knuckly like savages at Honokaa, but politesome speakin' it draws a line b'tween you what says, *I respect you well 'nuff but you an' I ain't kin, so don't you step over this line, yay?*'[453]). This is not true 'Civ'lise'; Meronym 'ain't kin' to Zachry at first:

> I'd got a bit o' the brave by now an' I asked our visitor why Prescients with all their high Smart'n'all want to learn 'bout us Valleysmen? What could we poss'bly teach her that she din't know? *The learnin' mind is the livin' mind*, Meronym said, *an' any sort o' Smart is truesome Smart, old Smart or new, high Smart or low.* No'un but me seen the arrows o'flatt'ry them words fired, or how this crafty spyer was usin' our ign'rance to fog her true 'tentions, so I follered my first question with this pokerer. *But you Prescients got more greatsome'n'mighty Smart 'n this hole world, yay?* O, so slywise she picked her words! *We got more'n the tribes o'Ha-Why, less'n Old'uns b'fore the Fall*. See? Don't say a hole lot does it, nay?[454]

Only a crisis - Zachry's sister Catkin's scorpionfish bite - will force both Zachry and Meronym to become what they are, and 'do what they can't not do':

> Despair I felt, my sis' was dyin', rain was drummin' but that same voice din't shut up in my ear. *Meronym*.
>
> I din't know why but I followed her out. Sheltrin' in Munro's pott'ry doorway she was starin' at the rods o' rain. *I ain't got no right to ask you for favours, I ain't been a good host, nay I been a pisspoor bad'un, but…* I'd ran out o' words.
>
> The Prescient din't move nor look at me, nay. The life o' your tribe's got a nat'ral order. *Catkin'd o' treaded on that scorpionfish if I'd been here or not*.
>
> Rainbirds spilt their galoshin'-galishin' song. *I'm just a stoopit goat-herder, but I reck'n jus' by bein' here you're bustin' this nat'ral order. I reck'n you're killin' Catkin by not actin'. An' I reckon if it was your son Anafi lyin' there with scorpionfish poison meltin' his heart'n'lungs, this natural order'd not be so important to you, yay?*
>
> She din't answer but I knew she was list'nin'.
>
> Why's a Prescient's life worth more than a Valleysman's?

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[452] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 250.

[453] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 259.

[454] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 263-264.

She lost her calm. *I ain't here to play Lady Sonmi ev'ry time sumthin' bad happ'ns an' make it right! I'm jus' human, Zachry, like you like any'un!*

I promised, *It won't be ev'ry time sumthin' bad happens, it's jus' now.*

Tears was in her eyes. *That ain't no promise you can keep or break.*

Suddenwise I finded myself tellin' her ev'ry flea o' true 'bout Sloosha's Crossin', yay, ev'rythin'. How I'd leaded the Kona to kill Pa an' slave Adam an'd never fessed to no'un till that very beat. I din't know why I was spillin' this corked secret to my enemy, not till the very end, when I cogged its meanin' an' telled her too. *What I jus' teached you 'bout me'n'my soul is a spike 'gainst my throat an' a gag over my mouth. You can tell old Ma Yibber what I telled you, an' ruin me, any time you want. She'll b'lief you an' so she should 'cos it's true ev'ry word an' folks'll b'lief you 'cos they sense my Soul is stoned. Now if you got any Smart, yay, anythin' what may help Catkin now, give it me, tell it me, do it. No'un'll ever, ever know, I vow it jus' you and me.*

Meronym placed her hands on her head like it boomed up with woe and she mumbed to herself sumthin' like, *If my pres'dent ever finded out, my hole faculty'd be disbandied*, yay, times was she used hole flocks o' words what I din't know.[455]

When Meronym resolves to climb the tabooed Mauna Kea, Zachry 'surpris'd ev'ry'un, yay, me too, when I settled to go with her; I weren't known as the bravest-balled bullock in the barn.'[456] On the way up, the wary goatherd and the condescending anthropologist discuss the 'meanin' o' Civ'lise' some more:

Meronym said Old Georgie weren't real for her, nay, but he could still be real for me.

Then who, I asked, tripped the Fall if it weren't Old Georgie?

Eery birds I din't knowed yibbered news in the dark for a beat or two. The Prescient answered, *Old'uns tripped their own Fall.*

O, her words was a rope o' smoke. *But Old'uns got the Smart!*

I mem'ry she answer'd, *Yay, Old'uns' Smart mastered sicks, miles, seeds an' made miracles ord'nary, but it didn't master one thing, nay, a hunger in the hearts o' humans, yay, a hunger for more.*

More what? I asked. *Old'uns got ev'rythin'.*

O, more gear, more food, faster speeds, longer lifes, easier lifes, more power, yay. Now the Hole World is big but it weren't big 'nuff for that hunger what made Old'uns rip out the skies an' boil up the seas an' poison soil with crazed atoms an' donkey 'bout with rotted seeds so new plagues was borned an' babbits was freakbirthed. Fin'ly, bit'ly, then quicksharp, states busted into barb'ric tribes an' the Civ'lise Days ended, 'cept for a few folds'n'pockets here'n'there, where its last embers glimmer.

I asked why Meronym'd never spoke this yarnin' in the valleys.

Valleysmen'd not want to hear, she answered, that human hunger birthed the Civ'lise, but human hunger killed it too. I know it from other tribes

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[455] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 280-281.

[456] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 283.

> offland what I stayed with. Times are you say a person's b'liefs ain't true, they think you're sayin' their lifes ain't true an' their truth ain' true.
>
> Yay, she was prob'ly right.[457]

And yet here they are, Zachry and Meronym, enacting the very change they each unconsciously want to see in the world.[458] Zachry is dazed by 'all this shockin' newness', especially the news that his beloved Sonmi was a 'freakbirthed human' who 'was borned'n'died hundreds o' years ago 'cross the ocean west-nor'westly […] on a pen'sula all deadlanded now'; we are relieved, however, to learn that, after her 'short'n'judased life', Sonmi 'found say-so over purebloods 'n' freakbirths' thinkin's'.[459]

The expedition to the Mauna Kea Obervatory witnessed the birth of a beautiful new friendship: 'Mauna Kea'd done its cussed best to kill us but we'd s'vived it together. I cogged she was far-far from her own family'n'kin an' my heart ached for her lornsomeness.'[460] Asked to tell a story from home, Meronym is reluctant ('Prescience tales was drippin' with regret'n'loss'[461]), so she obliges instead with 'a yarn she'd heard from a burntlander in a far-far spot named Panama', which Zachry recounts in full to his audience (including his son, the narrator of the whole chapter), on the condition that 'someun' fetch me a cup o'spiritbrew my throat's gluey'n'parched'[462]:

> Back when the Fall was fallin', humans f'got the makin' o' fire. O, diresome bad things was gettin', yay. Come night, folks cudn't see nothin', come winter they cudn't warm nothin', come mornin' they cudn't roast nothin'. So the tribe went to Wise Man an' asked, *Wise Man, help us, see we f'got the makin' o' fire, an', O, woe is us an' all.*
>
> So Wise Man summ'ned Crow and say-soed him these words: *Fly across the crazed'n'jiffyin' ocean to the Mighty Volcano, an' on its foresty slopes, find a long stick. Pick up that stick in your beak an' fly into that Mighty Volcano's mouth an' dip it in the lake o' flames what bubble'n'spit in that fiery place. Then bring the burnin' stick back here to Panama so humans'll mem'ry fire once more an' memry back its makin'.*
>
> […] Up'n'out that Crow flew from the scorchin' mouth, now flew with that burnin' stick in his mouth, yay, toward home he headed, wings poundin', stick burnin', days passin', hail slingin', clouds black'nin', O, fire lickin' up that stick, eyes smokin', feathers crispin', beak burnin'… *It hurts!* Crow crawed. *It hurts!* Now, did he drop that stick or din't he? Do we mem'ry the makin' o' fire or don't we?

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[457] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 286-287.

[458] As Pankaj Mishra reminds us in 'Gandhi for the Post-Truth Age', this anonymous quote is frequently misattributed.

[459] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 291.

[460] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 296.

[461] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 298.

[462] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 298.

> *See now*, said Meronym, […] *it ain't 'bout crows or fire, it's 'bout how we humans got our spirit.*
>
> I don't say that yarn's got a hole sack o' sense but I always mem'ried it an' times are less sense is more sense.[463]

Zachry has his Sonmi, Meronym has her science, but both sense a beyond of their own positions, a beyond which is revealed and embodied in their very relationship. This spirit or ethos is more than public law or rules - as Zachry says, 'law an' Civ'lise ain't always the same, nay, see Kona got Kona law but they ain't got one flea o' Civ'lise'[464]. Briefly captured in a Kona raid before another intervention of Meronym's 'Smart', Zachry is left to meditate: 'Us peacesome Windward men was busted in body by wounds'n'thirst'n'hunger an' busted in spirit by the killin' we'd seen an' the slaved future we seen b'fore us. No family, no freeness, no nothin' but work an' pain, work an' pain till we died.'[465] Torn between the prospect of flight with Meronym and eventual capture and death at Kona hands, Zachry is 'whacked' by 'guilt an' sorrow': 'guilt 'cos I always s'vived an'escaped despite my dirtsome'n'stony soul, sorrow 'cos the ruins o' my busted old life was strewed here'n'there'n'everywhere. […] *This ain't the safest place to sit'n'think, Zachry*, said Meronym, so tendersome that fin'ly my tears oozed out.'[466] Unable to resist revenge against a sleeping Kona sentry, and despite the explicit warnings of an augury ('*en'my's sleepin', let his throat not be slit*'), Zachry exercises his own conscience ('do what you can't not do'), and it is Meronym who helps him come to terms with his decision:

> I knowed why I shudn't kill this Kona. It'd not give the valleys back to the Valleysmen. […] If I'd been rebirthed a Kona in this life he could be me an' I'd be killin' myself. If [my brother] Adam'd been, say, adopted an' made Kona, this'd be my brother I was killin'. Old Georgie *wanted* me to kill him. Weren't these reasons 'nuff jus' to leave him be an' hushly creep away?
>
> *Nay*, I answered my en'my, an' I stroked my blade thru his throat. Magicky ruby welled'n'pumped an' frothed on the fleece an' puddled on the stone floor. I wiped my blade clean on the dead'un's shirt. I knowed I'd be payin' for it by'n'by but, like I said a while back, in our busted world the right thing ain't always possible.
>
> […] Avoidin' the open Kohala ridge'n'pastures we skirted the forest for camo an' only then did I fess to Meronym what I'd done back to that sleepin' sentry. I don't know why it is but secrets jus' rot you like teeth if you don't yank 'em out. She just list'ned, yay, an' she din't judge me none.[467]

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[463] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 298-299.

[464] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 300.

[465] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 306.

[466] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*,, pp. 314-315.

[467] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 316-317.

The 'Spiritual Humanism' of *Cloud Atlas*, then, is a matter of the cultivation of autonomous will, present in fledgling form in everyone, but like the Panamanian firebird, needing the determination of a 'flea' to beat the odds, cling on and pass to others:

> *The savage sat'sfies his needs now. He's hungry, he'll eat. He's angry, he'll knuckly. He's swellin', he'll shoot up a woman. […] Now the Civ'lised got the same needs too, but he sees further.*
>
> […] So, I asked 'gain, is it better to be savage'n to be Civ'lised?
>
> *List'n, savages an' Civ'liseds ain't divvied by tribes or b'liefs or mountain ranges, nay, ev'ry human is both, yay. Old'uns'd got the Smart o' gods but the savagery o' jackals an' that's what tripped the Fall. Some savages what I knowed got a beautsome Civ'lised heart beatin' in their ribs. Maybe some Kona. Not 'nuff to say-so their hole tribe, but who knows one day? One day.*
>
> *'One day' was only a flea 'o hope for us.*
>
> *Yay, I mem'ry Meronym sayin', but fleas ain't easy to rid.*[468]

The 'maps' provided by Mitchell in *Cloud Atlas* are for the world beyond the material needs of the present: 'Tho' a cloud's shape nor hue nor size don't stay the same it's still a cloud an' so is a soul,'[469] Zachry concludes; we, the readers, are challenged to recognise the 'flea o' hope' in Mitchell's story and to join the community of 'clouds'. By taking us from a recentish past (Adam Ewing's 'Pacific Journal') into a future just close enough for us to imagine (Zachry's Ha-Why), Mitchell evokes the enormity of this transtemporal, forever ungraspable but cloud-real spiritual dimension in a human-sized narrative, like a Japanese twig conjuring a whole powerful forest.

An Orison of Sonmi-451

If 'the present doesn't matter', then nor does 'history' understood as a linear progression. *Cloud Atlas* is as hostile to historicism and closed societies as any Karl Popper; by walking back to complete the first five stories in reverse order, Mitchell is denying that any one moment in the chain of spiritual transmission between him and us via these stories is any more important than any other. There is no *end* of this story; Zachry's son cannot consciously know the chain of goodness to which he is linked, but it is there; all he can say of Sonmi's orison, which has passed to him, is that 'it ain't Smart you can use 'cos it don't kill Kona pirates nor fill empty guts'[470], but something of Zachry, and hence of Adam Ewing, Autua and the good people in between has survived in him and his humour:

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[468] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 318-319.

[469] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 324.

[470] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 324.

> Zachry my old pa was a wyrd buggah, I won't naysay it now he's died. O, most o' Pa's yarnin's was jus' musey duck-fartin' an' in his loonsome old age he even b'liefed Meronym the Prescient was his b'loved Sonmi, yay, he 'sisted it, he said he knowed it by birthmarks an'comets'n'all.
>
> Do I b'lief his yarn 'bout the Kona an' his fleein' from Big I? Most yarnin's got a bit o' true, some yarnin's got some true, an' a few yarnin's got a lot o' true. The stuff 'bout Meronym the Prescient was mostly true, I reck'n.[471]

What matters here is not the historical record or 'atlas' itself; only individual clouds and the living links between them can ever be sites of meaning. Sonmi is forced to place her trust in Hae-Joo, even though he has lied to her about his true identity ('I don't know for sure [why I trusted him]; my decision was based on character'[472]). Hae-Joo, however, like Vyvyan Ayrs and certain revolutionaries of all types in any age, wants a little too much to make it into the atlas; he wants to reserve a 'paragraph in the history of the struggle against corpocracy' for himself and his co-conspirators. This is, Mitchell suggests, about as important as reserving plots in a cemetery; it is being part of the living link which matters, not winning the credit for maintaining it ('the present doesn't matter'). Private vocational pride, a sense of a job well done, of having made an important contribution to something important, is in no way connected to public recognition; for all that rewards and prizes might be nice at the time, they don't last like the living link itself does. Sonmi is not interested in 'altering history'[473] as such; she is more drawn instead to the Abbess of a remote monastery: 'The woman hugged Hae-Joo as affectionately as, I imagine, a mother would. […] She clasped my hands in hers; the gesture charmed me. Her face was as aged as a senior from Cavendish's time. "You are welcome here," she told me, "most welcome".'[474]

The horror, however, of Papa Song's slaughtership - the concentration camp where fabricant servers are 'recycled' as food and Soap - is the last straw for Sonmi, and she decides to become politically engaged anyway ('do what you can't not do'): 'Ascended fabricants need[ed] a Catechism: to teach them rights; to harness their anger; to channel their energies. I was the fabricant to write these words.'[475] And yet these *Declarations* themselves will not survive: even though she thinks, or at least says, that they are her real 'endgame'[476] ('every schoolchild in Nea So Copros knows my twelve "blasphemies" now'[477]), we know more and see further. The *Declarations* themselves, just like the *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*, ultimately subvert their own authority; to repeat Borges, 'literature is not an

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[471] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 324.

[472] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 329.

[473] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 343.

[474] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 346.

[475] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 362.

[476] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 362.

[477] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 364-365.

ars combinatoria; it is something much more important than that'. Such formulae, in other words, are never what matter in the humanities, and can *always* be abused; a living 'Spiritual Humanism' must always be maintained parallel to the law and structure that any free community will still need if it wishes, in Sonmi's words, to 'protect it[self] from slackers within and xploiters without'[478]. More interesting than the content of her lost *Declarations* is Sonmi's last request to her executioners: 'I wish to finish viewing a film I began watching when, for an hour in my life, I knew happiness.'[479] Asked by the Archivist if she 'loved' Hae-Joo, Sonmi replies that the 'Chairman of Narcissism' will 'have to consult future historians on that'[480]: what will survive of us, Mitchell once again seeks to remind us, is love.

The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish

> *Cannot I ever attain to true peace, excepting through knowledge,*
> *Or is the system upheld only by fortune and law?*
> *Must I distrust the gently-warning impulse, the precept*
> *That thou, Nature, thyself hast in my bosom impressed,*
> *Till the schools have affixed to the writ eternal their signet,*
> *Till a mere formula's chain binds down the fugitive soul?*
> *Answer me, then! for thou hast down into these deeps e'en descended,—*
> *[…] Whether, yon mummies amid, life's consolations can dwell?*
> *Must I travel the darksome road? The thought makes me tremble*
> *Yet I will travel that road, if 'tis to truth and to right."*
> *[…] Knowledge can teach thee in naught; thou canst instruct her in much!*
> *Yonder law, that with brazen staff is directing the struggling,*
> *Naught is to thee. What thou dost, what thou mayest will is thy law,*
> *And to every race a godlike authority issues.*
> *[…] Thou but observest not the god ruling within thine own breast,*
> *Not the might of the signet that bows all spirits before thee;*
> *Simple and silent thou goest through the wide world thou hast won.*[481]
>
> Friedrich Schiller, 'Genius' (1790)

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[478] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 347.

[479] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 365.

[480] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 365.

[481] For the full English text, see 'Genius - Poem by Friedrich Schiller', https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/genius-3/. For the German original, see https://www.textlog.de/schiller-gedichte-genius.html.

'"Freedom!" is the fatuous jingle of our civilisation, but only those deprived of it have the barest inkling *re*: what the stuff actually is'[482]: such is Timothy Cavendish's short summary of his days in 'Hull'. He finds this freedom first in art, or better, in a certain relationship to art:

> God knows, I had bog all else to do at Aurora House except read. The day after my miracle recovery I picked up *Half-lives* and, ye gods, began wondering if Hilary V. Hush might not have written a publishable thriller after all. I had a vision of *The First Luisa Rey Mystery* in stylish black-and-bronze selling at Tesco checkouts; then a *Second Mystery*, then the *Third*. […] One or two things will have to go: the insinuation that Luisa Rey is this Robert Frobisher chap reincarnated, for example. Far too hippie-druggie-new age. (I, too, have a birthmark, below my left armpit, but no lover ever compared it to a comet. Georgette named it Timbo's Turd.) But, overall, I concluded the young-hack-versus-corporate-corruption thriller had potential. (The ghost of [murdered critic] Sir Felix Finch whines, 'But it's been done a hundred times before!' - as if there could be anything *not* done a hundred *thousand* times between Aristophanes and Andrew Void-Webber! As if Art is the *What*, not the *How*!)[483]

Beyond art, Cavendish eventually finds friendship in his new prison:

> Veronica and Ernie were survivors. They warned me about the dangers of Aurora House: how its pong of urine and disinfectant, the Undead Shuffle, Noakes's spite, the catering redefine the concept of 'ordinary'. Once any tyranny becomes accepted as ordinary, according to Veronica, its victory is indomitable.
>
> Thanks to her, I ruddy well bucked my ideas up. I clipped my nasal hair and borrowed some shoe polish from Ernie. *Shine your shoes every night*, my old man used to say, *and you're as good as anyone.* […] Ernie had never read a work of fiction in his life, 'Always a radio man, me,' but watching him coax the Victorian boiler system into life one more time, I always felt shallow. It's true, reading too many novels makes you go blind.[484]

Ernie, Veronica and Timothy help each other to plot their escape: 'A history programme on BBC2 [on Christmas] afternoon showed old footage shot in Ypres in 1919. That hellish mockery of a once fair town was my own soul. […] "If you don't get me out of here I'll lose my mind." [… Ernie] disassembled a component I couldn't even name. "Aye."'[485] Once safely back on the outside ('Ernie promised to take the flak if the law were ever to catch up, as he's too old to stand trial, which is

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[482] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 372.

[483] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 373. Now may be the time to disclose that the author of these words also has a birthmark - I suppose one could describe it as 'comet-shaped' - under his left armpit (true story). But who cares?

[484] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 379.

[485] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 390.

ruddy civilised of him'[486]), Cavendish can draw his own further conclusions on the true meaning of freedom:

> Middle-age is flown, but it is attitude, not years, that condemns one to the ranks of the Undead, or else proffers salvation. In the domain of the young there dwells many an Undead soul. They rush about so, their inner putrefaction is concealed for a few decades, that is all. Outside, fat snowflakes are falling on slate roofs and granite walls. Like Solzhenitsyn labouring in New York, I shall beaver away in exile, far from the city that knitted my bones.[487]

<u>'Half-lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery'</u>

Courage grows anywhere, thinks Megan Sixsmith, *like weeds.*[488]

The return to the 'Luisa Rey Mystery' sees Mitchell still deliberately overpostulating the supernatural, but with the ever clearer goal of pointing to the truly spiritual. From Isaac Sachs ('*so*, thinks Sachs, *you obeyed your conscience, Luisa Rey has the Sixsmith Report; do you feel doubt? Relief? Fear? Righteousness? [Or] a premonition I'll never see her again*'[489]) to Luisa's final meeting with Javi (the young victim of her neighbours' domestic abuse who becomes her friend and equal), the ultimate freedom of the spiritual dimension from the causality of time ('the present doesn't matter') is driven home over and over and over again:

> 'If you could *see* the future, like you can see the end of 16th Street from the top of Kilroy's department store, that means it's already there. If it's already there, that means it isn't a thing you can change.'
>
> 'Yes, but what's at the end of 16th Street isn't made by what *you* do. It's pretty much fixed, by planners, architects, designers, unless you go and blow a building up or something. What happens in a minute's time *is* made by what you do.'
>
> 'So what's the answer? Can you change the future or not?'
>
> […] 'I'm not leaving town forever, Javi.'
>
> At the boy's initiative they shake hands. The gesture surprises Luisa: it feels formal, final and intimate.[490]

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[486] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 402.

[487] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 404.

[488] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 446.

[489] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 408.

[490] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 418.

This spiritual dimension seems to encompass enmity as well as friendship: '*What I want from you, Luisa, is a killing with intimacy*. For a moment Bill Smoke wonders at the powers inside us that are not us.'[491] Luisa is targeted by a psychopathic 'agent' of these 'foreign' powers ('bigger forces killed all of you; I just dispatched the bullet'[492]), not by a free, self-cultivating individual for whom friendship is possible; by contrast, Luisa 'feels a painful sense of personal loss at the death of Isaac Sachs, a man she hardly knew'[493]). The heartless 'corpocracy' of Sonmi's Papa Song world, and Sonmi's resistance to it, are also retrospectively foreshadowed by Luisa's encounter with the hideous Henderson triplets, who

> dominate the discourse at the matchmaking table. Each is as blue-eyed and gilded as his brothers, and Luisa doesn't distinguish between them. 'What'd *I* do?' says one triplet, 'if *I* was President? First, I'd aim to *win* the Cold War, not just aim not to lose it.'
>
> Another takes over. 'I *wouldn't* kowtow to Arabs whose ancestors parked camels on lucky patches of sand…'
>
> '… or to red gooks. I'd establish - I'm not afraid to say it - our country's rightful - corporate - empire. Because if we don't do it…'
>
> '… the Japs'll steal the march. The corporation is the future. We need to let business run the country and establish a true meritocracy.'
>
> 'Not choked by welfare, unions, "affirmative action" for amputee transvestite colored homeless arachnophobes.'
>
> 'A meritocracy of acumen.' A culture that is not ashamed to acknowledge that wealth attracts power…'
>
> '… and the wealth*makers* - us - are rewarded. When a man aspires to power, I ask one simple question: 'Does he think like a businessman?'
>
> Luisa rolls her napkin into a compact ball. 'I ask three simple questions. How did he get that power? How is he using it? And how can it be taken off the sonofabitch?'[494]

Power, always the same and always boring, does not survive; Joe Napier only wanted an easy retirement - 'a little fishing' - but Lester Rey's courage, and his wife Milly's silence ('Milly always won by saying nothing') reaches him from beyond the grave, and this story reaches and moves us, even though we 'hardly know' him, and even though he is 'only one man' and 'not a platoon'.[495] Even though we can only control, at any given time, a 'minute' or so into our local future, there is no telling where the 'weeds' of our free spiritual engagement and sacrifice in the name of friendship - from Adam and Autua all the way to Zachry - will later germinate. The empirical facts of physical causation are irrelevant; the connection between Frobisher and Luisa, for example (and even though Luisa does not seem

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[491] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 419.

[492] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 449.

[493] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 422.

[494] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 419-420.

[495] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 430.

consciously to appreciate Frobisher's treasured 'gifts' to Sixsmith), is more than any 'birthmark' or arrangement of atoms can begin to define:

> Luisa uses a plastic knife to slit the package open. She removes one of the yellowed envelopes, postmarked 10 October 1931, holds it against her nose, and inhales. *Are molecules of Zedelghem Chateau, of Robert Frobisher's hand, dormant in this paper for forty-four years, swirling in my lungs, now, in my blood?*
>
> Who is to say?[496]

And, Mitchell impels us to ask yet again, who cares? The real questions in *Cloud Atlas* are not for the scientists anyway.

Letters from Zedelghem

> *One encounters buffoons […] who wear an air of deprivation that the war ended before they had a chance to show their mettle. Others […] confess their relief not to have been of service age before 1918, but a certain shame that they feel this relief. I've often banged on to you [Sixsmith] about growing up in my legendary brother's shadow - every rebuke began with an 'Adrian never used to…' or 'If your brother were here now he'd…' Grew to hate the sound of his name. During the run-up to my forcible ejection from the Frobishery, it was all 'You're a disgrace to Adrian's memory!' Never, ever forgive the parents that.*
>
> *[…] 'Another war is* always *coming, Robert. They are never properly extinguished.'*[497]

Frobisher's own 'war' - at least for the time being - is his music, an attempt not merely to narrate his own solopsistic 'struggle' with forensic, Knausgaard-like detail and commitment to factual accuracy and knowledge, but precisely to transcend his resentments (his parents' grieving unfairness, Eva's unrequited love, and so on) and reach a realm of pure Spiritual Humanism:

> Spent the fortnight gone in the music room, reworking my year's fragments into a 'sextet for overlapping soloists': piano, clarinet, cello, flute, oboe and violin, each in its own language of key, scale and colour. In the 1st set, each solo is interrupted by its successor: in the 2nd, each interruption is recontinued, in order. Revolutionary or gimmicky? Shan't know until it's finished, and by then it'll be too late, but it's the 1st thing think of when I

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[496] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 453.

[497] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 459, 462.

> wake, and the last thing I think of before I fall asleep. […] The artist lives in two worlds.[498]

Sixsmith treasured these letters with his life because, whether Frobisher's *Cloud Atlas Sextet* does or not, they point to a microcosm of unselfish goodness in each of us ('composing the best work of my life; of all lives'[499]):

> All my life, sophisticated, idiotic women have taken it upon themselves to *understand* me, to *cure* me, but Eva knows I'm *terra incognita*, and explores me unhurriedly, like you did. […] If I smile at her ambition to be an Egyptologist she kicks my shin under the table. […] She makes me think about something other than myself. […] Emperor Robert is not a good man - his best part is comandeered by his unperformed music - but she gives me that rarest smile, anyway. […] Her laughter spurts through a blowhole in the top of her head and sprays all over the morning. […] A man like me has no business with this substance 'beauty', yet here she is, in these soundproofed chambers of my heart.[500]

'Unhurriedly, like you did.' The bisexual Frobisher and the homosexual Sixsmith exchanged more than their given natures, even if Eva and Frobisher will not. Frobisher does not want Sixsmith blaming himself for his suicide ('thank you *ever* so for trying to find me'[501]), but his mind is made up ('the healthy can't understand the emptied, the broken; you'd try to list all the reasons for living'[502]); he will survive in another form, however, far beyond the cliché of a jilted lover, and not exactly as he thought he might (i.e. through his music), but rather through the mysterious power - written, but unheard - of his spiritual example:

> It's an incomparable creation. Echoes of Scriabin's *White Mass*, Stravinsky's lost footprints, chromatics of the more lunar Debussy, but truth is I don't know where it came from. Waking dream. Will never write anything one hundredth as good. Wish I were being immodest, but I'm not. *Cloud Atlas Sextet* holds my life, *is* my life, now I'm a spent firework; but at least I've been a firework. […] Time cannot permeate this sabbatical. We do not stay dead long. […] Such elegant certainties comfort me.[503]

<u>The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing</u>

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[498] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 463.

[499] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 478.

[500] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 472.

[501] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 487.

[502] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 488.

[503] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 489-490.

This has the air of not having been written down. […] There is no theory. You merely have to listen. Pleasure is the law.[504]

Claude Debussy

Returning to San Francisco via the Society Islands, Adam confronts the impossibility of spiritual empire-building in his encounter with the 'Head Master of the Nazareth Smoking School', a certain Mr. Wagstaff: '"You'd think the savages'd be grateful, I mean, we school them, heal them, bring employment and eternal life! Oh, they say 'Please, sir' an' 'Thank you, sir' prettily enough, but you feel *nothing*," Wagstaff pounded his heart, "here."'[505] Adam is 'unnerved' by Wagstaff's 'shifting character':

> 'There exists a tribe of ants, called the slave-maker. These insects raid the colonies of common ants, steal eggs back to their own nests, & after they hatch, why, the stolen slaves become workers of the greater empire, & never even dream they were once stolen. Now if you ask me, Lord Jehovah crafted these ants as a model, Mr. Ewing.' Mr. Wagstaff's gaze was gravid with the ancient future.[506]

Like Wagstaff, Adam's physician-murderer Henry Goose has no illusions whatsoever about what 'Civilisation' really has been, is, and will always be:

> 'Wolves don't sit in their caves, concocting crapulous theories […] to justify devouring a flock of sheep! "Intellectual courage"? True "intellectual courage" is to dispense with these fig-leaves and admit all peoples are predatory. […] He mimicked my voice very well. '"But why *me*, Henry, are we not friends?" Well, Adam, even friends are made of meat. 'Tis absurdly simple. I need money & in your trunk, I am told, is an entire estate, so I have killed you for it. Where is the mystery? "But, Henry, this is wicked!" But, Adam, the world *is* wicked. Maoris prey on the Moriori, Whites prey on darker-hued cousins, fleas prey on mice, cats prey on rats, Christians on infidels, first mates on cabin-boys, Death on the Living. "The weak are the meat, the strong do eat."'[507]

Adam, however, has glimpsed and embodied an alternative, and passes it down to his son, Jackson, who lovingly preserves and edits his father's diary: 'By the third day I could sit up, feed myself, thank my guardian angels and Autua, the last free Moriori in this world, for my deliverance. […] No nursemaid ever ministered as

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[504] See Alex Ross, 'The Velvet Revolution of Claude Debussy', https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/29/the-velvet-revolution-of-claude-debussy, 29/10/2018 (accessed 5/11/2018).

[505] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 502.

[506] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 510.

[507] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 509, 523.

tenderly as rope-roughened Autua has to my sundry needs these last ten days.'[508] The last entry in Adam's diary is chiselled by Mitchell from six stories from six different worlds, written in six different languages:

> My recent adventures have made me quite the philosopher, especially at night, when I hear naught but the stream grinding boulders into pebbles through an unhurried eternity. My thoughts flow thus. Scholars discern motions in history & formulate these motions into rules that govern the rises & falls of civilisations. My belief runs contrary, however. To wit: history admits no rules; only outcomes.
>
> What precipitates outcomes? Vicious acts & virtuous acts.
>
> What precipitates acts? Belief.
>
> Belief is both prize & battlefield, within the mind & in the mind's mirror, the world. If we *believe* humanity is a ladder of tribes, a colosseum of confrontation, exploitation & bestiality, such a humanity is surely brought into being, & history's [monsters] shall prevail. You & I, the moneyed, the privileged, the fortunate, shall not fare so badly in this world, provided our luck holds. What of it if our consciences itch? […] Why fight the 'natural' (oh, weaselly word!) order of things?
>
> […] If we *believe* that humanity may transcend tooth & claw, if we *believe* divers races & creeds can share this world as peaceably as the orphans share the candlenut tree, if we *believe* leaders must be just, violence muzzled, power accountable and the riches of the Earth & its Oceans shared equitably, such a world will come to pass. I am not deceived.
>
> […] A life spent shaping a world I *want* Jackson to inherit, not one I *fear* Jackson shall inherit, this strikes me as a life worth the living. Upon my return to San Francisco, I shall pledge myself to the Abolitionist cause, because I owe my life to a self-freed slave & because I must start somewhere.
>
> […] I hear my father-in-law's response: '[…] Naïve, dreaming Adam. He who would do battle with the many-headed hydra of human nature must pay a world of pain & his family must pay it along with him! & only as you gasp your dying breath shall you understand, your life amounted to no more than one drop in a limitless ocean!'
>
> Yet what is any ocean but a multitude of drops?[509]

This is not, at bottom, an empirical prediction that 'a purely predatory world *shall* consume itself', or that 'for the human species, selfishness is extinction'[510]; it is, rather, a call to transcend Enlightenment historicism altogether: spiritual activity is a vocation and its own intimate reward, or it is not spiritual activity.

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[508] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 526.

[509] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, pp. 527-529.

[510] Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, p. 528.

8. Yang Jiang's *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*

> *'The era of the fact,' Jill Lepore wrote in The New Yorker [in 2016], 'is coming to an end.' […] How do we know what we know? Understanding the world through stories is as old as human civilization, but building those stories from evidence, and building that evidence from facts, is a relatively recent development. […] A science arose that understood the natural world through experiments —observable, repeatable. […] Fiction itself came to prioritize verisimilitude, leaving behind romance and epic for forms more familiar to nonfiction: travel accounts, news, and what Shapiro describes as 'the pseudohistory and pseudobiography we call the novel'. What Shapiro calls a "culture of fact" has been the dominant intellectual force of modernity, but it sits on top of the conventions it displaced. […] A fact, at its base, is a kind of social contract. […] But it is a category error to treat facts as the ends, rather than the means, of what we can know.*[511]
>
> Alex Carp

Yang Jiang (1911-2016) is best known outside China as the author of the definitive Chinese translation of *Don Quijote*; when one discovers that such a figure turned her hand, at the age of 97, to a book intended for a general Chinese audience on 'reaching the brink of life' (*Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, 2007), well, when one is in my position, one has a professional obligation to be curious.[512]

After a hospital stay in 2005, Yang is lucky enough to walk out the front door - even though the back door to the morgue, she admits, would have been the truer 'homecoming'[513] - and resolves to use what time is left to her on Earth to wrestle with her age, illness and blindness in order to wring one last book from her spirit:

> I have already walked to the absolute edge of life, and if I take another step, well, I will have 'gone', 'passed away', 'shuffled on'. Chinese and foreign languages alike have long lists of euphemisms for this unwelcome and unavoidable 'death' business. […] But I confess I don't fully understand how I can 'go' anywhere without my body. […] None of the people who might know about this are around to ask, and besides, this is something one can only ask and answer in the depths of one's own heart.[514]

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[511] Alex Carp, 'History for a Post-Fact America', https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/10/19/history-for-a-post-fact-america/, 19/10/2018 (accessed 6/11/2018).

[512] Not least when Yang is to be found mentioning Irving Babbitt and his New Humanism on the very first page. See Yang Jiang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang (Reaching the Brink of Life)*, (Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 2016(2007), p. 1.

[513] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 1.

[514] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, pp. 7-8.

Even though 'it's not something people are apt openly to discuss', Yang asks around her circle of family and friends anyway:

> I would never have guessed that their responses would be so firm and unanimous: *everyone* I asked said that when you died, that was it, there was nothing. Even though the words for it were different and the feelings about it varied, their understanding of the overall situation could not have been any clearer: they were all able-minded, progressive intellectuals, and my questions weren't even questions. Their 'answers' could all be summarised in the following terms: 'I studied science. I only know about the branch of science I specialised in. Where people go when they die is metaphysical stuff, a philosophical problem, and no business of mine. I only know that when people die, that's it, there's nothing for them.'
>
> They were a bit more tactful perhaps than I am relating here, but they all managed to make me ashamed of my own muddled nonogenarian wish-thinking. Still, I wanted to think about it for myself, not take it on trust from them. Could I still trust my own judgment? Everyone seemed sure, but was there some secret confusion lurking in the consensus?[515]

Yang's first task is simply to clarify what 'soul' or 'spirit' might mean:

> When people die, it is an open question whether or how their spirits might still exist, but living people have 'spirits' in one sense by definition. Living people have lives, human lives, what we Chinese call 'an arc of personal destiny'. People who deny they have 'souls' or 'spirits' will still refuse to accept an arcless, mineral fate. […] What's the difference between an 'arc of personal destiny' and a 'spirit' or 'soul'? Old English preferred 'ghost', French has its *âme*; Spanish *alma*; these are all translated by the Chinese *linghun*. Isn't a *linghun* just an individual human destiny? Who is able to avoid having one of those?[516]

Likewise, while the words for 'God', 'Heaven' and 'metaphysics' will always differ, there can - again by definition - be no full and final 'death of God' or 'end of metaphysics': 'Many gods have idols with different forms. There are also gods without idols. Have they really all died? When people are in an emergency, when they are in pain or distress, they *all* ask Heaven in one sense or other for help, both in China and everywhere else.'[517] The fact that 'God' refuses to 'reply to all enquiries'[518] scarcely proves or disproves the influence of Heaven in human affairs; Yang is less interested in old philosophical arguments around theodicy, however, or

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[515] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, pp. 8, 10.

[516] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 11.

[517] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 12.

[518] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 12.

new ones around atheism and 'anatheism'[519], than she is in diagnosing her friends' wilful spiritual blindness - or perhaps her own - in honest and straightforward terms:

> There have been no kitchen gods in my household, and we have enjoyed decades of seeming peace and quiet from Heaven. […] I don't even like talking about this whole subject. I am a relic of a bygone era, respected by some and hung out to dry by others. In either case, it is hard to avoid the fate of irrelevance when one was born as far back as the godforsaken Qing Dynasty! […] Are people today *correct* in their refusal to believe in anything? This is a perplexing question. We are not talking about a small handful of people here, and they seem to come from all walks of life: scientists, historians, literary types and so on. They seem so unanimous and certain in their worldview, but it appears from my vantage point as if this unanimity might represent a generational fad, a placing of value on the things one can measure and a doubting of everything one can't. Younger people seem even more committed to this post-metaphysical materialism than their parents; they want to enjoy things they can buy for as long as they can. But it is extremely worthwhile to pause and ask whether they are *correct* to adopt such priorities.
>
> What I endeavour to do here is to strip away as many prejudices as possible and give the case a fair hearing, before weighing the facts and drawing from my own life experience to reach my own conclusions. It helps that I am an independent citizen and represent no party or doctrine, so I do not have to squeeze my free inquiry into any preconceived framework. And the theme is of universal relevance; this is not a specialist study, so the lay reader will be able to follow it.[520]

<u>'Spirits and Ghosts'</u>

It is a tightrope indeed between the twin abysses of arrogant determinism and fuzzy spirit-thinking; science itself requires certain psychological dispositions which might be described as 'optimistic', or which in any case 'demolish the assumption that scientific knowledge somehow mandates atheism, or that atheism is the only reasonable consequence of cosmic knowledge'[521]. Albert Einstein himself embodied this spirit of a 'fuller' modernity:

> I am not an Atheist. I do not know if I can define myself as a Pantheist. The problem involved is too vast for our limited minds. May I not reply with a parable? The human mind, no matter how highly trained, cannot grasp the universe. We are in the position of a little child, entering a huge library

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[519] See Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God*, (Columbia University Press, 2011).

[520] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, pp. 19-20.

[521] Peter Hitchens, 'John Gray: A Spinoza for Today', https://home.isi.org/john-gray-spinoza-today, Fall 2018 (accessed 14/11/2018).

> whose walls are covered to the ceiling with books in many different tongues.[522]

Yang finds herself in a similar position: 'Even progressive types still sometimes refer to the "truth, goodness and beauty" of old. Can we see or touch these things? Is it not the heart alone which grasps them? Trust is invisible too, but one knows it when it is present.'[523] Among the Chinese classics, Yang argues, *The Doctrine of the Mean* is particularly strong on this point from the very beginning: 'The most obscure place, the smallest matter are all revealing of our nature; do you think you get a free pass when you are on your own and no one is looking? The *junzi* is especially careful when she is alone.'[524] The primordial Chinese penchant for believing in spirits and ghosts is only indirectly challenged by the Confucian tradition: the word *shen* is really used in the *Analects* as a synonym of 'Heaven', with which one must cultivate a dialogical and ethical relationship; the world of *guishen* - of 'spirits and ghosts' - must by contrast be kept at a 'respectful distance'[525], much as Einstein's 'child' remains careful in her judgments on that which lies 'beyond her grasp'.

Yang herself 'feared ghosts more than anyone else in the house did' when she was a child, though she 'tried not to let on for fear of losing face' (her father mocked her for her fear, while her little sister defended her 'sensitivity').[526] Though her education placed these fears in perspective, Yang's understanding of their roots remained strong:

> There are a lot of ghosts in remote villages, but there are a lot of other superstitions too, and we cannot be obliged to take them all seriously as factual reports of anything. But the invisible is not necessarily unreal either; there are those who do not believe in ghosts (e.g. my father), and those who do not fear them (e.g. my late husband), but no one can prove their non-existence, because no one can prove the non-existence of anything. I basically just fear ghosts; I am not asserting that they are real, but is it too much to ask for a moratorium on outright unbelief? People say that the fact that our loved ones do not return home to us after they die is proof enough that ghosts do not exist. I don't think we are in any position to know from here, and I am interested in the problem as it faces us from this side.[527]

In other words, a certain modern form of atheism and insistence on the non-existence of ghosts can be a distraction from the real business of spiritual self-cultivation, which, as practised by the Confucian *junzi*, keeps certain metaphysical unknowables at a sensible 'distance' instead of taking pride in 'overcoming' them once and for all. Empirical inquiry into the psychology of religion is entirely

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[522] See Hitchens, 'John Gray: A Spinoza for Today'.

[523] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 22.

[524] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 25.

[525] See Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, pp. 27-28.

[526] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 28.

[527] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, pp. 29-30.

legitimate and natural, but it is in no way a form of apocalyptic or nuclear threat to spiritual life. One need not accept all the tenets of Spinoza's deterministic philosophy to share, as Yang does, his basic conclusion, namely that 'individuals are free to the extent that what they do follows not from how external things happen to make them feel, but from their own intellectual resources', and that

> we shall bear calmly those things which happen to us contrary to what the principle of our advantage demands, if we are conscious that we have done our duty. […] For insofar as we understand, we can want nothing except what is necessary, nor absolutely be satisfied with anything except what is true.[528]

In this spirit, Yang wants, like Spinoza, to keep room for 'true piety' in a world where old superstitions have lost their automatic and autocratic force. Consider Stephen Nadler's summary of Spinoza's 'philosophy of freedom':

> Perhaps the most deleterious superstition of all is the belief in the immortality of the soul. Like the notion of a providential God, the idea that a person will experience a post-mortem existence in some world-to-come is a part of all three Abrahamic religions. A robust doctrine of personal immortality, like the eschatology that accompanies it, only strengthens [the] harmful passions. […]
>
> Finally, as part of his effort to undermine the usurpation of political power by contemporary ecclesiastics, Spinoza undercuts the stature and alleged authority of Scripture. He denies that the Torah is literally of divine origin. Neither the Pentateuch nor the prophetic writings or histories were written by God or by anyone serving as God's amanuensis.
>
> […] As Spinoza says, in a truly free society 'everyone may think what he likes and say what he thinks'.[529]

Yang is simply trying to save the modern inheritors of Spinoza's project from their worst selves, to pull them back from the 'brink' of outright unbelief without denying Spinoza's basic insight that 'the human mind and the human body are […] at a deep level one and the same thing.'[530] The idea of 'spiritual life' must somehow be freed from belief in straightforward life after death and corresponding wishful 'superstitions' without denying the dual 'hunger' inherent in the unified life of the body and mind, which extends from bodily needs to curiosity for that which lies beyond our immediate grasp.

From 'The Nature of Personhood' to 'Destiny and the Mandate of Heaven'

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[528] Stephen Nadler, Spinoza's Philosophy of Freedom', https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/private/spinoza-philosophy-freedom/, 27/4/2018 (accessed 31/10/2018).

[529] Nadler, 'Spinoza's Philosophy of Freedom'.

[530] Nadler, 'Spinoza's Philosophy of Freedom'.

Yang begins the second chapter of *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang* by distinguishing between the 'human' of human-scientific inquiry and the 'human' of the humanities:

> The collectivity of concrete, individual human beings may be referred to as 'people' or 'the human community', but these are abstract pronouns which flatten the endless diversity of individual subjectivity and lazily stand in for three-dimensional people with individual inner lives. I am often correctly reminded by my critics that there are only concrete subjectivities, that a 'person' in the abstract does not exist, and that all talk of 'people' or 'the human community' in the generic plural threatens the very nature of what it means to be 'human' in the first place. […] Anyone who refers to herself as 'I' has such a subjective nature, regardless of class, profession, place or time.[531]

Yang has no problem listing and accepting accumulated Chinese and other folk wisdom summarisable under the English saying 'show me the boy at three, and I'll show you the man'; she is uninterested in challenging the empirical findings of developmental psychology[532], or in denying that human beings might share a *benxing* or common nature which extends to the 'Confucian and Mencian notion' that human beings can cultivate benevolence and righteousness in their hearts as well as learning facts and vocational skills[533]; the borderline cases of severely handicapped human beings and animals are duly considered before Xunzi's 'limited' and pessimistic view of human nature is rejected in favour of a 'twin nature' composed of *ling* and *rou*, directly translatable as 'the spirit' and 'the flesh' but really better understood as humanistic 'freedom' and scientific 'givenness'.[534] The 'struggle' between *ling* and *rou* defines the individual 'I' neither in the narrow anatomical sense (self-awareness, Yang reminds her readers, is not anchored in one brain region[535]), nor in the narrow aesthetic sense of hedonism versus asceticism, but in the broader moral sense of ongoing self-cultivation of an autonomous subjectivity which transcends *all* givens; there may be extreme examples in one direction (saints[536]) or the other (tyrants[537]), but most of us, most of the time, fall somewhere in the middle.[538]

Chapter 4 explores 'Destiny and the Mandate of Heaven': while all 'I's' are in a sense equal in their possession of individual subjectivities and spirits, we are far from equal in our circumstances of wealth, beauty, and intelligence; moreover,

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[531] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 31.

[532] See Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 34.

[533] See Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 37.

[534] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, pp. 42-53.

[535] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 51.

[536] See Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, pp. 57-59.

[537] See Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, pp. 59-62.

[538] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, pp. 62-64.

accidents and disasters may befall any of us at any time. A Confucian gentleman or *junzi* must accept this *ming*[539]; this does not mean that one should take astrology, numerology, face-reading, palm-reading or other superstitious pseudoscience overly seriously[540], but one ought (as Yang's beloved Quijote also does[541]) to retain a certain sense of ultimate uncontrollability, even in the face of blatant injustice: 'I think our destinies are completely unreasonable. Idiots and bastards can enjoy lifelong wealth and respect; unlettered charlatans win fame and fortune, while those with true genius, talent and character are routinely plagued with misfortune: the bad guys hold power, and the good among us are forced to suffer.'[542] This is the exact opposite of resignation and fatalism; it merely circumscribes the realm of human personhood, spirituality and meaning:

> What responsibility remains for the individual 'I'? On the one hand, one must find ways to cope with those things one has no hope of controlling. On the other hand, the border between the controllable and the uncontrollable, while porous and difficult to define, is real, as we all know from our own experience. As I reflect back on my own life, I know that there were some things I could never have changed, but there are many others where I was unsure whether it was destiny, my own inborn nature or a truly free will in the lead.[543]

Yang's husband Qian Zhongshu's refusal of a 'carrot' job with UNESCO after the war, for example, was a reflection of his character, but also an exercise of free will[544]; likewise, the couple's decision to remain in Communist China despite knowing that they were not the kind of 'useful' intellectuals the Party wanted[545] was a simple case of freely 'doing what we couldn't *not* do' (i.e. stay in their homeland); free will is experienced not as a supermarket-style choice among a range of alternatives, but rather as an intimate inevitability:

> When we look back over our lives, it may appear as if circumstances have dictated the overall course, but the key moments have still been dictated by ourselves. If we extend the fortune-telling analogy of a boat and a river, well, even a boat needs a river to go anywhere. […] But in shallow waters and storms, there is still the 'I' onboard to take the helm. […] Can we really say that the martyr who dies in the name of virtue or the loyal official who sacrifices for the organisation in which she believes makes no kind of free choice? Such people freely heed the call of their spiritual natures, and

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[539] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 65.

[540] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 72.

[541] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 72.

[542] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 73.

[543] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 75.

[544] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 75.

[545] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, pp. 75-76.

choose death over animal survival. True autonomy is in sacrifice, not in abject clinging to life.[546]

From 'The Soul of Things' to 'The Value of Human Life'

After a brief reminder in Chapter 5 of the Confucian tradition's emphasis on the 'animateness of the inanimate', Yang moves on swiftly to address 'human civilisation' in Chapter 6: material progress as such 'is not what matters,' she concludes, 'not the goal of Heaven's creation of us.'[547] Although human beings, with their consciousness and conscience, occupy a place of privilege, responsibility and leadership among the universe's myriad things, most of us 'continue to lead drunk and befuddled lives', and remain 'as insensitive as wood' to the universe around us; even the greatest philosophers in the millennial history of recorded 'civilisation' - nothing in cosmic time - have all, to the extent that they have pursued 'knowledge' over experience, been forced to conclude with Socrates and Faust that they don't really 'know' anything in a factual sense.[548]

'Civilisation', then, is a means; the end is not knowledge in the scientific, instrumental sense of modern technology - useful and comforting though such technology undoubtedly is - but rather the embodied and subjective - for want of a better word, 'spiritual' - knowing of the Confucian Way. As the Chinese translator of Cervantes knows, however, there is nothing uniquely Confucian about this Way: 'Every religion and secular philosophy worth mentioning has its own version of *Dao*. The *Dao* itself, however, has always defied scientific and cultural consensus.'[549] Instead of arguing legalistically over definitions, the creators of a true 'Spiritual Humanism' will actively liberate the individual human being, wherever in the universe she happens to be, through the sheer quixotic power of their own examples: 'Though we are all laughably small in cosmic terms, and though our lives are ridiculously short, we can still always learn, improve, make the best of ourselves. The preciousness of the individual person lies in her enduring ability to fashion her own [spiritual] identity.'[550] Such autonomous 'learning for the self' is not solipsism; it is the precondition for any free sense of generosity and belonging, which is what love is, and why it is so hard to sustain over time: authenticity requires prolonged and renewed bouts of self-cultivating effort, of pushing beyond the borders of our comfort zones and fixed ideas. 'Civilisation', Yang suggests, is perhaps the biggest 'comfort zone' and 'fixed idea' of all; without disparaging or belittling it - and on the contrary, according proper respect for the material gains of the Enlightenment in particular - she politely insists on life and meaning beyond the warm bath of modern consumer society.

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[546] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 77.

[547] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 86.

[548] See Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 87.

[549] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 88.

[550] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 91.

One can find such courage for creativity, indeed, in the absence of all bureaucratic structures of 'civilisation'; as Tahar Ben Jelloun recounts in *La punition* (Gallimard, 2018), it was 'literature and cinema' which 'really allowed him to resist' nineteen months of abuse in a Moroccan prison for peaceful political protest in 1965-66, and gave him 'the energy and desire not to get pointlessly killed': 'It all allowed me to grow beyond myself and thus to hang on. […] Joyce's *Ulysses* in particular (sent to me by my brother), […] a mere day in the life of Leopold Bloom, opened the gates of literary possibility, and brought me the freedom and courage to go to the wall for a seemingly mad idea'[551], namely that of genuine sacrifice. Yang summarises the 'bitter reality' of this spiritual predicament:

> In this human zoo overflowing with material greed, a fully human life is likely to be quite tough. If you try to stand above the fray, people below you will bully and use you; if you show even the slightest evidence of moral fortitude, people will soon be jealous, and isolate you; if you magnanimously cede ground, others will rush in to occupy it, leaving you with little; if you choose to stand and protect yourself, you will have no choice but to invest in weapons of war; if you refuse the confrontation today, you will have to give up capital now, and somehow pool your remaining forces for a postponed conflict; truly peaceful coexistence will require you to accept massive personal costs one way or the other. But at the same time, you will also have intimate friends and allies; when you see *them* bullied and mistreated, how can you be expected not to respond with heartfelt indignation and a spontaneous willingness to help? Can you remain indifferent as the good are victimised? Can you just stand by as the greedy grow their chubby flanks at the hardworking public's expense?[552]

It is unfair to instrumentalise or belittle art and literature as the 'training ground' for such sacrifice; the experience itself of virtue - never one's own, but always that of others - is already spiritually all-consuming and intrinsically meaningful. The effect that such exposure to virtue will have on our own ultimately autonomous behaviour is unpredictable and, if measurable, not in need of measurement or external quantification; though one may naturally wish for its increase, the desire to measure and manage it already betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the subjective nature and value of the 'knowledge' in question. Yang is not pushing us to embrace poverty or asceticism, but she does want to show her readers how a 'literary life' ultimately wins out over scientistic materialism and consumerism:

> The stronger the instrumental intellect becomes, the more deception it engenders, both for itself and others. A new generation of smart youngsters seems to have decided that the enjoyment of consumption is the highest good, and those who may once have resisted them, seeing no convincing alternative to the meaninglessness of the consumerist smorgasbord, have apparently given up in despair. […] But who, on close inspection, truly

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[551] Tahar Ben Jalloun, in Georgia Makhlouf, 'Tahar Ben Jalloun: Naissance (interview), http://lorientlitteraire.com/article_details.php?cid=6&nid=7368, November 2018 (accessed 19/11/2018).

[552] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 92.

> enjoys their wealth, privilege and general good fortune? […] Did the creative force of Heaven really bestow us with our brains and consciences in order for us just to be miserable and ungrateful even when the going is good for us?[553]

Empire can be more or less cruel, but it is always vain; quoting Newton, Yang decides that, in the material realm at least, 'the more is in vain when the less will do'.[554] Spiritual cultivation, by contrast, requires constant fuel for the fire of disciplined creativity; straightforward adversity can provide the individual spirit with one brand of fuel (as myriad Chinese and other ancient proverbs attest), but literature can provide another:

> Our most gifted teacher in these matters may indeed have been Confucius himself. In the *Analects*, he starts from the human, and never resorts to dogma. Nevertheless, a certain common thread may be said to run through his work; his loyal disciple Zeng Shen, afraid that this humanistic essence was in danger of being lost, compiled the *Great Learning*, the guts of which are encapsulated in the idea that 'from the emperor to the common citizen, all must take self-cultivation as the root'. What is this self-cultivation if not the forging of an autonomous individual identity?[555]

Devoid of all adversity or art, self-cultivation is like tennis without a net, or without an opponent. Adversity and art do not, however, by their very natures, allow two people, or even the same person at different times, to react identically to them; there is always an element of choice involved, sometimes unpleasant but always meaningful and free, even though both aesthetic experience and moral decision-making may, in the moment, take the *form* of irresistible revelation ('do what you can't *not* do').

Self-cultivation, though first and foremost for oneself, may not end up being for oneself *alone*: it may 'benefit family, country, or even the global order of things'[556]. But turning the social outcome of one's own private spiritual activity into its goal - however noble (saving the environment, rescuing future generations etc.) - is always, Yang argues, a subtle mistake; 'self-understanding' is more important:

> Autonomous self-understanding is hard work. Our brains are incredibly good at telling our bodies what they want to hear, ingenious when it comes to giving rational cover to our selfish desires. We should adopt the posture of unbiased detectives in relation to our own selves, […] lying in wait for the suspect to let down her guard in dreams and other semiconscious states (including the self-righteous intoxication of success).[557]

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[553] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, pp. 93-94.

[554] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 95.

[555] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, pp. 96-97.

[556] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 97.

[557] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 97.

Like adversity, art grants our autonomous 'detective' unchaperoned, surprise access to corners of herself which she may be 'unwilling or unable to see in her everyday life'[558]; it remains up to her, however, to decide from one day to the next what kind of detective she is going to be.

The 'Way' of Spiritual Humanism is therefore neverending, without ever becoming stale, repetitive or hellish; it is the constant offer of self-rewarding, self-defining freedom. The traditional Confucian recipe for such inner freedom, Yang argues, is a mixture of *li* and *yue* - 'ritual' and 'music' - though we might prefer today to say simply 'discipline' and 'fun', or 'work' and 'play': 'Human beings need to engage in spiritual cultivation, to be sure, but the training self needs to develop a sense of both proportion and generosity towards itself.'[559] Excessive asceticism, in other words, can be its own kind of counterproductive prison, just as excessive hedonism also can; the background psychological conditions against which an individual enjoys her free spiritual life are in constant flux; wisdom consists in learning to see these conditions (hunger, tiredness etc.) as 'enabling constraints' rather than as obstacles to the exercise of true freedom, which always begins where these shifting constraints end. This is not to celebrate hunger, tiredness, poverty, aging and so on, or to fail to keep pace with developments in neuroscience and genetics (which are, of course, revealing the neural and genetic mechanisms of our decision-making[560]) but merely to understand what spiritual freedom, as distinct from medical diagnosis and comfort (whether of body or head), is:

> A spirit undergoes all manner of changes over a lifetime. […] Each spirit was unique to begin with, and each grows uniquely based on free decisions made in different circumstances. And yet, for all the decisions and changes, the same 'I' endures. […] We keep calling ourselves 'I' for as long as we are physically able; and after that, well, our I's go and join the realm of the ghosts.[561]

'What's it all for then?' Yang understandably asks in Chapter 11.[562] Without wishing to dismiss the humanistic heritage of the world's religions[563], she reaffirms her commitment to understanding the view 'from here', and hence rejects too-easy parodies of Christianity and Buddhism which project either an 'afterlife' or 'future lives':

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[558] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 97.

[559] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 101.

[560] See Michael S. Gazzaniga, *The Consciousness Instinct: Unraveling the Mystery of How the Brain Makes the Mind*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018) for a recent overview. See also Jacob Ward, 'The "Geno-Economists" Say DNA Can Predict Our Chances of Success', https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/11/16/magazine/tech-design-economics-genes.html, accessed 22/11/2018.

[561] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 107.

[562] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 108.

[563] See Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 109.

> What matters is not the civilisation that human beings have built, but the human beings who build civilisation. Only human beings seem able to demand more of themselves than they have been given. This is an end in itself! […] But it remains so only to the extent that one has a basic trust that the achievements of the spirit, independent of all public recognition for them, are inextinguishable. Such trust can only be experienced; we can't reason our way to it.[564]

'Connie's Wife'

> *My 'Concluding Remarks' are by no means an end to my questions, but rather an invitation to my smart young readers to pick up the ball and run farther than I have. I hope to hear from some of them before my time comes to 'shuffle on'.*[565]

Yang's 'Annotations' at the end of her main text are almost as long as the text itself; one in particular, devoted to Qiguan, the wife of Confucius, is worthy of a brief epilogue here. After lamenting the absence of female voices in the Chinese classical tradition and the global historical record more generally, Yang unfavourably compares Socrates, who showed no apparent love or respect for his wife, to Confucius, who was 'a gentleman through and through, as his books show'[566]. Still, this Qiguan must have been quite some lady, even though we have been left next to no information about her[567]; as Yang notes (and it would be tough, in light of her emphasis on equal-opportunity self-cultivation, to make the same point any more dryly than she does), the comparable difficulty of 'educating' both 'women' and *xiaoren* ('small men') encapsulated in the old Confucian saying *dui nüzi yu xiaoren wei nanyang ye*[568] can only mean that Confucius must have practised some seriously amazing pedagogy on his wife:

> In my mind's eye, I see Qiguan imposing some pretty rigid order on her household. Confucius could be a picky bastard in his everyday habits, but harmony reigned over the house all the same. With their daughters, daughter-in-law, granddaughters and female servants all in the picture too, Confucius must have performed his pedagogical miracles on all of them through his branded mixture of intimacy and discipline. If the path to

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564 Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, pp. 109, 111.

565 Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 116.

566 Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 150.

567 See Alexandra Popoff's *The Wives: The Women Behind Russian Literary Giants*, (Pegasus Books, 2013) for a recent classic in the 'forgotten wives of great male artists' genre.

568 Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, p. 149.

> becoming a *junzi* begins in marriage, as he said it did, then he must have been on the best of terms with Qiguan. And if not, well, she must have at least done what she was told.[569]

Confucius, in other words, must not be put on a pedestal; not everything in the *Analects* is unimprovably wise, and not even *he* can be credited with having conceived everything in a vacuum of pure isolation. The mysteries of spiritual transmission and self-cultivation, Yang reminds her readers, are far richer than any theory of raw individual genius might dictate.

[569] Yang, *Zoudao Rensheng Bianshang*, pp. 152-153.

9. Viktor Frankl's *Ein Psycholog erlebt das Konzentrationslager*

> *Nietzsche […] had no stomach for palliatives. […] "Become who you are," the quotation that Nietzsche chose for the epigraph of his graduate dissertation, is a line from the Pythian odes of the Greek poet Pindar. Bereft of context, this pronouncement can sound as flabbily vacant as the text of a self-help manual. After all, how could anyone fail to become who she is? Is there any instruction more trivial? The full Pindar quote, however, outlines a daunting assignment: "*Learn *and become who you are." Nietzsche knew that if philosophy can serve as therapy, it's [only] by delivering an electric jolt to the soul.*[570]*
>
> Becca Rothfeld

My first proper encounter with Viktor Frankl came when a Chinese student of mine in Germany, Mengjie Ma (later to become the first viral Sinic subtitler of Jordan Peterson), insisted how much more interesting and relevant to the development of a 'World Ethos' Frankl's concentration camp survival narrative seemed to her than all of Hans Küng's theology combined; I spent most of the remaining semester grappling with this bluntly laid-down gauntlet. Frankl also allows us to face the 'Confucianism and the Holocaust' challenge set out by Thomas Fröhlich in our first chapter; Frankl's failure, moreover, to produce a successful and repeatable therapeutic 'method' out of his work as a psychologist offers powerful 'evidence' for the autonomy of the humanities, and for their ability to remain forever one step ahead of the human sciences.

'Experiences in a Concentration Camp'

> *Much of the stress [bullshit jobs] produce - the 'spiritual violence' - […] results from the contortionist maneuvers that employees are forced to perform in order to pretend to be working when they have nothing to do. […] 37 percent of the UK respondents to a poll on the subject, and 40 percent of the Dutch ones, insisted that their work is utterly useless. […] 'I get most of the meaning in my life from my job,' [Lilian] writes. But the 'meaning' of most jobs is meaninglessness itself. […] In a free society—one in which your time and work are your own rather than commodities—Lilian's sentiment would not necessarily be pathological. Work doesn't need to be drudgery; we can find meaning in our jobs. But a society based on the production of value is by definition unfree, since we don't really have*

[570] Becca Rothfeld, 'How to Live Better, According to Nietzsche', https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/10/nietzsches-guide-to-better-living/568375/, October 2018 (accessed 22/11/2018).

a choice about whether to participate in it, and because work often becomes merely a tedious means of survival. […] We earned a little over the minimum wage. As often as I could, I would shirk my duties and surf the then-nascent Web. […] It was a fellow temp, who sat on my left, who objected to my wretched rebellion. 'You're not getting paid to surf the Web,' he informed me. I was just trying to reclaim a little of my time from those who were stealing it. And it wasn't even a very effective protest, since I still had to sit in that depressing room and fill out enough spreadsheets to keep from getting fired. But my co-worker was simply expressing an assumption so commonplace that it hardly ever needs to be articulated: Your time does not belong to you.

[…] Some of the first factories in London went bankrupt because laborers refused to work all day, every day. To the factory owners, this proved the workers were indolent loafers, so they reduced wages to the point that workers were forced to put in even more hours to survive. […] "Productive activity," as André Gorz noted, began to be "cut off from its meaning, its motivations and its object and became simply a means of earning a wage." Now we've all internalized this view of work.

[…] The familiar slogan of Occupy Wall Street and the global justice movement of the early 2000s […] was "Another world is possible." We're told this is idealistic and naive. But it's not bullshit.[571]

Michael Robbins

In his Preface to the 1992 English edition of *Ein Psycholog erlebt das Konzentrationslager* (translated as *Man's Search for Meaning*), Frankl reflects on the unique commercial success of his 1946 memoir:

> I do not at all see in the bestseller status of my book an achievement and accomplishment on my part but rather an expression of the misery of our time: if hundreds of thousands of people reach out for a book whose very title promises to deal with the question of a meaning to life, it must be a question that burns under their fingernails. […] I had wanted simply to convey to the reader by way of a concrete example that life holds a potential meaning under any conditions, even the most miserable ones. And I thought that if the point were demonstrated in a situation as extreme as that in a concentration camp, my book might gain a hearing. I therefore felt responsible for writing down what I had gone through, for I thought it might be helpful to people who are prone to despair.
>
> And so it is both strange and remarkable to me that— among some dozens of books I have authored—precisely this one, which I had intended

[571] Michael Robbins, 'Looking Busy', https://www.thenation.com/article/graeber-and-pointless-work/, 8/11/2018 (accessed 1/5/2019).

> to be published anonymously so that it could never build up any reputation on the part of the author, did become a success. Again and again I therefore admonish my students both in Europe and in America: 'Don't aim at success —the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side-effect of one's dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself. Happiness must happen, and the same holds for success: you have to let it happen by not caring about it. I want you to listen to what your conscience commands you to do and go on to carry it out to the best of your knowledge. Then you will live to see that in the long run—in the long run, I say!—success will follow you precisely because you had forgotten to think of it.'[572]

Frankl nevertheless seems both perplexed and frustrated at his psychological writings' relative *lack* of recognition and success; he concocts a consoling compromise narrative for himself:

> To be sure, something else may have contributed to the impact of the book: its second, theoretical part ("Logotherapy in a Nutshell") boils down, as it were, to the lesson one may distil from the first part, the autobiographical account ("Experiences in a Concentration Camp"), whereas Part One serves as the existential validation of my theories. Thus, both parts mutually support their credibility.[573]

I suspect, however, that many readers of *Man's Search for Meaning* have either not read Part Two at all, or not particularly enjoyed it if they have; what they needed was the experience of a good story - 'meaning' itself - not a 'boiled-down' theory of meaning or 'existential validation' of that theory (can one avoid saying the word 'logorrhea' to oneself when one hears the word 'logotherapy'?). And 'Experiences in a Concentration Camp' *is* a great story, another case of someone simply, *in extremis*, 'doing what she couldn't *not* do':

> The reader may ask me why I did not try to escape what was in store for me after Hitler had occupied Austria. Let me answer by recalling the following story. Shortly before the United States entered World War II, I received an invitation to come to the American Consulate in Vienna to pick up my immigration visa. My old parents were overjoyed because they expected that I would soon be allowed to leave Austria. I suddenly hesitated, however. The question beset me: could I really afford to leave my parents alone to face their fate, to be sent, sooner or later, to a concentration camp, or even to a so-called extermination camp? Where did my responsibility lie? Should I foster my brain child, logotherapy, by emigrating to fertile soil where I could write my books? Or should I concentrate on my duties as a real child, the

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[572] Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy (Fourth Edition)*, trans. Ilse Lasch and Gordon W. Allport, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1992(1946)), p. 5.

[573] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 5.

> child of my parents who had to do whatever he could to protect them? I pondered the problem this way and that but could not arrive at a solution; this was the type of dilemma that made one wish for "a hint from Heaven," as the phrase goes.
>
> It was then that I noticed a piece of marble lying on a table at home. When I asked my father about it, he explained that he had found it on the site where the National Socialists had burned down the largest Viennese synagogue. He had taken the piece home because it was a part of the tablets on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed. One gilded Hebrew letter was engraved on the piece; my father explained that this letter stood for one of the Commandments. Eagerly I asked, "Which one is it?" He answered, "Honour thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land." At that moment I decided to stay with my father and my mother upon the land, and to let the American visa lapse.[574]

Just as Primo Levi's psychological struggles preceded and outlived his experiences of Auschwitz, Frankl's desire to be a world-famous psychologist - to develop a solid 'theory' of human meaning and motivation ('my brain child, logotherapy') - was there before National Socialism put his priorities to the test, and it seemingly survived through to this 1992 Preface. No scientific theory, however - not even a theory of spiritual or existential 'meaning' itself - could be worth the spiritual cost of not freely choosing what in the end was no choice for Frankl at all. Frankl's relative failure as a psychologist is more than compensated by his success as a storyteller; by sacrificing his own theoretical, academic and reputational ambitions to 'honour' his parents in their hour of need, he embodied the very thing his readers needed from him: not a generic and abstract theory, but a unique and precious example.

Frankl crucially makes no claim to moral superiority over his readers; even though we instinctively believe that 'no explanations are needed for those who have been inside, and the others will understand neither how we felt then nor how we feel now', we also know it must be true that

> on the average, only those prisoners could keep alive who, after years of trekking from camp to camp, had lost all scruples in their fight for existence; they were prepared to use every means, honest and otherwise, even brutal force, theft, and betrayal of their friends, in order to save themselves. We who have come back, by the aid of many lucky chances or miracles—whatever one may choose to call them—we know: the best of us did not return.[575]

Much about Frankl's arrival at Auschwitz was beyond his control; many of his reactions were, he tried to argue, in a sense scientifically predictable, even if they were 'abnormal':

> 'All of you standing here, even if you have only been here twenty-four hours, you need not fear gas, except perhaps you.' And then he pointed to me and

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[574] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, pp. 5-6.

[575] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 8.

> said, 'I hope you don't mind my telling you frankly.' To the others he repeated, 'Of all of you he is the only one who must fear the next selection. So, don't worry!' And I smiled. I am now convinced that anyone in my place on that day would have done the same.
>
> I think it was Lessing who once said, 'There are things which must cause you to lose your reason or you have none to lose.' An abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is normal behaviour. Even we psychiatrists expect the reactions of a man to an abnormal situation, such as being committed to an asylum, to be abnormal in proportion to the degree of his normality. The reaction of a man to his admission to a concentration camp also represents an abnormal state of mind, but judged objectively it is a normal and, as will be shown later, typical reaction to the given circumstances.[576]

Frankl the 'psychiatrist' seems interested in finding the rule behind all the apparent exceptions; Frankl the narrator, while averse to all 'exhibitionism'[577], is in fact busy preparing the ground for his own free exercise of the right to exception. His sense of vocation transcends all else - even the emergencies of injury and hunger - and ultimately saves his life:

> Apart from that strange kind of humour, another sensation seized us: curiosity. I have experienced this kind of curiosity before, as a fundamental reaction toward certain strange circumstances. When my life was once endangered by a climbing accident, I felt only one sensation at the critical moment: curiosity, curiosity as to whether I should come out of it alive or with a fractured skull or some other injuries.
>
> Cold curiosity predominated even in Auschwitz, somehow detaching the mind from its surroundings, which came to be regarded with a kind of objectivity. At that time one cultivated this state of mind as a means of protection. We were anxious to know what would happen next; and what would be the consequence, for example, of our standing in the open air, in the chill of late autumn, stark naked, and still wet from the showers. In the next few days our curiosity evolved into surprise; surprise that we did not catch cold.
>
> There were many similar surprises in store for new arrivals. The medical men among us learned first of all: "Textbooks tell lies!" Somewhere it is said that man cannot exist without sleep for more than a stated number of hours. Quite wrong!
>
> […] The corpse which had just been removed stared in at me with glazed eyes. Two hours before I had spoken to that man. Now I continued sipping my soup.
>
> If my lack of emotion had not surprised me from the standpoint of professional interest, I would not remember this incident now, because there was so little feeling involved in it.

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[576] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 14.

[577] See Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 8.

> Apathy, the blunting of the emotions and the feeling that one could not care any more, were the symptoms arising during the second stage of the prisoner's psychological reactions, and which eventually made him insensitive to daily and hourly beatings. By means of this insensibility the prisoner soon surrounded himself with a very necessary protective shell.[578]

With his clear sense of lifelong professional purpose and ambition, Frankl was able to cope far better than most ('friends whom I have met later have told me that I was not one of those whom the shock of admission greatly depressed'[579]) despite the fact that his profession is, in practice, taken away from him on his first day:

> I tried to take one of the old prisoners into my confidence. Approaching him furtively, I pointed to the roll of paper in the inner pocket of my coat and said, "Look, this is the manuscript of a scientific book. I know what you will say; that I should be grateful to escape with my life, that that should be all I can expect of fate. But I cannot help myself. I must keep this manuscript at all costs; it contains my life's work. Do you understand that?"
>
> […] The thought of suicide was entertained by nearly everyone, if only for a brief time. It was born of the hopelessness of the situation, the constant danger of death looming over us daily and hourly, and the closeness of the deaths suffered by many of the others. From personal convictions which will be mentioned later, I made myself a firm promise, on my first evening in camp, that I would not 'run into the wire'.[580]

Realising that he would never see his manuscript again, Frankl convinces himself that 'at that moment I saw the plain truth and did what marked the culminating point of the first phase of my psychological reaction: I struck out my whole former life.'[581] This is palpably untrue: his 'whole former life' had instead been spent in unsuspecting preparation for that moment; suddenly faced with an unavoidable and extreme predicament, his sense of vocation allowed him to 'do what he couldn't *not* do': he turned the whole dreadful experience into literature in his own head. His 'professional interest', in other words, survives his ability to *practise* his profession in society; devoid of alternatives, he turns his professional gaze on the only thing left: his 'naked' self and his reactions to the chaos in the chimneyed air. Who cares if there are psychological 'laws' predicting with greater or lesser degrees of accuracy how 'I' will react in a given situation; I may be curious to find out what they are, and to help others as well as myself, but I can still always savour the autonomy of my own reaction:

> Beatings occurred on the slightest provocation, sometimes for no reason at all. For example, bread was rationed out at our work site and we had to line up for it. Once, the man behind me stood off a little to one side and that lack

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578 Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, pp. 12, 15.

579 Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 13.

580 Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, pp. 11, 13.

581 Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 11.

> of symmetry displeased the SS guard. I did not know what was going on in the line behind me, nor in the mind of the SS guard, but suddenly I received two sharp blows on my head. Only then did I spot the guard at my side who was using his stick. At such a moment it is not the physical pain which hurts the most (and this applies to adults as much as to punished children); it is the mental agony caused by the injustice, the unreasonableness of it all.[582]

Clinging onto this autonomy was the final challenge of all the physical tortures; the fact that some succeeded while others failed is more important than the causal reasons - more or less measurable and predictable - which made some capitulate and others resist:

> In spite of all the enforced physical and mental primitiveness of the life in a concentration camp, it was possible for spiritual life to deepen. Sensitive people who were used to a rich intellectual life may have suffered much pain (they were often of a delicate constitution), but the damage to their inner selves was less. They were able to retreat from their terrible surroundings to a life of inner riches and spiritual freedom. Only in this way can one explain the apparent paradox that some prisoners of a less hardy makeup often seemed to survive camp life better than did those of a robust nature.[583]

Beyond the extraordinary physical deprivations (hunger chief among them[584]), love survived, at least for those capable of it in the first place:

> We stumbled on in the darkness, over big stones and through large puddles, along the one road leading from the camp. The accompanying guards kept shouting at us and driving us with the butts of their rifles. Anyone with very sore feet supported himself on his neighbour's arm. Hardly a word was spoken; the icy wind did not encourage talk. Hiding his mouth behind his upturned collar, the man marching next to me whispered suddenly: 'If our wives could see us now! I do hope they are better off in their camps and don't know what is happening to us.'
>
> That brought thoughts of my own wife to mind. And as we stumbled on for miles, slipping on icy spots, supporting each other time and again, dragging one another up and onward, nothing was said, but we both knew: each of us was thinking of his wife. Occasionally I looked at the sky, where the stars were fading and the pink light of the morning was beginning to spread behind a dark bank of clouds. But my mind clung to my wife's image, imagining it with an uncanny acuteness. I heard her answering me, saw her smile, her frank and encouraging look. Real or not, her look was then more luminous than the sun which was beginning to rise.
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> A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so

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[582] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 15.

[583] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 21.

[584] See Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, pp. 18-19.

> many thinkers. The truth - that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: *The salvation of man is through love and in love.* I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist in enduring his sufferings in the right way— an honourable way— in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfilment. For the first time in my life I was able to understand the meaning of the words, 'The angels are lost in perpetual contemplation of an infinite glory.'[585]

It is the science-transcending nature of this love, and the language that a hard-headed scientist like Frankl uses to describe it, which is most interesting: love is a truth beyond all evidence, presence, or causality, an immediate and explanation-resistant Heaven:

> I did not know whether my wife was alive, and I had no means of finding out (during all my prison life there was no outgoing or incoming mail); but at that moment it ceased to matter. There was no need for me to know; nothing could touch the strength of my love, my thoughts, and the image of my beloved. Had I known then that my wife was dead, I think that I would still have given myself, undisturbed by that knowledge, to the contemplation of her image, and that my mental conversation with her would have been just as vivid and just as satisfying. 'Set me like a seal upon thy heart, love is as strong as death.'
>
> This intensification of inner life helped the prisoner find a refuge from the emptiness, desolation and spiritual poverty of his existence, by letting him escape into the past. When given free rein, his imagination played with past events, often not important ones, but minor happenings and trifling things. His nostalgic memory glorified them and they assumed a strange character. Their world and their existence seemed very distant and the spirit reached out for them longingly: In my mind I took bus rides, unlocked the front door of my apartment, answered my telephone, switched on the electric lights. Our thoughts often centered on such details, and these memories could move one to tears.
>
> As the inner life of the prisoner tended to become more intense, he also experienced the beauty of art and nature as never before. Under their influence he sometimes even forgot his own frightful circumstances. If someone had seen our faces on the journey from Auschwitz to a Bavarian camp as we beheld the mountains of Salzburg with their summits glowing in the sunset, through the little barred windows of the prison carriage, he would never have believed that those were the faces of men who had given up all hope of life and liberty. Despite that factor—or maybe because of it— we were carried away by nature's beauty, which we had missed for so long.

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[585] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 21.

> […] Then, after minutes of moving silence, one prisoner said to another, 'How beautiful the world *could* be!'[586]

This all leads Frankl to meditate on the meaning of art:

> Another time we were at work in a trench. The dawn was grey around us; grey was the sky above; grey the snow in the pale light of dawn; grey the rags in which my fellow prisoners were clad, and grey their faces. I was again conversing silently with my wife, or perhaps I was struggling to find the reason for my sufferings, my slow dying. In a last violent protest against the hopelessness of imminent death, I sensed my spirit piercing through the enveloping gloom. I felt it transcend that hopeless, meaningless world, and from somewhere I heard a victorious 'Yes' in answer to my question of the existence of an ultimate purpose. At that moment a light was lit in a distant farmhouse, which stood on the horizon as if painted there, in the midst of the miserable grey of a dawning morning in Bavaria. '*Et lux in tenebris lucet*'—and the light shineth in the darkness. For hours I stood hacking at the icy ground. The guard passed by, insulting me, and once again I communed with my beloved. More and more I felt that she was present, that she was with me; I had the feeling that I was able to touch her, able to stretch out my hand and grasp hers. The feeling was very strong: she was there. Then, at that very moment, a bird flew down silently and perched just in front of me, on the heap of soil which I had dug up from the ditch, and looked steadily at me.
>
> Earlier, I mentioned art. Is there such a thing in a concentration camp? It rather depends on what one chooses to call art.[587]

Although art, like humour, is described by Frankl as 'another of the soul's weapons in the fight for self-preservation' (like humour, 'it affords an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds') it is also clear that art is more than a means to an end[588]:

> The attempt to develop a sense of humour and to see things in a humorous light is some kind of a trick learned while mastering the art of living. Yet it is possible to practice the art of living even in a concentration camp, although suffering is omnipresent. To draw an analogy: a man's suffering is similar to the behaviour of gas. If a certain quantity of gas is pumped into an empty chamber, it will fill the chamber completely and evenly, no matter how big the chamber. Thus suffering completely fills the human soul and conscious mind, no matter whether the suffering is great or little. Therefore the "size" of human suffering is absolutely relative.
>
> It also follows that a very trifling thing can cause the greatest of joys. […] I mentioned earlier how everything that was not connected with the

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[586] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 22.

[587] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, pp. 22-23.

[588] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 25.

> immediate task of keeping oneself and one's closest friends alive lost its value. Everything was sacrificed to this end. A man's character became involved to the point that he was caught in a mental turmoil which threatened all the values he held and threw them into doubt. Under the influence of a world which no longer recognized the value of human life and human dignity, which had robbed man of his will and had made him an object to be exterminated (having planned, however, to make full use of him first—to the last ounce of his physical resources)— under this influence the personal ego finally suffered a loss of values. If the man in the concentration camp did not struggle against this in a last effort to save his self-respect, he lost the feeling of being an individual, a being with a mind, with inner freedom and personal value. He thought of himself then as only a part of an enormous mass of people; his existence descended to the level of animal life.[589]

Pushed to the utter limit of physical and psychological endurance, Frankl continues to want to distinguish between the freedom of the spirit and the laws of the flesh (which includes the 'flesh' of brain chemistry and causality), and insists on reserving a privileged space in his worldview for self-cultivated, spiritual-humanistic effort:

> Now the transport for the rest camp was arranged for the second time. Again no one knew whether this was a ruse to obtain the last bit of work from the sick—if only for fourteen days—or whether it would go to the gas ovens or to a genuine rest camp. The chief doctor, who had taken a liking to me, told me furtively one evening at a quarter to ten, 'I have made it known in the orderly room that you can still have your name crossed off the list; you may do so up till ten o'clock.'
>
> I told him that this was not my way; that I had learned to let fate take its course. 'I might as well stay with my friends,' I said. There was a look of pity in his eyes, as if he knew. […] He shook my hand silently, as though it were a farewell, not for life, but from life. Slowly I walked back to my hut. There I found a good friend waiting for me.
>
> 'You really want to go with them?' he asked sadly.
>
> 'Yes, I am going.'
>
> Tears came to his eyes and I tried to comfort him. Then there was something else to do—to make my will:
>
> 'Listen, Otto, if I don't get back home to my wife, and if you should see her again, then tell her that I talked of her daily, hourly. You remember. Secondly, I have loved her more than anyone. Thirdly, the short time I have been married to her outweighs everything, even all we have gone through here.'
>
> Otto, where are you now? Are you alive? What has happened to you since our last hour together? Did you find your wife again? And do you remember how I made you learn my will by heart—word for word—in spite of your childlike tears?[590]

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[589] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, pp. 24, 26-27.

[590] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, pp. 28-29.

There is a for-its-own sake quality to this spiritual engagement: the brain provides only *post facto* psychological rewards for it; whatever the latest neuroscience might show, it is not in any humanly relevant sense the driver:

> At times, lightning decisions had to be made, decisions which spelled life or death. The prisoner would have preferred to let fate make the choice for him. This escape from commitment was most apparent when a prisoner had to make the decision for or against an escape attempt. In those minutes in which he had to make up his mind—and it was always a question of minutes—he suffered the tortures of Hell. Should he make the attempt to flee? Should he take the risk?
>
> I, too, experienced this torment. As the battle-front drew nearer, I had the opportunity to escape.
>
> […] I ran back to my hut to collect all my possessions: my food bowl, a pair of torn mittens 'inherited' from a dead typhus patient, and a few scraps of paper covered with shorthand notes (on which, as I mentioned before, I had started to reconstruct the manuscript which I lost at Auschwitz). I made a quick last round of my patients, who were lying huddled on the rotten planks of wood on either side of the huts. I came to my only countryman, who was almost dying, and whose life it had been my ambition to save in spite of his condition. I had to keep my intention to escape to myself, but my comrade seemed to guess that something was wrong (perhaps I showed a little nervousness). In a tired voice he asked me, "You, too, are getting out?" I denied it, but I found it difficult to avoid his sad look. After my round I returned to him. Again a hopeless look greeted me and somehow I felt it to be an accusation. The unpleasant feeling that had gripped me as soon as I had told my friend I would escape with him became more intense. Suddenly I decided to take fate into my own hands for once. I ran out of the hut and told my friend that I could not go with him. As soon as I had told him with finality that I had made up my mind to stay with my patients, the unhappy feeling left me. I did not know what the following days would bring, but I had gained an inward peace that I had never experienced before. I returned to the hut, sat down on the boards at my countryman's feet and tried to comfort him; then I chatted with the others, trying to quiet them in their delirium.[591]

Frankl cannot, even in the midst of concentration camp life, shake his vocation as a therapist; he wants first and foremost to *understand* and *define* the freedom he is experiencing, so that he may use it to help others:

> Apart from its role as a defensive mechanism, the prisoners' apathy was also the result of other factors. Hunger and lack of sleep contributed to it (as they do in normal life, also) and to the general irritability which was another characteristic of the prisoners' mental state. The lack of sleep was due partly to the pestering of vermin which infested the terribly overcrowded huts because of the general lack of hygiene and sanitation. The fact that we had

[591] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, pp. 29-30.

> neither nicotine nor caffeine also contributed to the state of apathy and irritability.
>
> Besides these physical causes, there were mental ones, in the form of certain complexes. The majority of prisoners suffered from a kind of inferiority complex. We all had once been or had fancied ourselves to be 'somebody'. Now we were treated like complete nonentities. (The consciousness of one's inner value is anchored in higher, more spiritual things, and cannot be shaken by camp life. But how many free men, let alone prisoners, possess it?)[592]

Frankl's lifelong professional goal, indeed, was to prescribe a therapeutic formula or recipe for this freedom:

> This emphasis on responsibleness is reflected in the categorical imperative of logotherapy, which is: 'Live as if you were living already for the second time and as if you had acted the first time as wrongly as you are about to act now!' It seems to me that there is nothing which would stimulate a man's sense of responsibleness more than this maxim, which invites him to imagine first that the present is past and, second, that the past may yet be changed and amended.[593]

Maxims, however, do not 'stimulate responsibleness' at all; something else does. Frankl's *embodiment* of his vocation after a day of particularly acute slavery[594] is of more spiritual help to his 'patients' and readers than any 'theory of meaning' he could ever formulate:

> The opportunities for collective psychotherapy were naturally limited in camp. The right example was more effective than words could ever be. A senior block warden who did not side with the authorities had, by his just and encouraging behaviour, a thousand opportunities to exert a far-reaching moral influence on those under his jurisdiction. The immediate influence of behaviour is always more effective than that of words.
>
> […] God knows, I was not in the mood to give psychological explanations or to preach any sermons—to offer my comrades a kind of medical care of their souls. I was cold and hungry, irritable and tired, but I had to make the effort and use this unique opportunity. Encouragement was now more necessary than ever.

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[592] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, pp. 31-32.

[593] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 50.

[594] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 39:

> A few days previously a semi-starved prisoner had broken into the potato store to steal a few pounds of potatoes. The theft had been discovered and some prisoners had recognized the 'burglar'. When the camp authorities heard about it they ordered that the guilty man be given up to them or the whole camp would starve for a day. Naturally the 2,500 men preferred to fast.

So I began by mentioning the most trivial of comforts first. I said that even in this Europe in the sixth winter of the Second World War, our situation was not the most terrible we could think of.

[…] I spoke about the future. I said that to the impartial the future must seem hopeless. I agreed that each of us could guess for himself how small were his chances of survival. I told them that although there was still no typhus epidemic in the camp, I estimated my own chances at about one in twenty. But I also told them that, in spite of this, I had no intention of losing hope and giving up.

[…] But I did not only talk of the future and the veil which was drawn over it. I also mentioned the past; all its joys, and how its light shone even in the present darkness. Again I quoted a poet—to avoid sounding like a preacher myself —who had written, *'Was Du erlebst, kann keine Macht der Welt Dir rauben.'* (What you have experienced, no power on earth can take from you.) Not only our experiences, but all we have done, whatever great thoughts we may have had, and all we have suffered, all this is not lost, though it is past; we have brought it into being. Having been is also a kind of being, and perhaps the surest kind.

[…] I asked the poor creatures who listened to me attentively in the darkness of the hut to face up to the seriousness of our position. They must not lose hope but should keep their courage in the certainty that the hopelessness of our struggle did not detract from its dignity and its meaning. I said that someone looks down on each of us in difficult hours—a friend, a wife, somebody alive or dead, or a God—and he would not expect us to disappoint him. He would hope to find us suffering proudly—not miserably—knowing how to die.

And finally I spoke of our sacrifice, which had meaning in every case. It was in the nature of this sacrifice that it should appear to be pointless in the normal world, the world of material success. But in reality our sacrifice did have a meaning. […] I told them of a comrade who on his arrival in camp had tried to make a pact with Heaven that his suffering and death should save the human being he loved from a painful end.

[…] When the electric bulb flared up again, I saw the miserable figures of my friends limping toward me to thank me with tears in their eyes. But I have to confess here that only too rarely had I the inner strength to make contact with my companions in suffering and that I must have missed many opportunities for doing so.[595]

Frankl concludes his 'Experiences in a Concentration Camp' by claiming that there are 'two races of men in this world, but only these two—the "race" of the decent man and the "race" of the indecent man', though we might prefer here to say more and less 'cultivated' individual spirits; his vocation as a 'psychologist', 'psychotherapist', 'logotherapist' and even 'psychohygienist' was naturally to find creative and constructive ways of increasing the *junzi* cohort, itself a noble aim, though he again does more for his vocation by expressing his gratitude for the kindnesses of other *junzi* than he does in the whole of 'Logotherapy in a Nutshell':

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[595] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, pp. 39-40.

> Human kindness can be found in all groups, even those which as a whole it would be easy to condemn. The boundaries between groups overlapped and we must not try to simplify matters by saying that these men were angels and those were devils. Certainly, it was a considerable achievement for a guard or foreman to be kind to the prisoners in spite of all the camp's influences, and, on the other hand, the baseness of a prisoner who treated his own companions badly was exceptionally contemptible. Obviously the prisoners found the lack of character in such men especially upsetting, while they were profoundly moved by the smallest kindness received from any of the guards. I remember how one day a foreman secretly gave me a piece of bread which I knew he must have saved from his breakfast ration. It was far more than the small piece of bread which moved me to tears at that time. It was the human 'something' which this man also gave to me—the word and look which accompanied the gift.[596]

'Logotherapy in a Nutshell'

Frankl pushes himself and his readers to the very edge of both scientific and humanistic possibility; on the one hand, his 'logotherapy' is an attempt to liberate psychology from the 'nothingbutness' of 20th-century scientism:

> The existential vacuum which is the mass neurosis of the present time can be described as a private and personal form of nihilism; for nihilism can be defined as the contention that being has no meaning. As for psychotherapy, however, it will never be able to cope with this state of affairs on a mass scale if it does not keep itself free from the impact and influence of the contemporary trends of a nihilistic philosophy; otherwise it represents a symptom of the mass neurosis rather than its possible cure. Psychotherapy would not only reflect a nihilistic philosophy but also, even though unwillingly and unwittingly, transmit to the patient what is actually a caricature rather than a true picture of man.
>
> First of all, there is a danger inherent in the teaching of man's 'nothingbutness', the theory that man is nothing but the result of biological, psychological and sociological conditions, or the product of heredity and environment. Such a view of man makes a neurotic believe what he is prone to believe anyway, namely, that he is the pawn and victim of outer influences or inner circumstances. This neurotic fatalism is fostered and strengthened by a psychotherapy which denies that man is free.
>
> To be sure, a human being is a finite thing, and his freedom is restricted. It is not freedom from conditions, but it is freedom to take a stand toward the conditions. As I once put it: 'As a professor in two fields, neurology and psychiatry, I am fully aware of the extent to which man is subject to biological, psychological and sociological conditions. But in addition to being a professor in two fields I am a survivor of four camps—

[596] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 41.

> concentration camps, that is— and as such I also bear witness to the unexpected extent to which man is capable of defying and braving even the worst conditions conceivable.'[597]

Frankl, however, fails to apply the logotherapeutic concept of 'paradoxical intention' to his own vocational endeavours as a psychiatrist; by seeking to codify a form of 'existential therapy', he risks destroying (much like the authors of the *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic* and other formulaic consensus endeavours) the very spontaneous essence of the freedom he loves:

> There is nothing conceivable which would so condition a man as to leave him without the slightest freedom. Therefore, a residue of freedom, however limited it may be, is left to man in neurotic and even psychotic cases. Indeed, the innermost core of the patient's personality is not even touched by a psychosis.
>
> An incurably psychotic individual may lose his usefulness but yet retain the dignity of a human being. This is my psychiatric credo. Without it I should not think it worthwhile to be a psychiatrist. For whose sake? Just for the sake of a damaged brain machine which cannot be repaired?
>
> […] For too long a time—for half a century, in fact—psychiatry tried to interpret the human mind merely as a mechanism, and consequently the therapy of mental disease merely in terms of a technique. I believe this dream has been dreamt out. What now begins to loom on the horizon are not the sketches of a psychologised medicine but rather those of a humanized psychiatry.
>
> A doctor, however, who would still interpret his own role mainly as that of a technician would confess that he sees in his patient nothing more than a machine, instead of seeing the human being behind the disease![598]

A good 'therapist', in other words, throws all 'theory' and 'method' out the window beyond a certain point, and engages in honest and vulnerable dialogue with an equal human being; the 'doctor-patient' relationship is replaced by genuine spiritual conversation of the kind the arts and humanities alone can provide.

<u>'The Case for a Tragic Optimism'</u>

> *There is no need to become untrue to the basic concept of man and the principles of the philosophy of life inherent in logotherapy. Such a loyalty is not hard to maintain in view of the fact that, as Elisabeth S. Lukas once pointed out, 'throughout the history of psychotherapy, there has never been a school as undogmatic as logotherapy.' And at the First World Congress of Logotherapy (San Diego, California, November 6-8, 1980) I argued not only for the rehumanisation of*

[597] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 58.

[598] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 60.

> *psychotherapy but also for what I called 'the degurufication of logotherapy.' My interest does not lie in raising parrots that just rehash 'their master's voice', but rather in passing the torch to 'independent and inventive, innovative and creative spirits'.*[599]

Frankl's challenge - and the challenge of this book - is find a way to be serious about art's ability to improve people without seeking to reduce this ability to a prefabricated formula and thereby destroying it; freedom is an experience, yet saying so is already to preempt what freedom tomorrow might smell or feel like, and nobody who has tasted it, and therefore wanted others to taste it, could wish to do that. We want the next story, not the key to all stories:

> The meaning of life differs from man to man, from day to day and from hour to hour. What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment. […] One should not search for an abstract meaning of life. Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life to carry out a concrete assignment which demands fulfilment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated. Thus, everyone's task is as unique as is his specific opportunity to implement it.
>
> As each situation in life represents a challenge to man and presents a problem for him to solve, the question of the meaning of life may actually be reversed. Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather he must recognize that it is he who is asked.[600]

Only a few - those both privileged *and* hardworking - can build this sense of self; we cannot make anyone else hardworking, but we can freely choose to spread humanistic privilege to our friends and colleagues; trying honestly to do so - as Frankl does before, during and after Auschwitz - is itself more 'inspiring' or 'therapeutic' than *how* we choose to do it. There is even a certain counterproductive, narcissistic quality to any story which is didactically spoonfed from students to teachers (or doctors to patients) rather than spontaneously shared among equals (as 'Experiences in a Concentration Camp' is). Wanting to help others is noble and natural, but believing that one can develop an objective theory of how best to help them denies them the very help they need if they want to learn to be autonomous and enjoy their own 'responsible' spiritual lives. Deep down, if our motives are properly selfless and pure, this freedom is all we might want to give them:

> Sigmund Freud once asserted, 'Let one attempt to expose a number of the most diverse people uniformly to hunger. With the increase of the imperative urge of hunger all individual differences will blur, and in their stead will appear the uniform expression of the one unstilled urge.' Thank heaven, Sigmund Freud was spared knowing the concentration camps from the

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[599] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 67.

[600] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 49.

> inside. His subjects lay on a couch designed in the plush style of Victorian culture, not in the filth of Auschwitz. There, the 'individual differences' did not 'blur' but, on the contrary, people became more different; people unmasked themselves, both the swine and the saints. And today you need no longer hesitate to use the word 'saints':
>
> […] You may of course ask whether we really need to refer to 'saints'. Wouldn't it suffice just to refer to decent people? It is true that they form a minority. […] And yet I see therein the very challenge to join the minority.[601]

Frankl's humanistic vision of psychiatry begins where pharmaceutical 'medicine' ends; it is, indeed, the exact opposite of any formula or closed system of definitions, which makes writing *about* it - as Frankl endeavoured to do throughout most of his career - powerless compared to *practising* it in one's writing (as he did in 'Experiences in a Concentration Camp'). In other words, beyond merely functional assistance (which robots can in principle provide), what counts, in a humanised psychiatry as in art and friendship alike, is the Confucianesque willingness to enlarge our *own* selves in dialogue with others; it is this which makes it possible for us to help others to cultivate or 'enlarge *them*selves'. Frankl answers Thomas Fröhlich's 'Holocaust challenge' from Chapter 1, laid down to a modern Confucianism struggling for relevance in the postwar global marketplace of ideas, in these inadvertent terms.

[601] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, pp. 67-68.

10. Adonis's *Zaman al-Shi'r*

> *As we boarded the black gull-wing Tesla Mr. Harari had rented for his visit, he brought up Aldous Huxley. Generations have been horrified by his novel* Brave New World*, which depicts a regime of emotion control and painless consumption. Readers who encounter the book today, Mr. Harari said, often think it sounds great. "Everything is so nice, and in that way it is an intellectually disturbing book because you're really hard-pressed to explain what's wrong with it," he said. "And you do get today a vision coming out of some people in Silicon Valley which goes in that direction. […] If humans are hackable animals, and if our choices and opinions don't reflect our free will, what should the point of politics be? How do you live when you realize […] that your heart might be a government agent, that your amygdala might be working for Putin, and that the next thought that emerges in your mind might well be the result of some algorithm that knows you better than you know yourself? These are the most interesting questions humanity now faces.*[602]
>
> Yuval Noah Harari

We will get to Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* - the forerunner of Huxley's *Brave New World* - in a minute (well, in a chapter), but before we do, permit a longish detour through the translation project which accompanied the preliminary reading for this book: the first part of Adonis's 1971 collection of essays on poetry, *Zaman al-Shi'r (Poetry's Time)*. After some short biographical background on Adonis (1930-), we turn to the translated text - an ironic 'Glossary' of 26 key terms which Adonis presents as an 'alphabet' - as if there could ever be such a thing - of modern poetry.

<u>'I Was Born for Poetry'</u>

> *A person is not an island. The intersubjective bonds tying you to others actually make 'you' possible. […] Self-cultivation is not just a private monologue; it is always mediated by the quality of these reciprocal relationships. […] Other people deserve the same respect that you afford yourself. With such an attitude, one can learn the 'best that has been thought and said' in the world while remaining true to one's own inner compass. Confidence and curiosity are interconnected. If they sever ties, they both shrivel up. […] First and foremost, [a* junzi *cultivates] self-respect. It doesn't matter where in*

[602] See Nellie Bowles, '*Brave New World* as Aspirational Reading, in 'Tech C.E.O.s Are in Love With Their Principal Doomsayer', https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/09/business/yuval-noah-harari-silicon-valley.html, 9/11/2018 (accessed 26/11/2018).

> *the world you are now; there are ways to become proud of your efforts and to make the best of your current situation. This is the very essence of what it means to learn to be human, or to 'become a sage' in Lu Xiangshan's formulation. Everybody, regardless of origin or orientation in life, wants to realize the best possible version of herself; there is no one for whom this means loneliness. Such isolation, however, is the endgame of a certain malignant form of individualism. What the* junzi *wants, by contrast, is a life of meaningful communication…*[603]

In a 2015 interview with the Louisiana Channel, Adonis describes his early life as a *madrasat al-shajara* ('a school under a tree'); although there were no cars, no electricity cables, and no schools in his native village in northern Syria, his father was very familiar with the Arab poetic tradition ('his favourite was al-Mutanabbi'), and passed on his love to his son: 'In that environment I started writing poems of my own automatically.'[604] His life was then characterised by a series of 'coincidences' (*musadafat*) of a certain, unmistakable kind; following a vivid dream, a visit by Syrian President Shukri al-Quwatli to the village in 1943 allowed Adonis the unlikely privilege of attending school in Tartous; he escaped Syria just minutes before the border to Lebanon was closed in 1956, and so on. Without attributing such good fortune to the gods directly, the young poet was able to attain a certain privileged relationship with 'truth' which would free him from the ideological debates raging in the postcolonial Arab world of his youth:

> That which is visible and revealed to us is not necessarily an actual expression of truth; it is perhaps an expression of a superficial, transitory, ephemeral aspect of truth. To be able to truthfully express reality, one must also seek to see that which is concealed. […] Truth is not ready-made, prefabricated. [...] We don't learn the truth from books! Truth is to be sought out, dug up, discovered. Consequently, the world is not finished business. It is in constant flashes of revelation, creation, construction, and renewal of imageries, relationships, languages, words, and things.[605]

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[603] This 'quote' was the fruit of a productive misunderstanding, in which I - by accident - creatively 'retranslated' a Chinese text which was itself a translation of a 2018 English interview Tu Weiming gave with CGTN's Tian Wei. For the original interview, see https://news.cgtn.com/event/live_channel/share_p.html?url=https://envod.cgtn.com/cctv-news/201811232215.m3u8&channelId=1&epgId=196072&startTime=1542982500000&endTime=1542985200000&name=World%20Insight%20with%20Tian%20Wei&from=groupmessage&isappinstalled=0 (accessed 16/12/2018).

[604] Adonis Interview: 'I Was Born for Poetry', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldLr4M1cP28&t=335s, 15/1/2015 (accessed 16/12/2018).

[605] See Adonis, *Identité inachevée (Unfinished Identity)*, (Paris: Editions du Rocher, 2004). Translated in *The "Other" Middle East; An Anthology of Levantine Literature*, in Search of Identity p. 26, http://fmwww.bc.edu/SL-R/salamehAntholSample.pdf), accessed 16/12/2018.

By the time of *Zaman al-Shi'r* (1971), Adonis has diagnosed the millennial plight of Arab politics against the backdrop of the Vietnam War: instead of deciding in advance what 'truth' is, thereby instrumentalising art for ostensibly political ends, 'poetry's time' must finally be allowed to come.

'Obscurity'

> *[Modern poetry] no longer offers the reader ideas and meanings on a plate, which was the business of poetry in antiquity, but rather offers her a certain spiritual state, or a space for fantasy and imagery, emotion and fascination. This does not begin from a clear and readymade fortress of reason or philosophy, but rather from an inner emotional climate, with what we might call an experience or vision.*[606]

The first challenge for art in a hyperbusified, impatient, solution-oriented modernity is to defend the place of 'obscurity' - not the charlatanism which tries to make things more complicated than they are, but the idea that access to certain peaks of human 'truth' might actually require slow and careful individual climbing rather than one-size-fits-all technological and commercial solutions. Against the Marxist - but also capitalist - view that useful art is that which can be easily understood by everyone, Adonis argues that the proletariat *can* benefit from art that it may lack the time, patience or education to understand; paradoxically, artists who embody an individual, self-cultivated spirit in their own work are worth more to the 'revolutionary' cause than all the sloganeers combined:

> A poet is only a poet to the extent that she sees what others do *not* see and discovers things which others have not yet perceived. There is hence a natural disparity between the poet and the reader in terms of both inner wealth and outward expression; this does not necessarily entail, however, a communication breakdown or inability to reach mutual understanding, but rather the mere fact of difference, one which leads to an alliance which calls the reader to become a creator and poet herself.
>
> We can see here how a reader of poetry who relies on memory, custom and tradition alone - the opposite of a spirit of discovery or embrace of the new - behaves in thought the way she behaves in the flesh when she consumes a material object: her spirit only registers it to the extent that she can consume it.
>
> […] From this perspective, there is nothing which, on its own, justifies a critical judgment of 'obscurity' in poetry, or at least in true poetry. Whoever opposes certain forms of poetry by citing 'obscurity' alone is fighting depth in favour of superficiality, fighting the sea in favour of a river, fighting the jungle, thunder and rain in favour of remaining in the desert.

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[606] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2005(1971)), pp. 14-15.

> Imagine human beings or the world as straightforward or fully revealed, and you will find yourself in a giant empty expanse, with no place in it for poetry.[607]

'Roots'

Having dismissed art which tries either to empower the proletariat with spiritual shortcuts or respond to consumer demand with market research-driven calculations, Adonis turns to the specific question of the Arab situation, and calls on a revolution against a prevailing theocratic mindset in favour of the deeper, partly pre-Islamic 'roots' of Arab civilisation, in which individual self-cultivation plays the central role:

> Arab society needs radical and complete change which can only be achieved via revolution. Such a revolution, however, cannot limit its ambition to changing the political or social structures of the state (the school system, for example), but must rather aim for change at the root level, in the depths of the individual human being. This cannot be achieved simply by changing the structure of life around her, but must also be accompanied by a change in the mode of her thought. To change an individual person, it is not enough to change life at the level of materiality and modes of production, but also at the level of the symbol and aesthetic taste.
>
> […] This change presupposes a broader and deeper concept of culture than we traditionally employ. Culture is not simply a superficial realm, but the basis for our entire individual and social lives. […] Culture on this account is the practice of liberation, in all its forms and on various levels. Culture is that which does not stop at our basic needs, but which presses on to nourish our wants as well. There can be no revolutionary culture without such nourishment. The true business of revolution is to derive its vitality from the forms of desire itself.
>
> […] The power of our inherited theocratic feudal culture does not lie in the fact that its concepts are structured and coherent, but rather in the fact that it represents the totality of symbolic options available to the people at the level of existing institutions and authority. It is not enough, therefore, to engage in an ideological struggle to overcome this culture or to settle for purely political change, as I once believed. It is not even sufficient to tear down the old ideological structures (administrative practices, institutional arrangements, political programs etc.): institutions are not people but sets of relations, not causes but effects. We cannot revolutionise one without the other.[608]

'Transmission'

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[607] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, p. 19.

[608] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 21-22.

Given Adonis's insistence on the inescapable need for humanistic rather than merely institutional reform in the Arab world, the question of cultural and spiritual 'transmission' - the very essence of humanistic education - is addressed, again in an Arab context, but again with universal human implications: trying too hard to 'transmit' certain 'messages' can deform, and even kill, the very thing one may hope to convey in the first place:

> The urge to transmit a message underscores the majority of modern poetic forms. The reality, however, is that the message itself is not the important thing: the poet can always simplify his poems in the hope that his message gets through. The real question, however, is the extent to which the reader or listener transforms her reception of the work in her own dynamic critical consciousness. Social and cultural factors will influence this; the poet cannot simply blow her own air straight into the mind of the reader or listener. It is therefore only possible, given the current state of Arab social, cultural, economic and political life, to reach a so-called privileged public, a public which understands, through its education, culture and civic concerns, the meaning of poetic activity and its social role - a public, in other words, which is able to see beyond the general, commonplace understanding of poetic language to its suggestive and symbolic elements, especially the fact that poetry does not only say what it appears to say but also something else, something personal and possible. This 'something else' is the most important dimenstion of poetry, the central feature of all great poetry since Gilgamesh and Homer, and the very guarantee of its status as art. This also confirms Marx's famous saying that human beings can only appreciate art if they have acquired the culture for it.
>
> The question, on this view, is not whether simplification facilitates transmission or makes reception easier, but rather whether there is sensibility and interpenetration between what is sent and what is received, between the poet and the reader. For such interpenetration to occur, both sides must already be close in sensibility; otherwise one passes quickly to indoctrination. And all indoctrination is fundamentally hostile to art and hostile to the revolution of which we are speaking.
>
> […] I would summarise the root of all this as follows: thanks to Marx and his followers, we have materialist analyses of production, but we have not yet had analyses of spiritual transmission. We have analysed modes of production, but now we need to push on to the modes of spiritual exchange.[609]

'Attack'

The grail of 'praxis' entices Adonis here, just as it teased his mid-century contemporaries: if poetry is not a sloganeering means to a revolutionary end, but rather a free embodiment of the revolution itself, then it should be compared with *acts*, not slogans, with the sword rather than the pen:

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[609] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 23-24.

> Poetry with a true foundation can never be a shadow, only a tree: such poetry can never be a shadow or effect of work, but is rather a part of the work itself. This also helps us to explain the difference between revolutionary and non-revolutionary poetry: the latter hovers in the shadows, the shadows of the real work, in the realm of illusions, leading to further illusions, and finally to the conclusion that these illusions are reality, that the shadows are the tree. This is poetry which misleads and distracts us.
>
> […] When poetry is the tree rather than the shadow of the tree, it is not only a longing for liberation, but also that other kind of work which hastens the day of freedom. He who embodies the shadow faces no opposition, no wind; but he who embodies the tree can only make like his falcon cousin - 'the wind always opposes the falcon's flight.' Poetry is not a bending to the breeze, but a flight against it. Poetry is freedom, or it isn't poetry; being content with a loss of freedom is settling for a life of shadow 'when people are happy to be led like cattle or horses, when they have no right to words, to expression.' In such a state, 'when a human being loses, by way of force, her natural human freedom, […] her worth is reduced to less than that of a pig.'[610]

This is close to Adonis's core claim that the true artist, unlike the overpliant bureaucrat or middle manager, 'opposes all order, even good order'[611]. Adonis's distinction here between a *muwazzaf* ('functionary') and a *mufakkir* ('person who thinks for herself') could not be clearer: the humanistic spirit always exists at a certain critical distance from everyday politics and business; it is a mixture of humanist insistence and the wisdom of those with power which allows it to flourish in its proper sphere.

'The Public'

Adonis is writing, in 1971, firmly in the context of decolonisation and the struggle for Arab national liberation; we should neither forget this nor be limited by it in our evaluation of his arguments:

> Revolutionary Arab poetry is not in this sense 'for a broad Arab public'. The question of mass appeal, in this context, is posed by the tradition in its confrontation with revolutionary poetry in a society ripe for revolution. Even in such societies, art which arises in the revolution and with the revolution is not accessible to the masses; it can only be so in already classless societies, where every individual already enjoys equal access to artistic culture. In other words, revolutionary Arab poetry cannot be accessible to the general public.

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[610] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, p. 26. Adonis is citing Ho Chi Minh here; rather than opening a side-door debate on Ho Chi Minh's ambigious historical legacy here, I preferred to let the quotes stand on their own merit.

[611] See Adonis, 'I Was Born for Poetry'.

The question of accessibility is therefore not best posed in terms of whether the Arab masses can 'understand' poetry, but rather whether they can learn and work, engage in the struggle for a crystallisation of awareness of their own situation and of their own causes, and for their own progress, in the most general sense. Without that, poetry can't mean anything to them, even if, by means of simplification, it reduces itself to the level of banality. These masses do not even know the culture into which they were born.

The Arab peasant or blue-collar worker does not know 'Urwa bin al-Ward, Tarafa, Dhu l-Rumma, Abu Tammam or Abu l-Ala. His culture is a series of orders and prohibitions, superficially inherited from tradition. How on Earth should he be expected to understand revolutionary poetry in the sense in which we have defined it? Therefore, when we hear people say to a poet, 'O ye revolutionary, write a poem which the masses will understand!', these voices are contributing, perhaps unwittingly, to the consolidation of the feudal-bourgeois order. The meaning of revolutionary poetry remains beyond them.

[…] 'The poet should write in a language which the masses understand, because it is his responsibility to contribute to the extension of the revolutionary consciousness to the masses themselves.' This is the standard line on the role of poetry in revolutions.

This means that:

> 1) the masses are the starting-point and target audience of poetic work;
>
> 2) but who are these 'masses'? Even when one replies that the masses are those who stand to benefit from revolutionary change and are therefore its natural allies, these 'masses' have wildly varying levels of culture and revolutionary awareness, and for the most part have to make do with partial or total illiteracy […];
>
> 3) a degree of simplification is required in order to allow these masses to understand directly. The extent of poetry's contribution is therefore reduced to its ability to strengthen and broaden this revolutionary awareness and to accelerate the onset of revolution itself;
>
> 4) transmission, therefore, is the most important thing. But this leads, logically and formally, to the conclusion that the means of transmission are irrelevant; if we need to use old and familiar forms of expression in given contexts, then so be it. This implies, however, that poetry is reduced to a simple instrument or tool, and that the goal (the politicisation of the masses) is more important than the means used to achieve it (poetry).

[…] If we want to reap material benefit from poetic forms and accord them influence in our everyday lives, use them to change our ideas, then we are at the level of advertising, not poetry. I am not against advertising, or against

> the use of poetic and visual imagery in advertising, but I am against calling things by their wrong names. In this context, we could say that, very often, what has been and is described as 'poetry' in Arab society is merely advertising for something else. There is no unity in the language of advertising between form and content; that is the business of poetry. There is no fixed content in this sphere, no fixed form; the content here is not an idea but a state of being; the form is not a template, but rather an image or structure of such a state. A poem is a living thing, born as a self-contained whole, in a single moment.[612]

Poetry, in short, is like love itself, which in turn is like self-cultivation, as Adonis's 2018 poem 'Al-Hubb' ('Love') reminds us:

> Love
> Does not speak and does not name.
> […]
> I do not love in order to get my hands on anything
> My love is neither a goal nor a flag.
> As the fountain springs
> As the sun rises
> I have loved; an unfolding without a higher aim.[613]

'Subjugation'

The genius which Adonis displays in the first part of *Zaman al-Shi'r* - the gift of poetry itself - is the ability to say the same thing in 26 different ways without repeating himself or becoming boring. If writing about poetry is like dancing about dancing, then Adonis does his best, as Confucius himself does in the *Analects*, not to *package* wisdom but rather - like a genuine *entrepreneur* - to *create* it:

> Most of the [contemporary Arab] critics and poets who opine on the relationship between poetry and revolution in their critical and creative work turn poetry into something it isn't, and make subjugation their main idea. In the name of revolution, therefore, pseudo-art alone becomes art, and that which lords it over poetry becomes poetry. […] Revolution, however, is the deepest and most beautiful thing of all. That which lacks depth and beauty, whether linguistic or physical, cannot serve the revolution or be revolutionary itself.[614]

It is perhaps unfair to judge Adonis, as we are largely doing in this book, on his writing *about* poetry, rather than on his poetry itself; and yet he himself invites us to

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[612] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 28-30.

[613] See Adonis, 'Amour', http://lorientlitteraire.com/article_details.php?cid=11&nid=7412, December 2018 (accessed 16/12/2018).

[614] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, p. 31.

view *Zaman al-Shi'r*, as well as other prose essay collections such as *Siyasat al Shi'r (The Politics of Poetry)* (1985) and *Al-Nizaam wal-Kalaam (Political Order and the Poetic Word)* (1993), to name just a couple, as part of a single body of work. We are not, ultimately, instrumentalising him to make a wider argument here, just as he is not instrumentalising himself or his own poetry in his prose writing; his work, in an important sense, already *is* an embodiment of itself, or there would be no need for him to 'repeat' himself, or for us to reproduce these 'repetitions' in this anthology instead of 'subjugating' it to social-scientific theory. *Zaman al-Shi'r* is a deep, intrinsic, embodied plea for the autonomy of the humanities from the explanatory tyranny of the social sciences.

'Impact'

Poetry is not the sociology of poetry; Adonis wants to protect art from all talk about the 'impact' so dear to research funding committees:

> Hidden behind the comparison of poetry with [other research] work is a view of the former which is scientific or technological in nature: it demands of poetry that it be logical, clear, and provably useful, and that it provide teachable and applicable material.
>
> Such a view, however, destroys the special something without which poetry would no longer be poetry - namely the aesthetic dimension, the unique mode of expression open to poetry - and instead turns poems into mere linguistic or culturological phenomena. Science is the stuff of work, and does its business according to the logic of usefulness and purpose; from the beginning, it has a utilitarian dimension. Poetry, on the other hand, does not describe the world or the individual phenomena within it from the point of view of purpose, but rather from a place of hopeful contemplation and wonder - in essence, from an aesthetic dimension. The production of poetry, then, is a question of hope and contemplation, while the products of work or science are matters of use and application.
>
> Poetry does not distinguish itself, as science does, for its ability to demonstrate its effects, but rather for the stores of energy for discovery which it houses and the breadth of horizons which it opens. The application of scientific creativity can be repeated; as soon as science discovers something, that thing becomes ripe for teaching and use: this is the scientific model. Poetic creativity, by contrast, cannot by its very nature be 'applied'; the notion of repeatability or applicability so dear to science constitutes an affront to the very idea of poetry.
>
> […] The truth of a poem does not lie in its usefulness as a tool or in its function, as a knife's does; it rather transcends the entire realm of functionality and instrumentality. A poem constitutes poetry to the extent that it is an uncovering of existence and an opening out to the farthest reaches of human possibility.[615]

[615] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 32-33.

Like lightning, and unlike science, poetry never strikes twice:

> Framing the question of poetry's 'impact' in terms of the laws of work and science actually contradicts the nature of poetry itself. For as long as poetry has been measured in terms of work and science, it has been relegated below them; the workers and the scientists have looked down on the whole business in which the poets are engaged. Poetry itself, in the face of work, has recognised that it is slow and effete by comparison.
>
> […] Poetry is [rather] to be measured on its own merits, its impact evaluated in terms of the laws of its own creativity and the laws of its own development. When we measure it in terms of work, we separate it from its own nature. […] We can therefore see how it is the analogy between poetry and work which has corrupted Arab taste in poetry and debased the role of poetry in Arab society by reductively considering it a burst of mere scientific or functional creativity. This false analogy is also hidden behind the failure of contemporary Arab critics to deal with modern poetry; their criticism only deals with poetry in terms of its 'content' or 'ideas', and as a function or handmaiden of activism. This not only betrays poetry, but criticism itself.[616]

Talk *about* poetry may be either 'scientifically' useful or itself a form of poetry, but it cannot be both at the same time; the scientistic reduction of the humanities to the former - 'cultural studies', 'philology' etc. - marginalises and endangers the latter, not only in the Arab world (where profane art may largely be forced to sit in the shadow of superhuman Quranic perfection), but everywhere else too; poetic or humanistic 'knowledge' does not 'accumulate' in the way scientific - even social-scientific - knowledge may be said to do; the moment of the next lightning strike is always a 'rupture'[617] with the past, a recalibration of the entire meaning of one's own embodied 'heritage'. Poetry is hence the final frontier of human freedom, the beyond of science at every step, not hostile to science and technology by any means, but transcendent of them.

'The *Poetry* Generation'

Poetry is an individual, intimate business, and every poet is part of her own idiosyncratic and chosen canon, but the question of 'progress' and 'value' - of the uniqueness of an individual poet or poetic movement's 'contribution' - can still be asked and answered in terms of ongoing intergenerational and transcultural dialogue, without which new generations of poets would be impossible. The challenge of every new poetic self is always to make

> an aesthetic and epistemological break with traditional standpoints, exercising an aesthetic and poetic influence which [i]s new and decisive, despite the fact that the very nature of the split involve[s] ambiguity and cross-pollination between the old and the new.

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[616] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 34-35.

[617] See Adonis, 'I Was Born for Poetry'.

> […] There [i]s in the old […] a depth which call[s] for the new and confirm[s] its necessity; moreover, there [are] poets who [take] ancient poets, despite their age, as the fathers and pioneers of modernity. 'Modernity' thus only ever rejects the past up to a certain point, beyond which it must welcome it. 'Modern poetry', in every era and in every nation without exception (even when it takes its most dismissive form), is always a kind of reckoning with the old in some form or aspect.
>
> […] The fact that we do not write the way Imru' al-Qais or al-Ma'arri or Gibran did, for example, does not necessarily mean that what we write is better, or that it has a unique poetic value. The difference must be based on some concrete advantage or development. We discover what this might be when we subject our writing to the following kinds of question: what is the extent of our difference from them, and in what dimensions do we find it? What is the horizon of our questioning and of the problems we uncover? What is our starting point, and what vision follows from this origin? What kind of poetic language does this break with the past represent? What effects does it have? And what aesthetic and epistemological break has been realised?
>
> It is here, in such questions, that one finds the true value of new poetry and the standards for confronting and evaluating it.[618]

For Adonis, the Arabic language - indeed any language - has this function of a family tree, to which every poet belongs; without these nourishing roots, she would be unable to exist as a free, creative, pioneering self. All poets create and realise themselves in dialogue with other poets (past, present and future), without whom their own embodied words would be both impossible and meaningless. An audience for the poetic self is implied, even when one chooses not to publish.

'Two Avantgardes'

Adonis then deepens his reflection on the social role of the humanities - a scientistic university 'discipline', the intellectual paramilitary wing of a certain political 'revolution', or something else? - by comparing the meaning of the 'political' and 'poetical' avantgardes:

> If we agree that poetry only has a role to play based on the uniqueness of its expressive and aesthetic impact, and that awareness of this special character, and interaction with it, require a particular form of aesthetic sensibility, then true revolutionary poetry can only be written and appreciated by a public which is itself already revolutionary.
>
> *'But as I understand it, you are not necessarily against poetry which has a missionary or marketing agenda.'*
>
> 'I am not against it, but I don't call it revolutionary poetry. In fact, I don't call it poetry at all. It is prose dressed up as poetry, nothing more.

[618] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 37-38.

[…] *So you are not against the idea that poetry should serve the oppressed classes?*

Of course I oppose keeping these classes in the darkness of old, at a cultural level where they cannot understand the meaning of artistic creativity. The maintenance of this *status quo* is a form of collusion with those who would keep these classes at a distance from culture and from possibilities for interaction with works of art. On the other hand, I am convinced, as I said at the start, that revolution demands of a poetry that wishes to support it (and supports the interests of the classes who stand to benefit from it) that it embody the revolution itself in its structures and means of expression. We can only write the poetry of revolution if we start by realising the revolution in our poetry.

I hence draw the tragic conclusion that great poetry, revolutionary poetry, fits neither within the bourgeois categories of taste and understanding which dominate the contemporary Arab world, nor within the limited bounds of taste and understanding which our oppressed classes are forced to endure. On the one hand, such poetry transcends the inherited cultural order, but on the other, it is also a long way out of the reach of the oppressed classes, not because of how difficult it is, as is usually alleged, but rather because of the long night of cultural darkness, backwardness and humiliation to which these classes are confined.

The idea that contemporary Arab poetry can be both simplistic and great at the same time is an impossible one. Such simplification will only reach the bourgeoisie, who will quickly assimilate and domesticate it, and turn it into a form of decoration and entertainment.

I personally prefer that our inherited bourgeois culture rejects me instead of welcoming or domesticating me. And I would rather, at this stage in our history, that the oppressed classes fail to understand me, than that I address them in a form which is poetic in name only.[619]

The 'revolution' which interests Adonis is ultimately one in which 'learning for the self' - going to the theatre, as one might say - is the common privilege of all. Like Tang Junyi, Adonis wants to make absolutely clear, however, that theatre performances themselves should not be confused with, or reduced to, advertising for the theatre or defences of the theatre. Beyond propaganda for the humanities, there are the humanities themselves, which have a social role to play which transcends archiving and philologising; they must somehow prepare people for the theatre, not by reductively advertising for it or scientifically explaining its health benefits, but by embodying the spirit of the theatre itself.[620]

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[619] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 42-44.

[620] As explored in Chapter 1, this was also, in one sense, the core concern of the co-authors of the 1958 *Declaration on Behalf of Chinese Culture Respectfully Announced to the People of the World*, in which Western Sinologists, missionaries and historians in particular were called out by the authors - Tang Junyi and fellow 'New Confucians' Mou Zongsan, Zhang Junmai and Xu Fuguan - and invited to 'reappraise' Chinese attitudes to spirituality: the Chinese humanities - and by extension the global humanities in general - must be experienced and 'embodied' from within, not merely described and critiqued from without as the scientistic framing of the Western humanities dictates.

‘How?’

The challenge of embodying a humanistic spirit, Adonis stresses here, ultimately requires a privileging of creativity over subordination. This creativity extends, crucially, beyond content to ‘form’ itself; not only the ‘what’, but also the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of art must constantly be reimagined and refashioned, not merely defined once and for all:

> The writing of poetry, in this context, is a dual challenge: to do away with poetic language laden and beset with traditional ideology on the one hand, and to free oneself from this ideology’s forms and structures on the other. It is indeed a liberation of poetic language from its traditional artistic climate and a welcome into a new latitude.
>
> Such writing is itself a form of political activity, not in the sense that one is forced to talk directly about politics, but rather insofar as it reconfigures reality with its artistic uniqueness. A poem does not manufacture revolution; only a people can do that. What a poem *does* represent is an attempt by a worker in the field of poetic production to contribute with the specificity of her artistic work to the creation of a new image of reality, to its reconfiguration within a revolutionary horizon. A revolutionary poem is therefore not only revolutionary in its content, but also revolutionary in its form.[621]

The value of the humanities, in other words, cannot be stated or measured in advance; it is the role of art continually to create and surprise. There can by definition be no formula for doing this; while Adonis’s main target is ‘theocratic’ mainstream Arab culture, which reduces art to a vehicle for the eternal ‘message’ of Quranic revelation, his insistence on the fundamental creativity of art is a reminder to humanists everywhere faced with the challenge of explaining or justifying their ‘work’ to outsiders: ‘If you have to ask you’ll never know’ is the only possible answer in this sphere, as the great Louis Armstrong recognised; one’s only ultimate hope, if one wants to communicate meaningfully with other ‘selves’, is to embody the music, not merely to define it or explain why it matters.

Creation

Artistic creativity implies distance and separation from all existing art: a critical, less than completely satisfied posture towards tradition - or rather, this is the very

[621] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi’r*, p. 46.

posture which the tradition, at its best, encourages.[622] The relationship between Arab artistic creativity and the idea of Creation with a capital C predates Islam; Adonis wants to acknowledge and celebrate the pre-Islamic roots of Arab poetry, but not without confronting a parallel vision of artistic creativity which developed on the Arabian Peninsula both before and after Muhammad:

> [Ancient] critics believed that poetry had existed from the beginning in the soul of the Arabs, and that knowledge had emerged from it, with its generous insight - a seeing and knowing without recourse to reason, logic or learning.
>
> Some of them went too far, and argued that we couldn't pass judgement on the revelation [constituted by such poetry] with reason and its measures, and that we therefore couldn't pass critical judgement for or against the poetry of Creation with the values of an inherited culture. This would have constituted a 'separation from God', as Jaahiz (776-867) put it, a uniquely Arab phenomenon, as though it would be wrong to view it through a lens foreign to it. Many defenders of this view find their justification here for their rejection of all foreign cultures, corrupting and corrupted in equal measure.
>
> With the advent of Islam, moreover, the concept of creation took on another dimension. Islam is a culture, and as such establishes ideals and principles based on a vision of creation. Indeed, as a creed, it claims direct access to this creation; the very idea of creation is arabised.
>
> […] The concept of faith in Islam thus assumes the role of mercy in the original vision: the beginning of existence. We find this idea in the following Quranic verse: 'Set thou thy face steadily and truly to the Faith: establish Allah's handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind. No change let there be in the work wrought by Allah.'
>
> Diversions from the path of creation were thus either the result of disease within individual human beings or the result of pre-Islamic tradition. Such detours represented a turning away from humanity's human face, a self-distancing from God's creation.[623]

The business of criticism, in other words, is not external to poetry (as empirical science is to the objects of its study), but constitutive of its essence; Arab culture, according to Adonis, must urgently embrace this detheocratised attitude to its own poetic and cultural tradition, and understand that the best of the Arab heritage,

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[622] See Liam Hoare, 'A Parting of Ways', https://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/277200/a-parting-of-ways, 14/12/2018 (accessed 18/8/2018) for an embodied example of this attitude to tradition:

> To use [Christopher] Hitchens as a crutch is in a certain sense antithetical to the way he conducted himself. In *Letters to a Young Contrarian*, he rejected the label 'model' for himself as "almost by definition a single existence cannot furnish any pattern." But if he is a model, then it is not so much for what he thought as how he thought: someone who was not afraid to be deemed an awkward cuss, arrogant or selfish, who [encouraged] us to "seek out argument and disputation for their own sake" for "the grave will supply plenty of time for silence." Ask not what Hitchens would think, but rather think for yourself.

[623] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 47-48.

including much of the Islamic part, is an invitation to creativity rather than a call to conform to the eternal, set-in-stone will of a capitalised Creation. Poetry *is* creation, not merely a pale reflection of what has already been created.

'Playing Beyond the Jungle'

Here Adonis lets his frustrations boil over; he is angry at the Arab tendency to make martyrs out of individuals that no one properly cares about until they join the collective 'struggle':

> Our sorrow over the loss of such people is an occasion for us to talk about ourselves: we create the story that we share in some way in their legacy. With such flights of fancy, we make up for our own shortcomings and imperfections. In reality, we don't miss these people for who they were. In our thoughts and behaviours, we reveal that we do not value the human being as such, but rather an individual act in a specific context and in view of a specific collective goal. In our dominant culture, the human being is a means to a higher end, an object like any other.
>
> When we mourn such a person, we dilute our own deaths by imagining that we participated in what she did: in reality, an ethics of absenteeism.
>
> Instead of practising such abysmal values, why don't we invent or embody an ethics of presence? […] But we don't live the present as a space or platform for human creativity, rather as a disappointment in relation to a perfect past. We live the present as a chance to extend the past. The importance of the present, in our dominant culture, lies in the opportunity it presents to us to restore the innocence of creation; it only has a meaning insofar as it allows the past to be dreamt back into existence and made visible again.
>
> Touch your bodies and your faces, o revolutionaries! Are you really only moved by what the past has to offer? […] Poetry is like a game, not a restoration of the past but a longing for the future. Just as a child plays in order to propel itself out of childhood, so too does a poet write in order to become what she craves, and to possess the present moment. Like a game, poetry constantly places us on the threshold of another dimension of time, a new beginning for a different life. And like a game, it is an adventure of joy and hope. All forms of adventure tie us to the future.
>
> But what do you do when you live in a culture which is not capable, by its very nature, of seeing the future except through the eye of the past and as an opportunity to bring the past back to life (in its eternal magnificence), a vision in which all future time is reduced to a paddock for storing what has already been?[624]

'The Refuge of Home'

[624] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 50-51.

This ‘ethics of presence’, then - what we are calling ‘Spiritual Humanism’ in this book - must be actively cultivated, but where to start? Adonis admits that, for all the ferocity of his precocious rebellion against theocratic attitudes, he

> harboured an admiration I cannot explain for Bedouin mountain poetry, Omar Abu Risha and Muhammmad Mahdi al-Jawahiri. I asked myself: how could they claim a place in my canon when they were reviving the old forms I was trying to run away from? Was it that they walked that thin line between the ages, mixing them in their work in such a way as to make you feel that the foot of the present remains dipped in the water of the past? Or was it something else that they were hiding?
>
> […] When I started my war on the past, I wasn’t targeting the old poetry, but the traditionalist mindset as such. When I did return to engage with the old classics of our tradition, I wasn’t returning to the historical past or to the traditionalist ideological assumptions which accompany such time travel, but rather returning to planes of consciousness, to images of life, human individuals and the world, and to psychological or spiritual states of being.
>
> I was, in other words, returning to the past to find what transcended history in it - namely, the poetic and artistic works which had survived independent of the forms of life which had produced them, works which seduced and captivated with their raw power even when their contemporaries had not known them. This is the meaning of the poetic and artistic past: nothing if not a pure presence.
>
> This presence is the mythical symbolic memory which removes us from abstract rationality and brings us into contact with the depths of individual human beings. It removes us from necessity and throws us onto a wave of freedom.
>
> Without this mythical symbolic dimension, the present is nothing more than a blind and deaf machine. While the present [on sale at the local mosque] was [made exclusively from] the clay of the Creator, and the future remained under His exclusive intuition and supervision, this [poetic] past-present was the deep interiority which arose in the refuge of exile from Him.[625]

‘Getting to the Root’

Adonis wants to distinguish between tradition - without which none of us would be here or exist as free and individual selves - and traditionalism, which is in fact an insult to the best of our ancestors:

> Despite the fact that ‘transmission’ is a deeply mysterious thing, the culture of traditionalism looks upon it as the straightforward essence or root of all later production. [… However,] what we refer to as our ‘inherited tradition’ is nothing more than a sum of individual works which differ from each other to

[625] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi’r*, pp. 52, 54.

> the point of contradiction. It is therefore senseless to seek in this tradition a root or essence or governing principle; we should aim instead to explore specific cultural products, created in specific historical contexts. We can take our bearings *after* such an adventure, not before it.
>
> Even within a single historical period, there are levels and varieties of cultural production such that it is wrong to place them all at the same high table or on the same plate. Islamic law, for example, is not the same thing as Arab poetry or philosophy or architecture or music.
>
> […] There are no sensible answers to the question 'What is your attitude to the tradition as a whole?' or to the question 'What is your relationship with it?'. The right question in this context is: 'What is your view, for example, of this philosopher?' Or 'how would you define your relationship with that poet?'[626]

Adonis wants to give himself room, in other words, to abolish the distinction - beloved of all true dictatorships - between 'local' and 'foreign':

> If I were now asked how I, as a contemporary poet, would define my relationship with 'my' Arab poetic tradition, I would reply: 'First, this is a meaningless question; I can't define my relationship with something so vague and undefined. I can only speak about my relationship with specific poets. And then, what does the word "relationship" mean here anyway?'
>
> If the question were being asked in the logic of our ruling culture, then 'relationship' would mean that I was at one with 'my' tradition, and that I would not come up with anything that my poetic forebears did not know, practise or sanction.
>
> From a revolutionary point of view, however, this 'relationship' would imply that I was different from my ancestors, or rather, that my relationship with Sophocles or Shakespeare or Rimbaud or Tchaikovsky or Lorca might be deeper than my relationship with any of the classical Arab poets, without implying that I wanted to escape from or denigrate the Arab poetic tradition. Contemporary Arab poetry has shown itself capable of innovations, in both form and content, which go against the grain of much of the Arab past while still remaining 'Arab'. Indeed, in what sense would it be 'contemporary' at all if it didn't challenge the ancestors? All creation is a matter of distinguishing oneself from one's influences. For a poet to get to the root of her inherited language, she has to be a kind of stranger to it.
>
> This doesn't mean that one refuses the legacy of the ancestors, or that one necessarily writes better than they did. But it does mean that one expresses one's own unique experience in one's own unique moment in history. The poetic worlds we create are, by default, unique.
>
> The history of poetry, on this account, is a series of emanations or surprises, not a straight line composed of a single colour or texture. It is therefore right to say that the task facing Arab innovators is to produce something which challenges the past, in order that they might play a role in

[626] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 56-57.

> revolutionary change or at least be among the pioneers in the direction of such a revolution.[627]

The 'revolution' in question is neither primarily economic nor political, though it may have such effects; the revolutionary 'root' for Adonis is the individual self, liberated from the groupthink of traditionalism by audacious examples of poetic creativity:

> The past, on the [traditionalist] view, is the cause, and the present is the effect. 'Pure, original, Arab poetry' achieved a separate status from 'imported, non-Arab poetry' on the basis of fine formal distinctions, and in terms of harmony and congruence with the early poetic forms. The question of a poem's health or capacity for corruption, its authenticity or its fatal hybridity, was thus decided in advance, in terms of a traditionalist standard.
>
> If reality is what we are facing and suffering here and now, not that which our ancestors suffered in their lives of yesteryear, then traditionalism is a means of separating language from reality. Language on this account is nothing but a constant attempt to escape from reality and from the action required to change it. If language is separated from reality here and now, it necessarily becomes cheap, and so too does its content.
>
> Moreover if, in the end, language separates itself from action, then it abolishes it, and eventually takes its place.
>
> This allows us to explain why our dominant (inherited) culture constantly affirms that the task of all poets (and indeed all individuals) is to accept and to justify, not to ask questions or conduct research projects. 'There is nothing new under the sun': this is the Salafist attitude to poetry. […] 'Creativity' in this context is naturally a departure from tradition, an act of eccentricity and deviance.[628]

<u>'Dissolution'</u>

Adonis parodies Marxist modes of analysis again here by returning to focus on the contrarian nature of art itself; the artist lives in *a priori* opposition to all political order, 'even good order' (thereby making the question how best to 'institutionalise' the humanities both urgent and permanently unanswerable):

> If the writing of poetry is an attempt to change or add a twist to reality, this presupposes two things: first, that such writing rejects the existing mainstream conception of reality, or more precisely, is born as a rejection of it; and second, that its forms of expression necessarily contravene those of the *status quo*. A rejection of the 'content' of mainstream reality implies a rejection of its forms, and, so to speak, of the means of its production. What is true in the sphere of economic relations is also true in the sphere of poetry and aesthetic relations. In other words, traditionalist forms of

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[627] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 57-58.

[628] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 58-59.

production cannot but transmit traditionalist ideological content. Moving beyond such content requires a transcendence of its forms.

This means that poetry rejects the *status quo* - structurally, epistemologically, lyrically, relationally.

[…] The writing of poetry, therefore, does not depict reality so much as dissolve it or tear it down in order to transform it via revolution. Poetry can thus be compared - I stress, *compared* - to politics; just as revolutionary politics emerges only when it learns to distinguish itself from non-revolutionary practices, so too does the writing of 'new' poetry only distinguish itself when it breaks from traditionalist habits.

This act of distinction, at the level of poetry, entails a fresh acquaintance with life and the world, not only in terms of content, but in terms of the form of the relation as well, for this is the direct proof that life and the world can have a different kind of presence and a different kind of meaning to us; it places them in a different context and depicts them in a different way.

In this sense, writing is a twofold task: first, a sabotaging of poetic language laden with traditionalist ideology in its authoritarian and totalitarian pretensions; and second, a sabotaging of its forms, a liberation of poetic language from its traditionalist aesthetic latitude and an invitation to it to join warmer climes.

Such writing is by its very nature political. This does not mean that it addresses politics directly or that it depends on it, rather that it forms reality in its aesthetic specificity. A poem does not cause a revolution - only people can do that - but is rather an attempt by a worker in the field of poetic production to contribute, via the aesthetic uniqueness of her own work, to the creation of a new image of reality, one which encompasses the possibility of change within a horizon of revolution.

[…] The central question hence becomes how such work is undertaken. It is not a matter of tailoring one's work explicitly to the masses in a quantitative sense, but rather of envisaging a public capable of transcending blind everyday language and achieving an understanding which reaches the level of symbol and suggestion.

A poem not only says what it appears to say, but also something more intimate, something possible. This is the most important dimension of the poem, and of poetry in general.

[…] The goal is not to preach to this public or to educate it as such, but rather to affirm one's participation in the overall movement for change, and to add one's voice to the ongoing dialogue from which the movement lives.

Poetry does not explain this dialogue or describe it, but rather becomes an organic part of it.[629]

<u>'Abolition'</u>

[629] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 60-62.

Adonis makes an indirect call for a Universal Basic Income here, not in the name of laziness, but in the very name of 'learning for the self':

> You ask an Arab poet or artist what he does, and he replies to you: 'I work for the government', 'I'm in private practice', 'I work for this or that body', or 'I'm unemployed.' And he adds: 'My whole time is spent trying to make a living.' He is caught in the vortex of daily life and eventually ground down by it, and is unable to free himself to say, without a trace of sentimentality, what he really does: 'I work at creating a new world. I set the life of my people, as I imagine it to myself, to the rhythm of cosmic change.'
>
> […] This was not always true of us; there were periods when we walked proudly towards the future. All truly living culture, indeed, does so; it thrives on the business of becoming, of looking forward as well as backward. Creativity is the essence of this outlook.
>
> […] Some of us wonder, in this context, why Arab society does not currently, as a rule, give birth to great works of human creativity. Others of us ask why Arab society is in the process of losing what might be called our aesthetic hold on morality. What I mean here is the ethical orientation which creates life ever anew at the individual level, and at the level of society as well insofar as it affirms the continued desire for change and creativity, not an ethicality of need as much as one of beautiful and noble desire. This aesthetic hold on morality is what makes every artist an artist. It makes poets of those who choose to be poets. The absence of this ethicality is what makes a person lose her appetite for work, her enjoyment of mastery and her dedication to it. We all know that any profession is furthered and turned into value to the extent that its practitioner loves it. The person who does not love her work, or in other words, the person who does not approach it like an artist, does not feel that she creates anything in her work. And whoever does not create anything in her work remains stuck at the level of materiality, at the level of the machine; she loses both her sense of work and her sense of self.
>
> This ethicality is what affirms to us, therefore, that we create ourselves through our work. The identity of all of us is tied to the outside world; our work never ends, and we must therefore realise this calling continually. It is an endlessly open program. If work changes our lives for the better, art allows us to live this life as deeply and regally as we can. The aesthetic hold on reality is what teaches us how to get this balance right. We can therefore see that a society which takes a sustainable approach to creativity is one which never gets old.[630]

Lamenting Arab governments' lack of 'investment' in the humanities, Adonis offers a stark prediction cloaked in hope:

> The history of all realms of endeavour not directly associated with art and creativity in the life of peoples is, when all said and done, a series of documents: history at the level of everyday life. Such stories are necessary,

[630] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 63-64.

perhaps even beautiful, but the deep history behind them, that which survives, is a different matter: it is to be found in products of creativity. You can't overcome the dust of history and emerge stronger than time without it. Creativity is the essence of a nation's identity, the symbol of its expansion, the matrix of its future and its driving force.

Therefore, if you deprive a nation of its poets and innovators, its language and culture will die, and perhaps a foreign culture will invade and absorb it. No culture is capable of a continuous creativity which steadily distances itself from the past and eventually becomes foreign to its own tradition. Only creativity in the present, however, is able to conserve the creativity of the past. What keeps al-Mutanabbi alive today, for example, is a great contemporary poet such as Badawi al-Jabal.

When our hearts break, we do not force institutional memories on them; instead, we turn to Imru-l Qays and to great innovators in other spheres. Such recollection traverses centuries, as if coming back to carry us in our suffering. Kings disappear; Abu Tammam remains. This is the meaning of creativity; here is where you find the true history of peoples. Abu Tammam and those like him are those who renew our sensitivities and restore our energy for life. There are those who lead humanity on paper and govern us superficially, and those who do so for real, in the depths of ourselves. This again is the meaning of creativity; a political leader cannot, in her role as such, influence the intimate dimension of human existence or conduct the orchestra of our deepest feelings. The poet can. Artists in general can. Creativity is the voice which sings the loftiest verses with the proudest face, allowing us to pierce the eternity which unites us in the time which otherwise keeps us apart.[631]

'Message'

What should a critic look for in art if not a 'message' or version of something else? Adonis has advice for 'me' here:

> You don't start from a prior ideological standpoint which does your talking for you, and you don't have a doctrinal position which narrows your horizons from the beginning; instead, you try to read the text in front of you, presenting your reading as one among many possibilities for criticism and evaluation. You do not present a series of definitive judgments, but rather uncover in the text an interconnected order of meaning which does not cancel the possibility of other orders. You affirm, in other words, the text's right to independence, and you refuse to see it as a mere ideological weapon, preferring instead to treat it as a horizon, a switch, or a field.
>
> […] 'You try, therefore, to write a second text on top of, or inspired by, the original. Your critique arrives as a second language built on a first language. You don't claim to be discovering the text's full and final meaning; you are satisfied with refining and intensifying the texture of one part or

[631] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 64-65.

> aspect of it. You thus mediate between two languages: the language produced by the historical period of the poet or author in question, and the unique structure of her own utterances, affirming as you do so that the power of the poetic text lies not in what it 'says' in its philological context, but rather in its own unique structure or texture. One might even go so far as to say that, in your critical engagement, you are not 'unveiling' the meaning of the text at all, but wrapping it deeper in its own uniqueness.'[632]

Is 'learning for the self' an 'ideological standpoint', or is it an attempt to liberate the global humanities from ideology in a way that philology alone - in its pseudoscientific 'neutrality' - is destined to fail to do? It will be for the reader of this book to decide; if the humanities are antitotalitarian by definition, and if liberalism is the opposite of totalitarianism, then perhaps we have produced a work of pure liberal ideology, in which Chinese, Arab and other global voices have been recruited to an essentially 'Western' ideological cause. One can envisage such critiques from both the left and the right; there is no 'message' here, however, only (as we have said from the beginning) a row of cocktails for the thirsty. Just as Hans Küng's *Projekt Weltethos* was built on exclusion of the extremes of fundamentalism and relativism, so too does 'Spiritual Humanism' require consensus on the possibility of cultivating free individual spirits, individual selves, however much we may disagree about how such 'selves' are best formed. If this consensus is already 'ideology', then so be it: it is the 'ideology' which Adonis himself embraces in order to oppose collectivist, 'traditionalist' ideologies hostile to individual self-cultivation. The goal in his *poetry*, however, is not, as it is in *Zaman al-Shi'r*, to engage in this 'ideological' opposition directly; it is merely to embody his own creative self. It is not the case that 'the medium is the message'; it is that the very idea of 'message' is transcended by art and poetry. A cocktail is a drink in a glass; it is not a message in a bottle.

'The Poetry of Matter'

The worst thing one can do, therefore, if one wants to 'help' other 'selves', is to condescend to them in any way:

> If revolution itself is on some level a burst of manual tasks, […] poetry is a burst of inspiration for hearts and minds which changes the order of possible meaning. The meaning of the literary act is never exhausted in the words chosen; its value cannot be reduced to its direct content. It is rather to be found in the spaces between the words, in the play of words and ideas generated in the reader's head, in the spaces behind the text: the literary text is a continual call to transcendence of itself.
>
> The work of revolution (creating a new world) is by its very nature change. Poetry (the writing of the world) is also change: they are in fact two dimensions of the same revolutionary front.

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[632] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 66-67.

> […] Peasants and workers, if we can put it this way, live in a kind of direct contact with matter and nature, rich in their relationships with things but not always rich in their poetic relationships with words. This means that those who speak on their behalf and in their name should know how to explore these things and how to find words worthy of these intimate relationships. Those who identify with these peasants and workers, especially poets and artists, have a difficult task, for they have to penetrate this level of material relationship by embedding themselves in the broad canvas of nature. Turning workers and peasants into masks to hide one's own superficiality and one's own vulgarity does not serve their interests, and does not serve any revolution; it only shows disdain and contempt for such people. Peasants and workers are not simply animals with nothing important going on in their lives except eating and reproducing; they are human beings who rejoice and despair, imagine and dream, gamble and desire. They are not just the hand on the plough; they are hearts, minds and aspirations, rolling waves rather than aging stones. They are poets of the earth they till; they therefore necessarily oppose superficiality and vulgarity, and resist attempts to write banal poetry in their name. They desire of poets who write about them that they rise to the level of surveying the destiny which moves them, and struggle to improve it - or in other words, that they write from the perspective of the great causes which push them to change the world in the first place: turning freedom into daily bread for everyone, turning poetry into daily work, and work into daily poetry.
>
> Bad poetry cannot be part of any desirable picture or framework of this. We cannot welcome the fruits of this structure except insofar as they help us to tear it down and to triumph as individuals, and as such to become part of a whole which knows how to use work to change the world.
>
> Great causes need great poetry. Only poets who write the world into being, in its own force and greatness, can be said to be operating at the level of peasants and workers, and to be defending their interests.[633]

'Reformation'

Adonis calls openly for a 'reformation' of Arab culture, but he wants to make absolutely clear how difficult this is: 'Whoever tries to evaluate the state of Arab culture today, and especially the legacy of its past, finds herself in a minefield, hemmed in by rigid assumptions and convictions, prejudices and prefabricated judgments. In practice, this produces doubts, accusations, and lethal brands of fanaticism.'[634] One must diagnose the problem - unwelcome though Adonis's diagnosis was in 1971, and unwelcome though it remains today - before one can hope to treat it:

> Arab society has only rarely known periods of stability without recourse to repression. […] it has almost always faced some sort of external threat or

[633] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 70-71.

[634] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, p. 72.

other. Perhaps there is something in this which explains how the cultural struggle within Arab society, and between it and its foreign enemies, takes a primarily politico-religious form, and how politics itself comes to be an extension of religion. Perhaps there is also an explanation to be found here of how the past became a constant promise for Arabs, how it was overglorified and used as a refuge, especially when the foreign threats in question were near and strong. This recourse to the past was both a form of armament and a source of solace. At the psychological level, it was a kind of compensation for the decadence or collapse represented by the present. We can see from this how the past, or the cultural production of the past, became the symbol of Arab individuality, and how criticism of this production was interpreted as an affront to Arab identity itself. Anything which challenged this picture of stability was also taken personally. In this way, the past became a full and final measure. An Arab today, whether he is a resistance fighter or a poet or a philosopher or an ethicist or a scientist or a family man or an economist or anything else, is subject in advance to the standards of this past, the stone of tradition, the fixed reference points of the ancestors.

Seen in this light, the past, or the legacy of the past, is an ideal, absolute, almost mathematical textual space, outside of time and protected from the dust of history. The theocratic and feudal political order which has dominated Arab society via a variety of means over many centuries has helped to cement this picture, and has been cemented by it.

[…] Nominally, then, the tradition turned into power, and became institutionalised: it decreed specific values and specific relationships. This institutionalisation is particularly clear in the way its judgments have been passed down, in word and deed, in its continuity as a fixed tradition. This transmission is what keeps the present tied to the past, thereby securing the horizon of the future. Tradition on this view is like a floating kingdom at sea; it has its own laws and its own power structures. The present is a constant potential indictment of the sultan of this kingdom. This relationship with the past is more than a temporal one: it is a legal relationship, in which the present is continually condemned, and condemned in advance. The Arab citizen today faces no choice: either submission to this sultan of the past (in a word, conversion) or a refusal to submit (apostasy and flight).

Apostasy here is an absolute sentence issued in the name of absolute knowledge. The mythical, fantastic or irrational element of this picture of the past, and of the institutional structures which conserve it, is here confirmed. These structures, far from promoting culture and reflection, can be seen actively to negate them.

[…] In practice, a second level of institutional censorship emerges from this preordained view of the canonical texts as incomparably and untouchably perfect. This censorship is carried out in the name of an infallibility which permits some things and forbids others. It says A is wrong and B is right. The tragicomic aspect of this infallibility complex in our age is that, in its blindness, it does not even know the law (the ‘tradition’, the ‘past’) in the name of which it issues these condemnations, or the accused (the present, the future) which it judges and condemns.

The institutions, however - and this is the danger of ideological camouflage - do not reveal this truth, but defend, serve and conserve the *status quo*. They embrace the static vision of tradition as an unchanging treasure chest, and seek to hand it down. In the name of this task of transmission, they must check and rationalise everything spoken and written. No one knows, therefore - and they themselves don't know - where their powers of censorship end.

The institutions not only keep themselves hidden, but they keep their work hidden as well. They disguise their autistic relationship with tradition by talking about respect and recognition for the legacy of our ancestors. Since they work to conserve this legacy, Arab culture is condemned to live in a desert of explanations, and of explanations of explanations, re-explanations and recontextualisations of re-explanations and so on. We need only look at the Arab education system to see this, even at university level, and at the kind of 'criticism' practised there, as exemplified in high school and university textbooks. Centres of learning and culture in Arab society, schools and institutes and universities of all stripes, treat tradition as a sack stuffed with scraps from the past, and chew over them until they are ground down to dust. The tradition sinks further into this desert with every passing day.

[…] I have reached the point where I now call openly for a reformation of Arab culture, particularly in terms of its approach to tradition.

First and foremost, the view of cultural production itself has to change, and to separate itself from a religious perspective; or rather, we must come to view religion as a product of culture rather than the other way round.

Second, it is not for institutions, whether political, social or cultural, to consider that they have a monopoly on the tradition, or to permit, forbid, judge or condemn anyone in the name of that tradition. Institutions have mediating roles as background facilitators of the social climate, but in a free society, the air and water belongs to everyone.

Third, our tradition is not perfect, and is not beyond criticism; there is, however, no absolute standard for doing this, no judge and no binding authority. There is, instead, a field of cultural activity ploughed by people like us, who wound and err, create and invent. Judgments of them should be limited to the work they produce, not turned into judgments of Arab identity as a whole. It should be possible for an Arab poet or an Arab philosopher to emerge today and *add* something new to the poetic or philosophical tradition, something not seen in the past and perhaps in some ways even better than anything before it, without anyone assuming that this amounts to an abandonment or refusal of our heritage.[635]

Any individual chained to the 'past' in a pathological way, Adonis argues, cannot begin the task of autonomous self-cultivation; 'learning for the self' requires a 'revolution' against these totalitarian forces, a transcendence of the 'constant struggle between [one's own] society as a whole and "barbarian" foreigners'[636], a cosmopolitan outlook which admits the possibility that novelty and nourishment for

[635] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 72-75.

[636] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, p. 72.

the self might appear from anywhere at any time, thereby fostering trust in one's own powers - limited but improvable - of discernment.

'Language'

Adonis turns his wrath here on the real gatekeepers of the traditionalist *status quo*:

> One of the problems created by the principle of judging things according to a preset model or root is the effect it has had on generations of Arab readers and intellectuals raised in this way. This principle formally requires the transmission of our cultural tradition by conservative critical means. This is where one finds the reasons which led to the emergence of the cultural phenomenon we might describe as the 'schoolyard intellectual', the embodiment and product of the Arab school system as a whole, who sets the programme for the development - or non-development - of the curriculum.
>
> Nothing comes out of this model, in terms of understanding or critical judgment, except that which the ancestors have fixed and established. This then promotes, by way of such conservative attitudes to interpretation, a cultural climate in which the focus lies squarely on what is known rather than what is not known, leading to a preference for memorisation over discovery, and for acceptance rather than transcendence. This climate is well summarised by the ancient words of, as I remember, Abu 'Amr ibn al-Ala' (689-770): 'A descendant among the ancestors is like a weed among palm trees.'
>
> […] The 'palm trees' in this analogy are the sources of absolute knowledge, and the 'weeds' are in a hopeless position of abjection in relation to them. Such programming of new generations of Arab intellectuals starts from the assumption, nowhere stronger than in poetry, that the great 'palm tree' ancestors represent full and final knowledge. They start, therefore, from the wrong foundation. There is no such thing as full and final knowledge in poetry, or in any other field for that matter. Such a promise is an illusion, for it contradicts reality, our experience, and the whole idea of knowledge in general. All knowledge arises from specific experience, is based on a certain method, and cannot be absolutised in this way.
>
> Claims to absolute knowledge reflect human weaknesses in the face of history, which is characterised by movement and change. Truth, moreover, is not finalisable in time, because the relationship between self and other, between the individual human spirit and the world, never grinds to a complete halt. The idea of full and final knowledge amounts to a freezing of time and thought, and of human life as a whole, in the jaws of a readymade and decaying machine.[637]

Language is capable of far more than 'freezing time':

[637] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 76-77.

> A spoken tongue is common to everyone who speaks it; it is not created by anyone on her own, and is a social phenomenon. The poetic word, however, is always created by individuals; it is a private business. Imrul Qays, al-Mutanabbi and Badawi al-Jabal shared a common tongue, but each developed his own distinctive poetic voice. Poetry is not shared language; it is private language. Language is like the sea, and poetry is the sequence of unrepeatable waves on top. The relationship between language and poetry is not one of cause and effect, and certainly not that of a weed to a palm grove; the poetry of a single poet is a single wave, or burst of waves, in the sea of language. It can therefore assume no form except the one it takes for itself. New poets are not in the business of erecting monuments to the waves which came before them; their work emanates from the sea as a whole. The new in Arab poetry is not some updated accumulation of old poetry or a repetition of it or a variation of it; both the old and the new have their own individuality in the common sea of the Arabic language.[638]

'Poetry and Work'

Adonis places the cosmopolitan, self-cultivating struggles of 'modern' Arab poets in all ages - from Imrul Qays and Abu Tammam down to the present day - against the dramatic backdrop of desert life on the Arabian Peninsula:

> The first Arab poets were born as members of social bodies best described as tribes. They were, in essence, the voice of the group, by which I also mean that their belonging to the group was profound and total insofar as separation from it - 'isolation' as Tarafa refers to it - meant death in the desert in one form or other. Although there are exceptions to this rule, such as 'Arwa bin al-Ward and Imrul Qays, the standard picture of the pre-Islamic poet is one of connection to the group. She spoke in the name of her tribe, the cardinal value of which was group membership itself. As the bard of the tribe's virtues in the first instance, the poet was an integral part of its soft power arsenal, and fulfilled a dual function: she praised friends and was tough on enemies; these words sometimes served as proxy weapons in real wars, or prevented such wars altogether. Poetry in this sense was part of the work of the tribe.
>
> This may also explain the relationship in Arabic between 'literature' as poetry and 'lettered' as a synonym of 'polite'. 'Literature' has in any case always been about distinction in a moral sense, about behaviour and what one does, or how one does it. Even after the word 'literature' had acquired its purely 'literary' meaning, it still retained the nuance of an embodiment of language, or rather of the public 'sea' of language, praising virtues and good ideas. This was the functional view of literature which reigned in the conservative and traditionalist circles which charged themselves with passing on the inherited tradition.[639]

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[638] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, p. 78.

[639] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 80-81.

The immense complexity of Arab society's transition to Islam ought not to overshadow, Adonis argues here, the continuities which obstructed the development of a culture of 'learning for the self' in Arab education:

> This principle of measuring literature by going back to its etymological root led, in critical practice, to a yardstick based on reason. This principle was consolidated by centuries of experience with an official religion which drew a sharp distinction between 'body' and 'soul', and between reason and instinct. Such distinctions contained clear value judgments: the soul is better than the body, and reason is better than instinct. Reason leads human beings to truth; instinct separates them from it. The former is a source of clarity; the latter the root of disorder. Intellectual practice created a world of reason cut off, at least ideally, from the world of emotion. It tied reason to that which lay behind nature and exalted it, and tied emotion to nature and condemned it. A series of standards and judgments resulted from this distinction: reason is objective, organised, clear, consistent with itself, subject to proof, repeatable. Its star waxes with norms and laws. Language is therefore either rooted in reason or it is trivial. As far as the world of nature and subjective instinct is concerned, it is not logical, and not susceptible to external proof; it is corrupting and contradictory. It undermines law and order. Everything it produces is vain, and it leads to no healthy knowledge.
>
> From these assumptions, a view of literature emerged which subordinated it to science.
>
> […] The Arab poets who witnessed the upending of Arab life with the advent of Islam wrote about their new lives with means of expression formed in the pre-Islamic period; they praised the new rulers with the same forms and artistic means with which pre-Islamic poets praised the kings and emirs and heads of their tribes.
>
> This acted to solidify the disjunction between meanings and forms, and confirmed the idea that poetry after the advent of Islam should continue to be a kind of adaptation or conformity to the old roots, a formal affirmation of the relative 'ignorance' in which it was now said to exist. This adaptation was at once descriptive and normative: the behaviour of the descendants should conform to the patterns of behaviour embraced by the ancestors, and so should the templates for expression. This conformity to the old was based on a faith that the old was, in its own limited non-religious realm, perfect, final, clear, rational and logical. Ancient poetry, for those who came after it, was a summary of the basics; everything which followed, in the form of thought or poetry, was mere detail in the shadow of this pre-existing and shallow perfection.
>
> Detail on this view is the tongue of the established conclusions, their translator and explainer and mirror. The detail does not add anything original, but rather explains what was already there. This necessarily implies that the older the idea, the better, and that the first people were the most learned. Arab poetic culture is therefore like spring water flowing away from its source; the preference is for that which is closest to it. If a poet wants to

> be considered a true poet in this culture, she must resemble or refer to this source as closely as she can.
>
> […] Poetry is to language, on this account, what hands are to work ('an injury to the tongue is like an injury to the hand,' as Imru l-Qays put it). As the Islamic nation came to replace the tribe, the poet became the tribe's envoy to it, in both a moral and practical sense, much as she had played a diplomatic role within the tribe, and with neighbouring tribes, in the pre-Islamic period. In order to justify its existence, poetry had to emulate work, and be directly useful. The only way to do this was to be pedagogical and proselytising.
>
> The problems facing contemporary Arab poetry, and faced by 'modern' poets from the past such as Abu Tammam, were born out of this whole climate.[640]

Adonis is not trying to dismiss 'Islam' in its entirety here, as he is frequently accused of wanting to do; on the contrary, he is trying to show how it can be understood at its best as a cosmopolitan step towards overcoming the 'ignorance' and isolation of tribal life, and a call to precisely the kind of individual self-cultivation which theocracy and totalitarianism thwart. Abu Tammam (805-845) is a truer representative of this civilisational tradition than all the theocrats combined who have found inspiration in 'Islam' over the centuries:

> Critics at the time called this revolution 'a corruption of poetry'; it was moreover said of Abu Tammam's writing that 'if this is poetry, then the Arabs have nothing to say'. Some even went so far as to describe it as 'hostile to what the Arabs have said', which means that the poetry of Abu Tammam, on such accounts, is not 'Arab' at all, because it is not clear in the traditional manner.
>
> If Abu Tammam did not actually manage to carry out the coup which modern poetry constitutes, he was certainly accused of trying; and it is indeed said of modern Arab poetry that, by comparison with what came before it, it isn't worth anything. It behooves those who embrace the adage that obscurity corrupts poetry, however, to remember that Abu Tammam, the 'obscurer', the 'corruptor', is one of the small number of individuals who built the great edifice of Arab poetry and engineered our glory as a poetic nation.
>
> We are also obliged to add here that such a break from the past occurred, or occurs, in all nations and all ages where there is a turn from established means of expression to opposing means, and that readers during this phase always accuse the offending poets and texts of 'obscurity'.
>
> Every true creator is obscure for the majority of her contemporaries, not only in our time but throughout history and among all peoples. This is true not only in art and literature, but in philosophy as well. In this sense, we can call the present a veil between writers and readers, a veil which falls away for those who come afterwards. To the extent that the text remains what it always was and does not change, the accusation of obscurity turns out to be a bogus one, usually just a mask behind which the less

[640] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 81-83.

> sophisticated reader hides her own shortcomings and her insistence on understanding what has changed with a mindset which has not.[641]

<u>'Poetry and Politics'</u>

The longest of the 26 'glossary' entries, Adonis offers a vision of poetry here which floats over the abyss between the raw, heartless power of *realpolitik* and the self-effacement of asocial mysticism. Consider first, by way of contrast, the ideological implications of Costica Bradatan's definition of 'humility':

> To the extent that humility is the capacity to unmask life and expose it for what it is — a bloody theater of power — it is the opposite of humiliation, which power always engenders. Humiliation is what you get when you are not savage enough to play the beast of prey, and yet insufficiently wise to realize it's all just a game. Humility instead prevents us from entering the game of power in the first place.
>
> Humility, however, is much more than just about table matters. It is, above all, about visibility and insight. Iris Murdoch defined humility, memorably, as 'selfless respect for reality'.
>
> […] The ultimate gift of humility — for it does offer gifts at times — is precisely this knowledge from the inside out, which those with power cannot even suspect exists. It is the kind of understanding of the world and its intimate workings that Ivan Denisovich acquires while relegated to the lowest of life's stations in the Soviet Gulag. Page after engrossing page, Solzhenitsyn reveals Denisovich as someone who has truly *got it*: he sees everything and understands everything and forgives everything. Compared to the humble prisoner, Stalin — for all his boundless, crushing power — hasn't understood anything worth understanding. For human beings, writes Simone Weil, 'are so made that the ones who do the crushing feel nothing; it is the person crushed who feels what is happening.'
>
> It is not for nothing that mystics and philosophers have often connected the practice of humility to a vision of truth. Bernard of Clairvaux writes: 'The way is humility, the goal is truth. The first is the labor, the second the reward.' For Vladimir Jankélévitch, 'humility equals truth,' and André Comte-Sponville eloquently defines humility as 'loving truth more than oneself'. In *Gravity and Grace*, Simone Weil, whose entire work and life were defined by a profound ontological humility, writes that God 'loves that perspective of creation which can only be seen from the point where I am.' But she finds she is in God's way: 'I act as a screen,' she writes. 'I must withdraw so that he may see it.' Leaving out Weil's God for now, we may extend her insight: we always act 'as a screen' even to *ourselves*, we are in *our own* way. To have a full view and a better grasp, then, we need to 'withdraw'. That's exactly what humility does: it removes us from the picture so that things can reveal themselves. It's only then that we can be said to be contemplating the world.

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[641] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 15-16.

> Unsurprisingly, major religions, from Buddhism to Christianity to Islam, place emphasis on humility. And so do countless codes of secular ethics. Indeed, any civilization worth its salt seeks to rein in our propensity for hubris and excessive self-assertion. […] And this is precisely why humility is so important. […] From the Buddha to the Sufi masters to Schopenhauer to Bergson and Weil, mystics and philosophers, East and West, have not in essence said anything else.[642]

Poetry for Adonis - and 'learning for the self' for the other authors covered under the loosely Confucian auspices of this book - is something subtly different from all this: rather than deciding *a priori* that life is 'a bloody theater of power', the poet is able actively to fashion a different world for herself and others; far from screening our 'selves' out of the picture, it is creative self-*cultivation*, not 'annihilation' of the self, which makes true 'humility' possible in the first place. John Gray makes a similar mistake when evaluating the legacy of Hermann Hesse:

> A lifelong narcissist, […] if Hesse returned from the East to another bout of depression, one reason was that the goal of the religions he had been half-heartedly exploring was the opposite of what he was looking for. Hesse wanted self-realisation, whereas Eastern mysticism aimed at the dissolution of the self. As Decker notes, Hesse's Siddhartha had more of Nietzsche in him than of Buddha. For Hesse's protagonist, as for Hesse himself, 'It was not a question of renouncing the Self but of finding it. This was a very Western line of thought.'
>
> […] Written over a period of more than ten years, Hesse's last full-length novel, *The Glass Bead Game* (1943), encapsulates the essential emptiness of his vision. Set in a remote future in a fictional part of Europe, the story tells the life of a member of a powerful spiritual order who rises to the top to become Magister Ludi – the supreme master of an esoteric game in which all the branches of human knowledge were deployed. Neither the rules nor the goal of the game are ever specified, and when the Magister renounces his position towards the end of the book his reasons for doing so are not given. Was he disillusioned, or simply asserting himself against a discipline of which he had grown tired? The reader cannot tell. Hesse's Magister Ludi remains a strangely insubstantial figure – not unlike Hesse himself. Apart from his overweening egotism, there is very little that is distinctive in this prophet of individuality.[643]

One can, however, defend individual self-cultivation, as Hesse, Adonis, and Confucians like Tu Weiming all do, without descending into self-centred 'narcissism' (the laziest and most fashionable critique of our entire age, a one-word catch-all character assassination). It is the ideal of self-*annihilation* which is truly ideological,

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[642] Costica Bradatan, 'The Gifts of Humility', https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-gifts-of-humility/#!, 16/12/2018 (accessed 20/12/2018).

[643] John Gray, 'How Hermann Hesse Became a Hero of Sixties Counterculture', https://www.newstatesman.com/2018/12/Hermann-hesse-Wanderer-Shadow-Gunnar-Decker-review, 5/12/2018 (accessed 20/12/2018).

because it means deciding once and for all what life is (e.g. 'a bloody theatre of power'). Like his Confucian, European, African and other allies in this book (nothing to do with 'East and West', in other words), Adonis wants to preserve the freedom of the individual spirit to breathe its own life and meaning into the world, and thereby to cultivate what modern Confucians like to call a 'dialogical relationship with Heaven'. Rather than 'loving truth more than oneself' - a nonsensical, not even impossible business - one loves truth because one has cultivated a self with which to dance with it:

> *'The window is open.'*
> *'The window is a woman waiting for her arms to be opened.'*

> The subject of both these sentences is the same window, but it is perceived differently. Despite the fact that it is the same window in both sentences, different corners of our feelings about it, and therefore of our understanding of it, are revealed in each.
>
> The former reflects reality as it first appears: it depicts it, represents it, sums it up in an image. It offers us a kind of practical utility. It is matter-of-fact and informative, providing more or less accurate and trustworthy news about the state of the window, facts which may be of interest or use to all those who see or have seen it.
>
> The second sentence, however, is a second-order type of writing which transforms reality; indeed, by changing it, it represents a kind of creation. It does not report reality as such, but instead offers us a possibility, or rather a range of possibilities which the object in question suggests or condenses.
>
> The first sentence conveys static and prefabricated knowledge, and presents us with a predefined situation and a predetermined idea about it. The latter offers a moment of suggestion, an uncovering of novelty. It achieves this by juxtaposing elements of reality, but not in a logical or rational way, at least insofar as logic and rationality are commonly understood. Indeed, it transcends these in the narrow sense by obliterating the distinction between reality and fantasy, the revealed and the hidden, the existing and the possible, the object and the desire behind it.[644]

'Poetry' is in fact the exact opposite of 'politics' as commonly understood and practised:

> We can identify the following characteristics of artistic or creative writing.
>
> First, artistic writing does not describe reality but rather creates it anew with images of transformed possibility.
>
> Second, it elevates everyday events and objects to the level of symbols. An artistic expression has, beyond its apparent meaning, a series of secondary meanings which open up new possible spheres of profundity and completeness. In other words, art transforms meaning into layers of possible meaning, making many things out of one.

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[644] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 89-90.

> Third, artistic language views things from the perspective(s) it brings to them, multiplying meanings by multiplying perspectives. We can therefore say that it is possible, in art, to talk about a single object in fundamentally different, indeed endlessly different, ways.
>
> Fourth, it is artistic language which renews and enriches language in general by expanding possibilities of meaning. Non-artistic language impoverishes language as a whole insofar as it repeats existing structures and grinds their meanings down by remaining at the level of superficial directness. Artistic language, by contrast, remains fertile, in a constant cycle of pregnancy and birth.[645]

Adonis even approaches the Confucian goal of *tianrenheyi* in his understanding of poetry:

> The human being, not an inanimate abstraction, is the focus of our attention and striving. Prioritising a material or intellectual concept ends up abolishing human agency, and therefore abolishes human beings in their very essence by reducing them to a means, insofar as their poetry or art in general becomes mere publicity for this other thing. Such propaganda entails an imposition of values and tastes on others, and not primarily in their interests. It means the manufacture of a top-down, built-to-order future.
>
> […] It is not as if there is reality on one side and poetry on the other, and then they look at each other and decide to marry; there is a poetic means of expressing reality which itself does the uniting by the power of its own example. Reality is an endless freedom, and to the extent that a poet writes with this total liberty, he enjoys an eternal relationship with it. This dialogical relationship brings the poet and reality closer to each other. Reality does not surrender to imprisonment, but rather to liberation. Reality is qualitative, not quantitative in nature; it is not an accumulation of stock over time, but rather a continual beginning.[646]

There is no end to this humanistic activity of the individual poetic spirit; or as Adonis puts it elsewhere, 'all great poets are great thinkers'[647]:

> To write true poetry, we must give reality a mobile, future-friendly form. Revolution cannot be realised once and for all (without turning human beings into things and depriving them of their nature); revolutionary gains push human beings to extend the revolution forward in time. In other words, there are distinctions to be made which separate the gains of the past from the hope remaining in the future. Hope, therefore, is always in the possibility of a new launch forward, a new undertaking, a new aspiration. Poetry embodies this hope. No true poem ends; it is always part of a longer undertaking. This obliges the poet to continue writing in ever broader,

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[645] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 90-91.

[646] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 92-93.

[647] See Adonis, 'I Was Born for Poetry'.

deeper and richer ways, and generally to continue her initial quest for forms which reveal that which remains hidden, and complete that which remains lacking, not only in oneself, but in the world as a whole. If I cannot lead my people to new horizons, if I cannot lead the world there, I cannot lead myself there either.

The old adage is that poetry is desperate hope and hopeful desperation. Anything which expands our view of reality, on this account, expands scope for despair; life cannot add to its stocks of hope without this extra room for anguish. Despair is a barricade, and all barricades are forms of death. As existence grows in our spirits, so too does death carve out ever greater space there. True poetry is when we write into existence the life which resides in death, and the death which resides in life.

[…] If reality is continually mobile, then it is always the future. Since the future therefore remains on one level constant, poetry is faced with a continual obstacle in front of it. All true poems are landmines laid to destroy this barrier. It is as if poetry is born out of that which refuses poetry: repression, both external (traditionalist language in its various forms) and internal (our myriad inhibitions). Poetry is a mine continually relaid in the field of repression in which we live; poetry therefore cannot be described as understanding life or expressing it as it truly is, or as achieving genuine richness, unless it understands death at the same time, and on the same level, and gives equal expression to it.[648]

Adonis's *junzi*-poet does not aim to 'cope' with reality via self-annihilating subordination or superstitious submission to what she can't change, but rather via active, endlessly creative dialogue, a true 'humility' based on an embodied sense of equality with an incomplete reality or 'Heaven' which needs our creative efforts as much as we need hers:

A poet, therefore, does not communicate with reality as a material or mass, but with an image she forms of it. In this specific sense, it is not wrong to say that poetry derives its substance, or part of it, from reality. The poet is a chemist, or alchemist, of reality; she smelts it in the crucible of her sensitivity and vision, and turns it into rhythm, granting everything its own individuality within the grand scheme. […] A poem does not simulate reality; it imitates it.

People typically look at reality with a profit-seeking gaze: it is either useful or harmful. This determines whether their overall attitude to reality is basically trusting or mistrusting. But for a poet, reality is either beautiful or ugly: it brings feelings into being or extinguishes them. The overall vision is an aesthetic rather than a utilitarian one.

There is no end of things that people look at in an ordinary and banal way, and which the poet regards as full of mystery and wonder. She sees the inner dimension of reality and the objects which compose it, and does not content herself with appearances. She perceives objects in the orbit of her own aesthetic sensitivity, not her own material advantage, creating meanings, paths, relationships and rhythms, and weaving them into a

[648] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 94-95.

> harmonious texture of correspondeces and contrasts. By turning them into poetic forms, she finds her own voice to express them. This is the point of departure for her own unique spiritual development, and liberates her from the darkness, alienation and chaos of general mistrust or ignorance of the aesthetic dimension of life.[649]

Adonis is struggling, throughout *Zaman al-Shi'r*, to reconcile the palpable economic need for a more or less 'socialist' revolution and the learning-for-the-self 'individualism' on which any *political* revolution worth having would have to be based:

> The description of an emerging revolutionary movement, for example, only describes the state of the movement from one moment to the next, or in other words, a process of continual change or disturbance in space and time. In order for a poem to give successful expression to the revolution itself, it must find a way to synthesise the static and the dynamic - the revolution as a fundamental awakening of the spiritual depths of peoples, and the revolution as a succession of historical events.
>
> Without such a synthesis, realist poetry becomes nothing more than the minutes of reality's meeting.[650]

Adonis's problem is that he, and those like him in the Arab world, are simultaneously attacked from the Stalinist left, the Salafist right and many in between for their insistence on the autonomy of the humanities from formal politics:

> We still suffer under the oppressive weight of this pact, under the agreement that what matters are the goals that poetry can serve, not poetry itself. This manifests itself in a formal abandonment of the adventures of creation in favour of didactic and political priorities and the preservation of tradition and its authenticity. As early as the 1850s, our 'revolutionary poets' and 'progressive poets' were affirming that their political engagement with the Arab masses was synonymous with the traditionalist conservation of the past.
>
> […] Existence is no longer written into poetic texts as the foundation from which all knowledge, all truth and all standards emerge, but is rather a continual unfolding of discovery in a form of writing with which human beings will never dispense. The myriad explosions and revolutions in this creative space, affecting our customs, values and politics, and indeed our whole understanding of 'tradition', go forgotten, and so too the love of sensuality, the raising of the banner of individual freedom, and the anti-traditionalist forms of expression which have accompanied our march towards modernity.

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[649] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 96-97.

[650] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, p. 97.

> We have struggled to make any use of these developments in our own history. Instead of being listened to, people like me are accused of heresy, anti-Arab prejudice and a desire merely to ape foreigners.[651]

This autonomy of the humanities from social science and politics is perhaps as sacred to Adonis as the work of any individual poet, for it is the condition of possibility of aesthetic experience and moral self-cultivation as a whole:

> I personally tend towards the view that one cannot be truly critical towards a text if one starts with an *a priori* ideological stance towards it. The main reason for this is that, on the one hand, true criticism refuses all prior assumptions, and is therefore hostile to ideology in general. Moreover, poetry itself, before it can be anything else, is above all an examination of received wisdom, a critical approach to inherited, prefabricated habits of expression.
>
> We know from contemporary examples of ideological 'criticism' of poetry in the Arab world that such critics start from axioms drawn not from any contact with poetry, but rather from outside it, from the realm of instrumental rationality which governs the social sciences. A poet's first duty, on this view, is to inform or explain, not to describe or express. The poet thus becomes a means; her writing must generate understanding, benefit and conviction. What a poet has to say must be obvious, useful and persuasive. The imaginary worlds or worlds of imagination created by poetry - the very heart of poetic engagement - disappear, or are relegated to the background.
>
> Ideological views thus rush to affirm the existence of a 'common meaning', which consists of cultural elements said to be fundamental and shared - in short, common knowledge. The value of 'meaning', and therefore of poetry, for ideologues of all stripes, lies in its being shared or shareable: there enlies its putative value as a marketing tool. Poetry on this account serves to harmonise and to remind: it tells the followers of a given ideology what they already know and what they already have; it strengthens and distills their conviction, and in fact tells them nothing new at all.
>
> Ideological approaches to poetry, or to the possibility of poetry, remain always at the level of reception, and never reach the level of creativity itself, for the latter implies contradiction and tension: between intent and interpretation, subjectivity and objectivity, word and deed, the individual and the group, power and desire. Ideological approaches to literature are powerless in this terrain, ignore its existence, or otherwise avoid engagement. Meaning, for all ideologies, is to be found in advance, in the ideology itself; it has been sent down once and for all in all its liberating perfection. The main thing is therefore how the poet formulates this perfection and transmits it to her audience (which should be convinced or otherwise made to believe, if there are still any 'unbelievers' left, or reconvinced and strengthened in the faith if they are already part of the fold). Insofar as poetry tries to create a meaning of its own, it is rejected by

[651] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, p. 99.

> ideologies of all stripes, and the poet is excluded from membership of the club. Indeed, she is denied the right to a separate existence as an autonomous agent. She is asked to repress her most intimate, private world - to which all true poets give expression - in all its contradictions, strangeness and irrationality. The poetic 'I' is obliged to dissolve itself in the collective 'we'; poetry is thus a functional activity, conducted in the service of some idea or other, and necessarily didactic (whether in the form of eulogy - praise of the right ideas - or satire - venom spouted at the wrong ones or those of ideological rivals).[652]

Finally, Adonis comes to the elephant of the Qur'an itself: it is, on the one hand, a 'landmine' of the kind he identifies with the very greatest poetry (the 'revelation' metaphor is a powerful poetic strategy, and the language itself offers rich aesthetic possibilities[653]); on the other, it has proven difficult to contain the potentially lethal fallout from the unprecedented original explosion:

> *In* The Divine Inimitability of the Qur'an*, al-Baqillani (940-1013) compares the text of the Qur'an with poetry. In your view, is such a comparison correct or possible?*
>
> One common answer reads as follows: 'The Qur'an is a revelation; it is not a human word. It therefore has a texture all its own; qualitatively, it is neither poetry nor prose. In its status as revelation, it is the absolute text, outside of time: there is no human individual who has written it, and it has no history. As a foundational prophecy, it has a fixed meaning: uncreated and eternal, in chapter and verse. Its meanings are divine, and inseparable from the text; the idea of separating the meaning (the spirit) from the letter derives from the assumption that the author is human, or that there is an 'author' at all. To measure poetry against the Qur'an is to place a text written by a human being next to the revealed Word of God. This means that any such comparison is impossible and wrong, on any level, because their natures are different.'
>
> The reality is that such views are based on an understanding of poetry which deprives poetry of its very identity, and allows Islam to usurp the position of poetry. I think this creates a tremendous amount of confusion when it comes to understanding and interpreting poetic texts.
>
> The Qur'anic text is a prophecy, and as such is a call to action, or at least to a union of word and deed. This is the political dimension of Islam. A poem is an imaginative vision, a longing, a survey of private possibility. It therefore only touches the public realm of day-to-day politics from a distance, and in a very indirect way. In this sense, it is the complete opposite of prophecy, which calls everyone to direct action.
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> The alleged divine inimitability of the Qur'an certainly seems to stir hearts and minds in an inimitable way. The elevation of the prophecy above

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[652] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 100-101.

[653] Adonis's treatment of the Qur'an as poetry is well worth comparing with Navid Kermani's celebration of the Qur'an's poetic qualities in *Zwischen Koran und Kafka* (München: C.H. Beck, 2014). I cover this terrain in *From Global Ethic to World Ethos?,* pp. 69-71.

poetry is not intended to destroy poetry as such, but simply to strengthen the truth claims of the prophetic word by affirming that when the Prophet Muhammad speaks, it is God who is speaking through him.

This implies, however, that poetry does not speak the truth or create reality, as was claimed in 'ignorant' pre-Islamic times. Poetry now has a new function: not speaking the truth, but glorifying it as it is given to us in the Qur'an. Poetry was never meant for this proselytising role. Al-Asma'i (740-828) offers an example of the fear which poetry, in its survey of human depths, provokes: 'Poetry is an intemperance which leads to evil; if it enters good houses, it corrupts.' Perhaps we see in this view the early roots of the ideological divisions which plague our understanding of poetry, and of art in general, to this day.'[654]

Instead of claiming a full and final knowledge of 'reality', Adonis's poet labours away in her corner of it like a hopeful Borgesian librarian ('I have always imagined that paradise will be a kind of library,' as Borges famously puts it). Adonis likewise concludes that truth is 'beyond power', but not because one's axiomatically power-hungry 'self' gets in the way of true 'humility'; rather, it is the cultivated self alone which has any hope of resisting power:

No one can possess knowledge of reality to the extent that she can claim a full correspondence between reality and her understanding of it. None of us perceives more than a corner of this reality, and we add our selves, our various emotions and inheritances and habits, into the mix. 'Reality' is therefore what each of us imagines it to be, never itself. I make something which is not mine into the king of my consciousness, my thought, my self, and then submit it to my own fancies.

In principle, there is no connection whatsoever between what we call 'truth' and what we call 'reality'. The truths we believe in today are mere partial images of a reality for which we will never tire of creating images. If I want to take the idea of 'reality' seriously, I need to believe there are truths beyond my own images, and that a single 'reality', if it is to be a shared concept, will admit of a plurality of 'truths'.

Such truths, therefore, cannot by definition be absolute or eternal. If I want to be true to reality as a dynamic and transcendent reality, then my 'truths' have to match it.

Reality, on this account, is always a plurality of truths. If we only see one truth in it, and seek to impose this truth by force, we distort both reality and truth, and we deform human beings in their very essences.

Truth is not given in advance; on the contrary, it is a quest, a fight for a quest, a competition for understanding, a continuous effort both to *enrich reality* and *be enriched by it.*

This is also, by the way, the essence of democracy and the essence of progress. Without this spirit, reality becomes an arena of blind struggle; truth becomes domination, and power becomes violent. Poetry is by definition anti-authoritarian in this sense, a symbol of resistance to authoritarian

[654] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 102-103.

assaults on truth and knowledge. Poetry's most profound lesson is that truth and knowledge are external to power, *all* power (and political power in particular).

We must therefore affirm the need to embrace a new form of reading and a new form of writing. 'Old' approaches to reading squeeze the poetic text through our own private filters of reality; if we find things in the text which correspond to our preexisting images and reproduce our illusions, we love it, and call it 'realistic', and if not, we dismiss it as false and reject it as poetry altogether. In fact, if we do this, we don't love poetry at all, for its own sake, but we love our own image: the very definition of narcissism, a mirror which keeps reality from us.

[…] If we understand all this, we will come truly to appreciate the importance of new poetry and new ways of reading. Such poetry, and such an approach to poetry, allows us to imagine worlds into being, and offers us knowledge which is not merely functional, but rather provides a gateway to the intrinsic bliss and ecstasy of augmenting our human reality and increasing our openness to yet more change. With the questions and dreams it provokes in us, poetry pushes us to reject everything which imprisons humanity and reality, and to overcome even what we thought were our own limits. New visions of human possibility, and of reality as a whole, will always explode in us; poetry is a space of questions inviting more questions. It points to that for which there can be no expression, and never tires of this fate.[655]

'Poetry' is, on the one hand, what free selves 'automatically' do:

Intellectual labour, in its very essence, is critique. When we forbid critique, on whichever pretext, we outlaw thought. The nature of thought is not only to critique the things with which one is dissatisfied, but also continually to question even our most comfortable of assumptions.

For a writer to address themes of fundamental importance to ordinary people, one must assume that she is able to speak openly about the obstacles and shortcomings of, well, whatever takes her fancy. This presupposes freedom. You can't achieve anything beautiful in writing, or even the dream of anything beautiful, if you can't honestly explore the reasons which block its path to emergence. In other words, you won't know how to uncover anything beautiful in your life or your work if you can't look the ugly in the face with a critical gaze.

[…] If we compare [the] contemporary state of affairs with the Arab world in the past (the 9th and 10th Century in particular), we see that, far from expanding scope for dialogue and freedom, we have become navel-gazing and autistic; we have become poorer, not richer, and have replaced a taste for adventure and discovery with a preference for staying at home. Now we have axioms and fixed points of reference which we think we can rely on.

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[655] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 105-106.

> […] The dominance of ideology in our religious and intellectual discourse has bred a culture of certainties. This is embodied in regimes which rule and that's it. This is the opposite of poetry, and the opposite of imagination in general. I therefore say again that creative writing by definition critiques the *status quo* and pushes beyond it, and that poetry in particular is the opposite of all power, the opposite of all authority except the authority of creativity and imagination itself.[656]

The real *raison d'être* of *Zaman al-of Shi'r*, however, is to plot a course from the A of authoritarianism to the B of a brotherhood of free and cultivated selves. Poetry is both the effect *and* the potential cause of such a transformation, as the example of Abu Nuwas demonstrates:

> The poetry of Abu Nuwas (756-814), for me, represents an example of a fantasy which has not yet been realised, but which *could* be realised: a will to deprive ideological structures of their weapons. At the same time, it is a poetry which is itself free of all hostility: he celebrates freedom, the freedom of each individual, embracing it, rolling with it, singing it and being sung by it.
>
> And yet it is also an attack - a kind of friendly, planned, beautiful attack, an attack which announces the presence of life: it embraces desire and ignores ossified convention, takes its chances and does away with safety nets, investigates the body of the world, the body of matter, and draws the other in with its captivating poeticality. The most profound thing about it is that it totally undermines political utopianism, with its wager on change at the expense of all else, and even at the expense of history itself, its reduction of history to a series of blind events, a mere shell of true modernity.
>
> When I read him, I don't pine or remember or regret: I hope, dream and aspire. This is, in essence, the politics of poetry: a human being is a bundle of desiring and dreaming energy, not a straightforwardly political or social animal. The poetry of Abu Nuwas, therefore, does not 'instruct'; it tears at the veil of the world itself, penetrating it and shining back to us.[657]

Such 'breaking with convention' is much harder work than is commonly imagined, above all because it requires a certain spiritual courage:

> Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani (ca. 1007-1078) regards 'breaking with convention' not simply in terms of progress or precocity relative to one's contemporaries, or in the use of unusual ideas and metaphors. True 'breaking with convention', as Jurjani defines it, achieves the following:
>
> a. It finds a style which has never existed before.
> b. It makes a qualitative leap which others feel they cannot copy.
> c. It transcends all ages, not just the age in which it was born.

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[656] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 107-108.

[657] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, p. 109.

> Jurjani is of course referring to the Qur'an here. 'Getting to the root', however, means recovering our poetry's pre-Islamic origins. We have become accustomed, in our intellectual and spiritual lives, to regarding Quranic revelation as the primordial 'source', but the deepest roots of our poetic tradition are to be found in our pre-Islamic poets.
>
> Those who define themselves as beholden first and foremost to the Prophet will not feel that they themselves have anything revolutionary to contribute; their relationship to the tradition is not one of renewal or innovation, but rather of deference and emulation.
>
> *What, then, is your definition of experimentation?*
>
> I will defer again here, this time by paraphrasing al-Farabi on experimentation in music: Our senses are bombarded by many things. Experimentation is required to solidify our spirit's hold on all this.[658]

When considering my options for a workable English title for my translation of Adonis's 'glossary', I thought for a while that *The Eternal Revolution* might work best:

> When it comes to the business of creativity, we have to look at the things we are trying to achieve (and this is especially true of writing) not only as difficult, but as impossible. This is the complete opposite of politics, both in theory and practice.
>
> […] Both poetry and the poet are inseparable parts of reality. But insofar as reality suffers from its own incompleteness, poetry does not merely reflect it but tries to recreate it anew, or at least to create new images within it. In this sense, poetry is always oriented toward the future, not the past. Poetry is not limited to what is, but pushes beyond it to the realm of what is not, or what is not *yet*. In this sense we can say that poetry does not explain reality or describe it, but rather changes it, or creates a new one.
>
> […] A poet can and certainly must turn to the past for inspiration, as long as this does not entail an escape into anachronism. [… She] thereby creates a new history and a new humanity by incorporating the past and facing the future, above all by facing the future. It is knowledge of the past, however, which allows her to push beyond this past in the first place.
>
> […] This means that poetry by definition involves refusal and change. It is the opposite of a 'poetry' which accepts the *status quo* as it is and becomes a mirror for it, merely reflecting the prevalent sociocultural phenomena of the day.
>
> Poetry which is truly creative embodies this revolutionary tension of refusal, this abyss between what is and what could be, between the past and the future, between life as a rigid given and life as freedom and dynamism. In this sense, we could describe poetry as an eternal revolution.[659]

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[658] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 112-113.

[659] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 114-115.

The word ‘war’ or ‘warrior’, indeed, would not be too strong here either; Adonis is absolutely militant in his defence of the humanities from what he describes as the encoachment of the ‘kingdom of things’, a multi-headed global force in which Islamic traditionalism, Communist materialism and capitalist modernity are all, in their camouflaged uniforms, variously arrayed:

> Most contemporary Arab poetry finds itself in thrall to the machinery of the advertising and publishing industries. This leads inexorably to a loss of expressive and aesthetic power specific to poetry. […] On this view, poetry serves merely to reconcile human beings to their chains, offering an illusion of freedom in a repressive society. […] Poetry thus becomes subject to the same machinations of supply and demand - in short, of consumerism - as all other areas of our economy and society. The mainstream therefore judges poetry, if at all, insofar as it is clear, bourgeois and useful, or in other words easy to consume.
>
> That poetry can be thought of at all as a product for consumption implies that it has already been commodified. Moreover, as the commodification of culture accelerates, the kingdom of things spreads the tentacles of its sovereignty over our lives and sensibilities, to the point that the individual human being becomes just another of its loyal subjects.
>
> […] There is no salvation from this encroachment of things short of destruction of the order which perpetuates it, or in other words: revolution. The role of poetry here consists of breaking through the layer of received, commonplace ideas which circulate among people, even educated people, like a currency.
>
> Any attempt to give poetry a role other than this, especially in the current phase of Arab civilisational development, only consolidates the consumerist *status quo*, and forces poetry into an alliance with the very thing it by its nature opposes, turning it into a pillar of the economic, social and political order which is itself the image or embodiment of the kingdom of things and its encroachment into the human sphere.
>
> […] The destruction of this kingdom of things and its rotten meanings, therefore, is also one of the main conditions for the survival of poetry itself in its original sense: the practice of liberation and enlightenment.
>
> A poem abolishes the very idea of a ‘theme’, ‘idea’ or ‘reality’, and becomes instead a jungle of possibilities. The individuality, quality and richness of any poem is to be found in a structure which transcends defined and defining meanings and embodies freedom itself. This battle with the ossification of meaning is a constant one; a poem is never reducible to a ‘theme’, but rather uncovers an emotional and imaginative explosion. This fact alone offers it a quantum of protection from the degradations of consumerism.
>
> […] Reality is not complete, and it never will be: it will always be lacking from the perspective of what ought to exist. From this lack, the need for art arises: this means that, within reality itself, there is a form of expression which transcends ‘concepts’, ‘themes’ and ‘meanings’ and arrives at images, the direct creation of possibilities made possible by entry

> into the kingdom of the imagination. In this sense, poetry creates a parareality.
>
> Poetry, as the expression in images of an incomplete and never-to-be-completed reality, thus becomes more real than reality itself. It stores the pain of history and our accumulated hopes for the future. In this sense, we could even say that poetry precedes reality.
>
> […] Poetry is an art of production, not of consumption; an art of desire, not of possession. Desire grows, while possession fades.
>
> […] The obsession with transmission conceals a tendency to turn poetry into a tradeable good. A mercantile logic is in play here: if poetry is to have value, it must be consumed, or in other words: there must be a public to consume it. A principle of profit or utility underlies all this: if a poem is to be understood, the poet must know her customers, and find a language which is profitable for them; otherwise the poem has no value. Utility thus becomes the *raison d'être* of poetry, its law and meaning. Functionality becomes its organising principle and goal.
>
> On this logic of commercial exchange value, a poet is one type of worker among others in the productive economy. She is not the creator of her own augmented reality, but a service provider to others: her own desire or pleasure disappears behind the wall of consumer demand.
>
> A reader on this account does not read a poem: she consumes its utility; the consumption of the poem reaffirms its use value and consolidates the existing economic order, leading to the dangerous view that a human being is only able to realise herself through what she uses and exchanges. Such a person is reduced to the status of a thing, one slave among many in an unfree world of mere commodity exchange.[660]

This all seems a bit hysterical on one level, but Adonis is not attacking the 'kingdom of things' or the importance of scientists and businesspeople as such here; he is simply calling on the humanities to resist the invasion of the humanistic sphere - the central sphere of activity in any 'human' society - by alien and destructive forces:

> There is a body in front of you: a child's parents have died, and she is homeless and starving. The hunger drives her out to look for food. A bomb blows her up.
>
> There is a social, political and cultural dimension to this concrete and personal story. Some events shake a society or a nation to its core.
>
> All the facts are in front of you. But how do you, dear poet, want to begin writing about it?
>
> […] I read what you wrote.
>
> There is a gap between you and the event. What I mean is that you extracted a theme from it. It is true that I felt your pain and anger and commitment. But you write like one of the ancient poets dedicating a poem to a preconceived topic like the Caliph or the autumn, the desert or the camel.

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[660] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 115-118.

> You narrated and described, but in a language conceived before you, for another event in another time. You didn't succeed in writing the event, only in writing *about* it. It remains distant from you, as if you were writing from a chair perched in the sky, reaching down to pull precious jewels out of the treasurebox of history.
>
> The event hasn't shaken your language; you therefore haven't written anything new, but simply reproduced the work of others before you, taking a necklace out of the box and playing with the beads before returning it as it was.
>
> You haven't done what you thought you were doing, or intended to do. You haven't changed anything politically, and you haven't achieved any transcendence artistically.
>
> […] Inherited forms are of limited use when it comes to writing a brand new event into existence. Just as it is unfair and superficial to claim that a complex historical event has one dimension - and to write about it from one exclusive perspective - so too is poetic writing from one side (the side of tradition) untrue to the nature of poetic innovation itself. An incendiary language must somehow be found which sets the entire tradition alight. We must always wait and see what survives this fire, transfigured in the new work.[661]

Adonis's example here - comparable to Wang Yangming's 'child in the well' - serves to remind his audience that poetry, understood as an 'eternal revolution', is a constant self-cultivation of human sensibility, not a one-off overthrow of existing power:

> Some thing or product meets a given need: this economic logic, extended to art, implies in advance that a poem or image or phrase has a given meaning. This is the analogy by which poetry today is most widely understood; it corresponds to our economic and political order, and this makes it one-dimensional and straightforward, narrows its horizons, prevents it from setting anything on fire, and reduces it to the level of licking around the everyday and the commonplace. This leads, in short, to the destruction of the very essence of poetry, which is recoverable only in suggestive metaphor and imagery.
>
> This is the bowdlerisation facing poetry today: a reduction of language to its direct commercial utility, an engagement with feelings themselves as if they were simple material products like a chair or a table. The producer of such packaged feelings is also reduced, along with her products, to her exchange value. This is not only an effective condemnation of poetry as an autonomous sphere of human creativity, but also of poetic language as a unique form of expression. It basically says: 'There are no images, no metaphors, only a single surface which extends itself over everything with a cold rationality.' It is a view of poetry as a commodity, one which denies a poetic dimension to human beings or the world. By doing so it denies the deepest thing in us.

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[661] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 120-121.

> This rejection of metaphor, or of what some might call 'ambiguity', implies a rejection of all that one cannot reduce to quantitative or instrumental rationality, a denial of the possibility of organising it or placing it in a context or language beyond that of mercantile exchange.
>
> If poetry is to have a role in this phase of colonial-capitalist domination of the means of production, it is first and foremost to free human beings from this creeping hyperrationality which has turned human beings themselves into objects.
>
> Poetry is not just a revolution against the order of existing language, but also, always, a revolution against the reigning political and economic order, and a revolution against the mainstream culture which provides a pattern for the organisation of cultural consumption and a consolidation of economic and political interests. […] Reducing language to the level of tradeable things deprives it of its true power: it makes us accept wholecloth the reality we are claiming to change. We may still find a lot to say, but nothing new happens; language becomes a superficial extension or reflection of the world of material objects, a mask which blocks our view of the reality we are trying to change with our words and deeds.[662]

Is it constructive to rail in this way against the 'system'? Might a 'humbler' approach not better serve the humanities in their quest to 'fight the power' and gain a proper foothold in global education? Adonis, however, is adamant that compromise is essentially impossible; a 'revolution' is indeed needed in which poetry *embodies* its own cause, and stops trying to argue for itself in the language of politics, economics, religion, education, or even other poetry:

> Some people are partial towards openly revolutionary poetry, to the Nerudas and Lorcas of the world. They build their critical judgments around them, imitate them in their own poetry, and generally demand of Arab poets that they follow their example.
>
> If it is true that there are such formulae for success in other spheres of human activity, poetry by its very nature rejects such preprogramming. Neither Neruda nor Lorca nor anyone else can be a simple 'template' for an aspiring poet. The standards for judging the originality or 'revolutionariness' of contemporary Arab poetry, moreover, cannot only be judged by applying foreign critical standards; such poetry, for all its universal echoes, has a distinct genealogy. Every poet has her own unique language, her own means of expression; art in the true sense begins where imitation ends. It would not be an exaggeration to say that poetry, and artistic creativity in general, consists in the continual demolition of established patterns.
>
> In other words, revolutionary Arab poetry cannot hope merely to copy examples of revolutionary poetry from abroad, written in other languages. The greatness of foreign poets is inextricably tied to the time and place through which they lived, the concrete dreams they had, the specific culture they inherited, and the genius of the unique language they created on top of all this. Arab poets can only hope to achieve similar greatness from their

[662] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 121-123.

> own unique points of departure. They must, in short, embody the profound path of revolutionary experience unique to their own situations, harnessing the unique aesthetic possibilities of the Arabic language they have inherited, and taking it to unexplored civilisational heights.
>
> […] Most of our critics and poets turn poetry into something it isn't, and simply fall into line with tradition and established ideology. In the name of revolution, they turn that which looks like art, but isn't, into the only art conceivable, and honour those who murder poetry with their every expression. The same naturally extends to other literary forms: theatre, the short story, the novel. One need only look at the overwhelming majority of our literary production since the 1850s to find confirmation for this miserable thesis. What remains from this period, once the dust has settled on our excitement at a putative cultural 'awakening', is very little indeed of truly revolutionary import.
>
> A true revolution is profound, beautiful, and good. Kitsch has no part to play in it.[663]

The specifically Arab challenges of establishing a culture - essentially a written culture - of 'learning for the self' should not be overlooked, but they should not be viewed as insurmountable either:

> Music is form - symmetries and intervals - and poetry is beholden to this form, not least as a service to memory in the absence of writing.
>
> Rhyme and rhythm, clarity of thought, mastery of style: these were the aesthetic foundations of pre-Islamic poetry.
>
> A poem within an oral culture serves memory, and is more than a mere aesthetic feat of language: it is a burst of energy which brings the past back to life and conserves it in the form of a ritual. Our pre-Islamic Arab ancestors regarded poems in these terms, as acts of magic, power and durability. They were seldom described as 'beautiful', for they had a prior symbolic and social function.
>
> Form was thus raised to the status of a principle which was maintained primarily in the interest of the collective. It did not express anything individual as such; the individual could only ever give her own polish or touch to it. The poet, in short, was not called to distinguish herself through formal innovation; she was a tailor, not a designer. The call to serve the collective memory principle - to maintain the unity of the group - trumped other concerns.
>
> This is all well and good for an oral culture, but surely a written culture can afford to grant its individual members more freedom than this?[664]

The traces of this 'oral' - and therefore collectivist - view of poetry and its function have nevertheless survived:

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[663] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 124-125.

[664] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 126-127.

The call to make poetry the business of everyone is the death of poetry. Yet this is the cultural climate in which the Arab reader of poetry lives, and to which she unwittingly contributes.

We know that she is born into a society which prescribes everything in terms of religion, from daily ablutions and prayers to questions of taxation and pilgrimage and even the business of life after death. The interpretation of religious texts is even prescribed for her. She is therefore largely relieved of the effortful responsibility of forming her own views and opinions. When such an effort *is* suddenly required, she doesn't know how to cope with it, and is liable to begin launching accusations of obscurity and incomprehensibility before anything else.

This attitude manifests itself particularly with regard to poetry. We find readers (and critics) passing judgments based on established criteria, measuring the present by the standards of the past, and the unknown on the basis of what they think they already know. Such a reader will tend to prefer writing which moves to the rhythm of a bygone era; that which strives to face the future will generally be either rejected, disputed, or simply ignored.

[…] This reader also defines in advance what she shares with the poet in question, and decides that she should not address themes which are not readily accessible to the whole tribe. This tribe in general only allows the poet to distinguish herself in one dimension: namely, that she address these already shared themes in a uniquely but still canonically beautiful language. This allows the poet to adorn what they already know, but not to reveal anything to them which they did *not* know. This is not only limited to ideas, but extends to the realm of poetic language itself, preventing any distinction between normal language and the language of art. Poetic language is entirely personal, and is not a social, or at least not a universally accessible, phenomenon; it is the realm of private creativity. Poetry in this sense is not communicative language at all, but rather, more precisely, a private ordering of language. Viewing poetry as a form of ordinary, public language leads in this context to the view that it is to be valued to the extent that it reinforces the existing social order. Pre-Islamic Arab poetry, for example, has been valued insofar as it embodies the Arabic language, becoming a model and standard by which to measure all the poetry that comes after it. To the extent that poetry has tried to be private rather than public, creative rather than conformist, it has been met with accusations of heresy. Language, on this account, is by definition old and noble, poetry by definition new and degrading; the best that 'poetry' can hope to achieve in such a world is a repackaging of the old or a recopying of the old in new colours; this is the only justification for its continued practice. And yet the very meaning of poetry is to break from traditional models by creating individual works of art.

This also means that the typical Arab reader (or critic) rushes to insert a poem into the framework of what she already knows, the network of 'ideas', 'currents' and 'positions' that make up her existing mental universe.

[…] Ideology has the habit of turning meaning into slogans and allusions into didactic principles. The words of the powerful may thus act to weaken the power of words. But poetry finds its power in opposition to all

> power; we cannot use it to explain ideologies, but only to shake them, move them, transform them via imagination, elevate them, bring them into the river of ourselves by turning them into images, listening to their silence and uncovering what is hidden behind it. Words do not truly have meaning until they change their meaning; here we face the horizon of true revolution, the revolution of the possible against the real, the unknown against the known, the hidden against the obvious, the future against the present. They thus surrender to their original playfulness, and to the freedom of love and exchange. They jump out of the straitjacket of ideological dictionary convention, and enter the dynamic realm of human emotion, vitality, and longing.[665]

Poetry on this account is both the means and the proof of the survival of the individual self over time, and of an ongoing dialogue with 'Heaven':

> [There are those who] are used to the idea that a poet should stick to a single means of expression, a stable formal order which observes certain precepts and principles. It should already be clear that such a view is not only foreign to poetry understood as a full-blooded experiment, but also makes it impossible to understand form as a means of expression in its own right, thereby reducing it to a tactical afterthought. The fact is that form is born before writing, survives through it, and ultimately transcends it; it is the innermost soul of poetry, its entire essence, its sensitivity and its thought. In the end, it even transcends poetry as such, because it represents what we call the poet's accent or dialect or distinguishing feature; it is the emblem of her individuality. It can only be grasped on the basis of association with this individual. In this sense, we say that style is individual, but on the condition that this individuality includes a certain plurality, a certain multiplicity of elements. The poet, to the extent that she is a complex human being, cannot be thought of as having a single message; such complexity presupposes multiple directions. It is therefore understandable that a poet might change her tastes and broaden her vision over time, multiplying as she does so the means of expression at her disposal.
>
> And yet behind all this change there is a stable constant, a centre around which the vision turns; the changes do not appear, therefore, as wild uprootings, but rather as flowerings of this underlying stability. […] Style (understood as form or a means of expression) from this vantage point is like a dream: it has no beginning, and as such can have no end. I doubt that it can ever really be defined.
>
> Without such a dynamic understanding of form, the poet necessarily falls into monotony. Read collections of poetry published these days, whether in metre or free verse: are they not, formally speaking, just endless repetitions of a single boring structure?
>
> The endlessly open: this is the field in which I have strived to move since *First Poems*, and in which I have continued to move since *A Grave for New York*. It has been a constant refusal of the finite and closed. How can a

[665] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 127-130.

human being, mortal by her very nature, live without constantly striving for that which never ends?[666]

'From the Flock to the Horizon'

In as clear a statement of the value of 'learning for the self' over 'learning for others' as any in Confucian history, Adonis tells the story of a 'rare species of bird which you won't ever have seen; it never settles in any given place':

> The female lays its eggs high in the sky, and the chicks hatch before they hit the ground. These chicks enjoy no nest and no rest when they come into the world; they have to start flapping their wings immediately, as fast as our hearts beat for them. Anything less means death.
>
> I don't find anything which explains the dynamism of creativity or the connection between creators, whether in the past, present or future, more profoundly than this myth, 'created' by Francis Picabia. The most profound thing about it is that it affirms a certain solidarity and common condition, and a vision of creativity as a constant beginning, as well as allowing each individual the right to difference at the level of creativity itself.
>
> When it comes to creativity, there are no paths traced in advance for us; on the contrary, we are stuck in a labyrinth with ourselves. But the labyrinth does not revolve around us or repeat itself; it is rather a labyrinth of continual exit towards the remote and complete, a labyrinth of neverending rapture, a celebration of movement, the movement of human beings, the world, and all the things within it.
>
> Why on Earth, then, would anyone want the hearts of new generations of poets to stop beating?
>
> The only thing you get out of such tired mechanical movement in the name of loyalty to the existing flock, alas, is death.
>
> What is the essence of this flock mentality if not sticking together, stability and certitude, a mere aping of others, a following of orders, a submission to authority, to a certain way of speaking and acting, beyond which one is classed as a 'deviant'. In the end, it is reducible to the idea that there is no room for an individual who is 'different', no room for an individual who 'dreams', no room for anything except 'order'.
>
> Creativity is a labyrinth, or it isn't creativity. It therefore clearly behooves us not only to challenge all modelistic approaches, but to do away with all aping of style, and to create movement and a path to transcendence via pure individuality.
>
> The labyrinth, therefore, says to us: I am not a structure or a matrix: I am a field of experimentation and possibility. To those of you who are born with me, don't copy me, but take advantage of me according to your own path. Be freedom, and be a celebration; may you live your creativity always

[666] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 130-131.

> as a desire, the desire of a rose which does not exalt itself or rejoice only when others look at it, but which blossoms because it wants to blossom.[667]

This 'learning for the self' is, as it has always been, as 'global' as one's circumstances will allow:

> Arab poetry today must face off against tradition by viewing language as chemistry (or alchemy), as the quest for an augmented nature and reality. When language frees itself from the old habits of use, it transforms the familiar and changes reality. If contemporary Arab poetry wants to achieve this, it has to enter into dialogue with poetic experiments from around the globe, starting with the period in European poetry from Baudelaire to Joyce (and following their example of engagement with Sufi and other Arab traditions). Likewise, in its quest for an augmented reality, it has no choice but to turn to the Symbolists, Surrealists, Impressionists, Futurists etc. for inspiration. Even the modern novel, which tears down distinctions between literary genres, can provide fuel for poets here.
>
> Indeed, the products of Western (or Arab) creativity are not the exclusive property of the cultures who produced them, but rather belong to the accumulated experience of humanity across history. Sufism, for example, does not belong to the Arabs alone, but is part of a global cultural heritage. The same could be said of Platonism and Marxism from a Greek or pan-Western perspective.
>
> We could therefore do without constantly talking of 'importing' ideas, and move instead to addressing ways these commonly owned gems of human creativity might move more freely across space and time. They are a common right, like air and sunlight. The challenge is not to 'import' them, but rather to give them their due respect and attention as ripples in the ocean of universal human creativity.
>
> […] Though she is in no way yoked into aping them, a poet cannot create a great poem without facing off against her life as a whole, and this includes [to the extent that she has been lucky] the great creations of the past.
>
> [… Multicultural] chaos? Let it be so. It is only chaotic in relation to the clear [tribal or monocultural] path which stretched out to poets before. If it is impossible for any voice of creativity to emerge from the crowds treading the trodden path (the same path in all ages), then it is also certain that more than one creative voice has emerged, in every generation, from the crowds who wandered from the trodden path.
>
> Let the emerging generation tear down the shaded pen in which they have been stranded, and emerge into the sunlight and fresh air. It is true that these will lead you into a labyrinth, but it is also true that they will lead you to a space of freedom and creativity.[668]

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[667] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 133-134.

[668] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 136-138.

‘Reading’

Here Adonis offers a generous review of Jawdat Fakhreddine’s *Form in Classical Arabic Poetry*, and calls on ‘modern’ poets to overcome the old, artificial, tribal distinctions between poetic form and content:

> Is modern ‘form’ in any age not also modern meaning, a sense of confusion and loss, a search for a new, different horizon?
>
> This is always a complete, revolutionary exodus from tradition, not a shallow tinkering with its surface, a shift from one state of consciousness to another, from one vision of the world to another, from one dimension of sensitivity to another, from one poetic language to another, from one set of cultural values to another. Such an exodus is never easy; it requires thoroughgoing creativity.[669]

‘Criticism’ of poetry - outside the academy but also within it - must *embody* this very creativity, not merely describe it from the outside:

> We must therefore rethink criticism, both as a concept and in terms of its role. If poetry is art in the strict sense of the term, then criticism and analysis of it cannot begin from ‘ideas’, as most contemporary criticism does, but rather from its essence as a unique product - a web of language, not a box full of readymade ideas. The study of this web is the only thing that promises to shed light on any ‘meaning’, ‘content’, ‘vision’, ‘goal’ or ‘purpose’. […] This is what great poetry itself does.[670]

‘Transcendence’

The proper relationship with the ancestors - the true meaning of *li* (‘ritual propriety’) and *xiao* (‘filial respect’) - preoccupied Adonis as if he were a Confucian; for all his emphasis on the freedom of the individual spirit and its right to depart from the established ways of the tribe to pursue its own learning, he understood that such freedom was built on a concrete foundation: our creative selves may be continually hatching chicks forced to flap their wings in the sky for survival, but we would not be able to be continually reborn as autonomous selves without the creative efforts of others:

> The concept of transcendence, as I employ it, does not entail a denial of the past or a total quarantining of it, but rather an overcoming of its decaying aspects and an embrace of a language which is capable of corresponding to a poet’s own life and experience. This may extend to forms of praise, courtship, political discourse etc. - an overcoming of certain archaic rites and expressions and a return to the original freshness of all creative

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[669] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi’r*, p. 141.

[670] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi’r*, p. 142.

language, the force which allows us to penetrate the surface of everyday platitudes and reach the depths of human experience.

[…] Transcendence, then, is never a total break with the past, and modernity is not a denial of its creative values, which are the same as its own. The idea of an absolute break with the past is essentially the flipside of the idea of linear and superficial continuity: both are equally hostile to any concept of progress, or indeed of culture; the vision of linear progress reduces human individuality to the fate of eternal repetition of the experiences of others, while the idea of an absolute break with the past means a falling into an abyss of meaningless movement through a vacuum.

The nature of the relationship between past and present, tradition and renewal, ancient and modern is hence best explained by this adversarial dialogue between rupture and connection (rupture with superficiality and communication with depth), or between difference and concord, transcendence and rootedness. The first feature of this dialogue is that knowledge of the past remains open, allowing for the celebration of new discoveries and relationships. It is this constant reviewing of the past which keeps a culture alive and relevant in the present; modernity itself is the image of this dynamic presence, an image of the past and that which transcends it, all rolled into one. The creative energy of the past thus remains alive in modernity, and is itself a key to unlocking the future.

[…] In this light, we can see that modern creativity is consistent with ancient creativity, and that modernity is in fact a continuation of the creative spirit of the past. This continuity, however, is the opposite of continuity in the linear, traditionalist sense; the typical view of such continuity is that tradition is like a single thread in which one slowly wraps oneself, an unfolding tomb of identity.

The truth is that the history of Arab poetry itself squashes this vision. It is a history of competition between currents, an ongoing dialectic of opposing forces. As with any living tradition, Arab poetry is more than a single, straight, harmonious line of inheritance, but a series of disputes and ruptures; any ‘continuity’ it could meaningfully be said to have consists in the very continuation of such creative conflicts. Without this dynamic spirit, all poetry, including Arab poetry, loses its vitality, and becomes dry and effete repetition. Identity is never recoverable in a single cultural product, but always in what remains to be produced - not in what has already been achieved, but in what has not yet been brought into existence. It is freedom for the future, not bondage to the past - not a closed tribal belonging, but an openness which, remaining in healthy bloom, promises ever more openings. A poet creates her own identity, and thereby constantly recreates the tradition in which she operates.

[…] On the traditionalist view, time is like water flowing from the original spring of the beginning of the world. As long as this creation is viewed as complete, time itself is complete; the present is always, on the traditionalist view, lacking in comparison with the past. Tomorrow is never the start of anything truly new, but always the beginning of the end, insofar as time is always marching in this inexorable direction. For human beings, on this account, time is only ever a space for reviving this created and original

> perfection - a space of mimicry, not creation. This means that history is not a progression from good to better, or from lack to completion, for this would imply that an age could be better than the age of the Prophet or the Rashidun Caliphate.
>
> It is here that we find the root of the idea that the past (the perfect home in every regard) is the source from which all forms of perfection derive, in all spheres, and to which we must constantly return. There is hence nothing new in any profound sense, for this would imply that the past was short of something, including creativity. The past itself comes to be synonymous with novelty, and poetry (indeed, all thought) is the mere vibration of the root. Even the Arab *nahda* itself can be understood in these terms: an illusory refuge from decadence, not a transcendence of it.[671]

True respect for the ancestors requires, in short, the free and creative cultivation of the best self you can be, a critical and creative transcendence of your 'parents', but a transcendence that they themselves have willed and made possible for you, and which you, in turn, will want for your own children, not 'selflessly' as such, but because, Adonis argues, you have a self of your own, and understand how precious an intergenerational achievement that is.

'Experimentation'

Writing for an Arab audience in 1971, Adonis concludes his 'Glossary' with an entry which could easily have been written 50 years later by anyone in the world struggling against scientism in humanities education:

> The formation of this mature aesthetic identity is only possible through the exercise of creativity, through constant experimentation. This should be obvious and natural for our political and cultural avant-garde, but the reality is that at the institutional level, and for most readers, experimentation is unwelcome, and the passing on of the *status quo* is encouraged; the principle of continuity remains paramount.
>
> […] Only experimental poetry is new or revolutionary; indeed, only experimental poetry is poetry at all. It is not part of a tradition in a conformist or coalitional sense, but always as a point of real difference. It is a continual quest for new structures of meaning, a constant movement within a horizon of creativity: there are no preconceived models, only constant irruptions. Unlike the sciences or other spheres of economic and social activity, it does not represent accumulated knowledge, but rather a perpetual bridgehead to new knowledge, a better world, and a finer humanity.[672]

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[671] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 143-146.

[672] Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, pp. 147, 149.

11. Yevgeny Zamyatin's *My*

Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee;
Not untwist—slack they may be—these last strands of man
In me ór, most weary, cry I can no more. I can;
Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be.
But ah, but O thou terrible...

Gerard Manley Hopkins

The most disturbing aspect of this 1921 book - in many ways the most important of those covered in our entire anthology - is the superficial plausibility of the arguments in favour of a lobotomy over the burdens, responsibilities and rewards of spiritual life. Although narrator D-503 is ultimately forced into an invasive neurological procedure, we sense how we - with even a moderately different socialisation - might freely have reached the same conclusion as the novel's well-meaning and tyrannical Benefactor: namely, that totalitarian submersion in the routines of the collective provides a path to perfect happiness and meaning, whereas the risks and madnesses of individual 'freedom' represent only unpleasant obstacles to such perfection. The individual 'spirit' or 'soul' is quite literally an illness in the world of the novel, a disease from which the narrator eventually 'recovers' via imposed surgery; Zamyatin is pleading with his reader to grasp the urgency of the totalitarian threat, not just from without, but above all from within, from the very attractiveness of such an abdication of individual responsibility. If it is so easy, he suggests, to make totalitarianism seem reasonable, even preferable, then defences against it must somehow be strengthened. At the same time, however, poetry - and spiritual production in general - cannot be instrumentalised, not even in the service of anti-totalitarian political struggle; Zamyatin's *My (We)* is not an *argument* for Spiritual Humanism, for there can be no such arguments; it is rather an indirect embodiment of it via a *reductio ad absurdum* which, on closer inspection, is not nearly as absurd as his readers may first think, and for that precise reason worth taking absolutely seriously.

D-503 is the (initially willing and enthusiastic) constructor of the great INTEGRAL, a full and final system for human happiness based on optimised mathematical formulae, a creation destined to 'liberate' humanity once and for all from the 'barbarian state of freedom'[673] in which it still partially lives:

> Let me be perfectly honest with you: even we do not yet have an absolutely precise solution yet to the problem of happiness: twice a day, from 16.00 to 17.00 and 21.00 to 22.00, our great organism disperses into separate cages - the so-called Private Hours. […] But I firmly believe - call me an idealist or dreamer if you will - I believe that, sooner or later, we will find a way to

[673] Yevgeny Zamyatin, *My (We)*, (Moscow: AST, 2017), p. 3.

> integrate these hours into the public formula as well, such that all 86,400 seconds of every day will belong to one Common Clock.[674]

The 1982 German film adaptation of Zamyatin's novel, *Wir*, harrowingly depicts workers chewing their meals in unison to a metronome; D-503, however, asks Slavoj Zizek's 'What's so bad about it?' question; most of the novel is in fact dressed as propaganda for the United Government:

> If [barbarian foreigners] do not understand that we are offering them mathematically infallible happiness, then it is our duty to force them to be happy. But before turning to weapons, we are trying words instead. […] I don't think you will judge me too harshly. I think you will understand that it is more difficult for me to write than for any other author in human history; some wrote for their contemporaries, others for posterity perhaps, but no one has ever written for her ancestors, or for equally uncivilised foreigners.[675]

Writing a thousand years in the future, D-503 is not exactly trying to reach us in the 21st Century, but his ideology stands before us: 'love just because' is out, and only 'love for a reason' will do.[676] Genius and individual originality, which create love out of nothing, or out of themselves, are violently resisted by this totalitarian order: 'To be original is to destroy equality,'[677] as D-503's counter-revolutionary spy love interest, I-330, ironically puts it to him during one of their Private Hours. Suddenly, he finds himself dreaming for the first time:

> It's clear; I am unwell. I have never had dreams before. They say that it was the most ordinary and normal thing in the world for the Ancients to dream. Of course, their lives were nothing but a dreadful carousel. […] We know that dreams are a serious psychic illness.[678]

The great prophet of these 'Ancients' (and killer of dreams) was the American pioneer of 'scientific management' Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856-1915), who by D-503's time has assumed the contemporary status of Aristotle, Confucius or Buddha in the pantheon of human thinkers:

> There can be no doubt: Taylor was the greatest of the Ancients. It is true that he never thought so far ahead as to extend his method over life as a whole, over every step, or over entire days - he wasn't able to integrate his system across all 24 hours - but I still don't know how it was that they were able to

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674 Zamyatin, *My*, p. 14.

675 Zamyatin, *My*, pp. 3, 24.

676 Zamyatin, *My*, p. 26.

677 Zamyatin, *My*, p. 29.

678 Zamyatin, *My*, p. 32.

> write entire libraries on someone like Kant and scarcely mention Taylor, the great prophet, still going strong ten centuries later.[679]

The end of freedom, among other benefits of Big Data collection, means the end of crime[680]; if every movement of every human day is choreographed, then the only human responsibility is to remain healthy for work[681]; in a world without individual spirit, motivation is a medical problem for the doctors, not a moral problem for the patient ('it's not my fault I'm sick,' D-503 happily concludes as his 'spirit' grows).

Poets, meanwhile, have a firm and narrow mandate to sing the praises of the United Government:

> Poetry is Government service; poetry is usefulness. […] Who could remain indifferent upon reading […] such immortal tragedies as *Late for Work* or the *Sexual Hygiene Stanzas*? All of life, in its complexity and beauty, is there, immortalised in the gold of words.[682]

D-503's friendship 'triangle' with the poet R-13 and the lovely 'pink O' (what the Ancients called a 'family'[683]) threatens to end in subversion of the United Government, but the majesty of a totalitarian rally lifts D-503 above his 'illness':

> A solemn, bright day. On such a day one forgets one's weaknesses, imperfections and diseases. […] Yes, this was the Formal Liturgy for the United Government, a memorial for the godforsaken days of the 200 Years' War, the greatest celebration of the victory of all over one, of the masses over the individual. […] You who read these lines, have you known such minutes of bliss? I am sorry for you if you haven't.[684]

Of course, sacrificial victims are needed for such rallies; in this case, it is a renegade Government Poet who suffers the 'logical consequences'[685] of his subversive actions.

D-503, however, is still not sleeping well, and this is a problem on two levels:

> At night, we numbers are obliged to sleep. It is a duty, just as work during the day is; indeed, it is necessary to allow us to work our best during the day. Not to sleep at night is a crime. And yet I couldn't, I just couldn't.

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[679] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 33.

[680] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 36.

[681] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 37.

[682] Zamyatin, *My*, pp. 66-67.

[683] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 44.

[684] Zamyatin, *My*, pp. 44-45, 48.

[685] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 46.

> I am drowning. I am not in a state to fulfil my obligations to the United Government.[686]

The problem for D-503 is that spiritual 'certainties' are not of the mathematical kind; spiritual life is (if one may forgive the burgeoning horror of such a phrase) the spontaneous *management* of uncertainty through constant creation and cultivation, the development not of a brittle INTEGRALesque formula or organ-like prosthesis, but of a whole dimension of self which has no specific function beyond itself:

> The Ancients knew that, up there in the sky, their great bored sceptic - God - was waiting for them. *We* know that there is a crystal-blue, naked, vulgar nothing. […] Knowledge - the absolute certainty that one is not mistaken - this is what faith is; I used to have complete faith in myself, and was sure that I knew everything about myself. Now look at me…[687]

D-503 enjoys the refuge of his diagnosis, but does not always want to be cured; *My* is the diary of his struggle to choose between two diametrically opposed alternatives:

> Think of the ancient vision of Paradise… Isn't that what we have now? Think about it: those two in the Garden of Eden were offered a choice: either happiness without freedom, or freedom without happiness; there was no third option. [… Our whole totalitarian apparatus] protects our unfreedom, or in other words, our happiness. The Ancients worried themselves to death - is this ethical, is that ethical? - who cares?![688]

D-503, however, still wants to know 'who' and 'what' he is[689], as if there could ever be a single answer to this question: 'Truth is One, and the Way to the Truth is One; the Truth is two times two, and the Way to the Truth is four. Would it not be absurd if these happily and correctly multiplied twos started thinking about freedom, or in other words, about error?'[690] This line of 'thinking' turns all non-Taylorist art from the past into a giant waste of time:

> How did the ridiculousness of their poetry and literature not jump up and slap the Ancients in the face?! The immense functional power of the artistic word was wasted. […] Poetry is not this unforgivable nightingale music anymore. […] My faraway unseen readers, we are coming to you to make your lives as divinely reasonable and accurate as ours…[691]

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[686] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 57.

[687] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 58.

[688] Zamyatin, *My*, pp. 60-61.

[689] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 63

[690] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 65.

[691] Zamyatin, *My*, pp. 66-67.

I-330, however, is on hand to offer D-503 her subversive whispering into this quadratic world:

> 'I hate fog; I'm afraid of fog.'
>
> 'It means you must love it. You fear it because it is stronger than you are, you hate it because you fear it, and you love it because you can't bring it under your self's control.[692]

D-503, however, still thinks there must be a perfectly good 'scientific' explanation and cosmic justification for all this suffering:

> It's embarrassing, dear readers everywhere, to recount such seemingly improbable business. But what am I to do? This is how it all was. […] Moreover, I am certain: sooner or later I will find a way to integrate this whole story into one syllogism or other. This [certainty] comforts me, as, I hope, it comforts you.
>
> […] I know what's wrong with me, that I am sick, and that it doesn't want to heal. […] You, the readers of this diary, wherever you are, there is a sun in front of you. And if you have once been sick as I am now, you will know how the sun can take on a pink, transparent, warm, golden hue. Even the air is pinkish, imbued with sweet sun-blood. Everything is alive; to a man, the world of the living smiles. It may be that, after an hour or so, it all disappears, that the pink blood dries up, but for the moment it's one big living scene. […] But I see INTEGRAL pulsing the whole time, reckoning with its enormous future, with the heavy burden of the unavoidable happiness it must provide and bring to you, up there, you invisible ones eternally seeking and not finding what you are looking for. And you will see, you will be happy; it is your duty to be happy, and you don't have long to wait now.[693]

Refusing either to trust 'himself' or to join the resistance, D-503 reports, of his own free will, to the Medical Bureau, which is understandably worried that the constructor of its great INTEGRAL has been caught up in the 'spirit epidemic'. The official diagnosis - a 'soul' ('this strange, ancient, long-forgotten word'[694]) - leaves D-503 even more perplexed than before: 'What, this means that this ridiculous "soul" is as real as my uniform, as real as my boots, even if I can't see it? […] But if boots aren't a disease, why should a soul be?'[695] D-503 is really starting to struggle:

> I feel it: I live apart from others, alone, fenced in by a thin membrane of deafening sound, a wall, and inside that wall is my world.
>
> But here's the problem: if this world is mine alone, what is it doing in this diary? Why all these absurd 'dreams', bookcases, and endless

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[692] Zamyatin, *My*, pp. 69-70.

[693] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 73.

[694] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 85.

[695] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 97.

> corridors? I see with great sorrow that, instead of an economical and rigorously mathematical poem in praise of the United Government, some sort of fantastic adventure novel is pouring out of me. But if only this was just a novel, and not my current […] life![696]

D-503 regards 'learning for the self' as a meaningless and unnatural exercise in which he is reluctant to engage: 'Imagine a human finger severed from the body, or from the hand - a single human finger. […] I am that finger. And the strangest and most unnatural thing of all is that this finger doesn't even want to be reattached to the hand it came from, or to be with others.'[697] The struggle for 'morality' must be waged, on this account, not in the direction of self-cultivation, but in the opposite direction of submission to the collective:

> Even among the Ancients - or at least the clearest-eyed of them - there flowered the awareness that power is the source of rights, and that rights are a function of power. A gram is on one end of the scales here, and a tonne is on the other: the gram is 'I', and the tonne is 'We', the United Government. Is it not clear that to accord the 'I's' rights in relation to the Government is the same as assuming that a gram and a tonne are the same weight? Hence, the tonne has rights, while the gram has only responsibilities: the natural path from nothingness to greatness is to forget that you are a gram, and to learn to feel that you are part of the tonne.
>
> […] Everything great is simple. You will surely understand: only the four laws of arithmetic are immutable and eternal. Only a morality built on these four laws can be likewise.[698]

D-503 feels sorry for any readers 'unable to think philosophico-mathematically'[699] in this way; *homo sapiens* only achieves the 'full meaning' of his scientific name 'when question-marks have completely disappeared from the grammar he employs'[700]. Rather than simply enjoying dreams of pink sunrises or anything else 'private' and hence meaningless, perhaps, D-503 asks, there might be a 'way to treat this dream-disease and make it reasonable, maybe even useful'[701]. Everything is instrumentalised for the alleged good of the hive:

> We march on - one body with a million heads - and in each of us there is that humble joy that molecules, atoms and cells presumably feel as they go about their business. In the ancient world - at least for the Christians, who for all their imperfections were our only real forebears - humility was a virtue,

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[696] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 98.

[697] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 99.

[698] Zamyatin, *My*, pp. 110-111.

[699] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 112.

[700] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 113.

[701] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 119.

> and pride was a sin. 'WE' was with God; 'I' was with the Devil. […] Is it really not clear, however, that private self-consciousness is just an illness?[702]

'I am sick. I have a soul. I am a microbe'[703]: such is D-503's guilty state of mind as he struggles with his new condition of being in unsanctioned love with I-330:

> She took my face - my whole self - in the palms of her hands, and lifting my head slightly, asked:
>
> 'Well, where are your 'duties of every honest number' now?'
>
> […] Inside every number, there is an invisible, quietly ticking metronome telling her, to within five minutes or so, what the time is. But the metronome in me had stopped; I didn't know how long had passed…
>
> […] The terrible thing is that even now, a day later, after the logical functions have well and truly had time to kick in - and the implicit conclusion is that [such love] is a sure death - I still want those teeth, those hands, those breasts, every millimetre of her.
>
> […] What an absurd thing to want pain like this. Who can fail to understand that such increments of pain only serve to reduce that sum of what we call happiness?
>
> […] But again I forget that I am not writing for myself, but for you, o distant ones, whom I love and pity, for those of you still languishing on faraway planets and in faraway centuries.[704]

The political consequences of pathologising private life like this are not just 'antidemocratic'; they are much worse:

> They say that the Ancients held their elections by secret ballot somehow, hiding like thieves. […] We still don't know exactly why all this secrecy was necessary. […] We, by contrast, have nothing to hide or be ashamed of. We celebrate our elections openly, honestly, in the cold light of day. I see how everyone else votes for the Benefactor, and everyone else sees how I vote for Him, and how could it be otherwise, for everyone else and I are a united We.[705]

Zamyatin is leaving us, his 20th- and 21st-century readers, with a clear choice between freedom - love, madness, the lust for ownership and so on - and slavery - the real slavery not of frustrated, but of extinguished, desire, the very abolition of self-consciousness and self-identity. D-503 is the battleground in this war between two irreconcilable froms of 'life':

> I want her to be with me every minute, any minute, always, and only with me. All of what I just wrote about the Great Vote, I don't need any of that -

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[702] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 123.

[703] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 125.

[704] Zamyatin, *My*, pp. 127, 130.

[705] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 132.

> not only do I not need it, I want to delete it, tear it up, throw it away. Because I know (heresy of course, but this is how it is) that today is worth celebrating only if she is present, near, shoulder to shoulder with me. Without her, tomorrow's sun will just be a giant tin circle, and the sky a dyed-blue tin hemisphere, and my own self the same hollow tin nothing.[706]

At least, in such a state, D-503 senses that he *has* a self which exists to be hollowed out; in moments of proto-fascist enthusiasm provided by United Government rallies and the 'hymns of the Music Factory', by contrast, this 'self' is quickly drowned out, not by a 'tribe' in some ancient hunter-gatherer sense, but by a globalisation gone terrifyingly wrong, by 'millions of human voices' singing in unison: 'In a second I forgot everything. […] I even, it seems, forgot about her.'[707] The sight of I-330 with R-13 in the crowd, however, is still able to elicit a 'sharp, physical pain in the heart', even if D-503 'unfortunately didn't draw the right conclusion'[708] about his jealousy at the time (namely that it is the symptom of a disease of 'selfhood' curable via lobotomy): 'It's incredibly embarrassing for me to write this now, but it seems that I am obliged - yes, obliged - to write, so that you, my unseen readers, might draw the final lessons from the story of my illness. I hit him, yes, hit him in the head. Do you understand the gravity of this?'[709] But even afterwards, I-330 can still do it for him: 'How can I tell you what the ancient, ridiculous, miraculous ceremony of touching her lips does to me? With what formula to describe this swirling vortex in my spirit? Yes, in my *spirit* - laugh if you want.'[710] D-503's unique status as the constructor of INTEGRAL also provides moments of 'intoxicating pride' which may be far from the Confucian ideal of 'learning for the self', but which are at least a step up on the total 'selfhoodlessness' of daily life under the United Government. Amid the adulation of his peers, D-503 suddenly feels 'unusually distinguished from everyone else; I was me, separate, a world, I stopped being a composite part of something else, as I otherwise was, and became an individual.'[711] The process of 'learning to be human' - of transcending the opinions and recognition of others and 'learning for oneself' - cannot even begin, in other words, without such praise and special attention from others, as rituals like school prizegivings and rewards from Santa Claus for younger members of liberal societies attest.

One conversation in particular between D-503 and I-330 - in which the totalitarian and anti-totalitarian options are clearly laid out - will have 'an enormous, decisive meaning for the destiny of the United Government, and indeed for the universe as a whole'[712]:

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[706] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 133.

[707] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 134.

[708] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 136.

[709] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 139.

[710] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 146.

[711] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 150.

[712] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 165.

> ‘Our revolution was the last. There can be no more revolutions. Everyone knows that.’
>
> ‘What “final revolution” are you talking about? There is no final revolution; revolution is endless. The idea of an end of history is for children; children are afraid of infinity and eternity, and they need a way to sleep well at night…’
>
> ‘But what’s the point of a new revolution, for virtue’s sake?! What’s the point if everyone is already happy?’
>
> ‘We assume… Well alright, let’s assume it. What then?’
>
> ‘What a hilariously childish question! Tell children anything, any story, and at the end they still ask: “What then?”’
>
> ‘Children are the only philosophers with balls! Or rather, brave philosophers remain like children: “What then?” is what everyone everywhere should always be asking. […] Our ancestors made one big mistake [after the Two Hundred Years’ War]: they started believing in a final number, which does not exist in nature. Theirs was a Galilean error: one can be right that the Earth orbits the sun without knowing that the solar system orbits an even bigger centre, and without knowing that the true, absolute orbit of the Earth is not a simple circle. […] We, on the other hand, cling to the idea that there is no final number.’[713]

The apocalyptic dream of a ‘final number’, while terrifying us as a synonym of spiritual death, acts as a spiritual *comfort* for D-503, a pacifier for his ‘childish’ uncertainties. After awakening from the ‘terrible nightmare’ of his lost debate with I-330, he admits that it is ‘shameful to read’[714] his account of it, and yet he feels both obliged and confident: ‘Let those pages remain as a monument to that unlikely world which could have been, and now will never be.’[715]

It is worth pausing for a moment to reflect on what Zamyatin’s *My* is: a diary left behind by a man who is forced into spiritual suicide (via lobotomy) at the expense of a free and individual spiritual life. Has the text been retrospectively ‘edited’ afterwards, either by a lobotomised D-503 or some other censor? However reliable our narrator may be, Zamyatin is trying to present a picture of totalitarianism which, for all its horror, is intellectually and psychologically *attractive* in important ways, and precisely for this reason deserving of active opposition (not least as the means for implementing such a vision via modern technology expand). Any so-called ‘Spiritual Humanism’ must be actively cultivated in the face of such complacency. Zamyatin’s real enemy is not the totalitarian Benefactor as such; it is the idea that humanistic education is automatic, easy, or heritable without effort: the task of ‘learning for the self’ begins anew in each human being, but there is much we can do as parents, teachers and citizens to incubate or undermine it.

The United Government - no fan of families or spiritual guardians - is offering its citizens (before it starts forcing them) an early version of Robert Nozick’s

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[713] Zamyatin, *My*, pp. 166-167.

[714] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 170.

[715] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 170.

Experience Machine; we, Zamyatin's readers, are of course meant to respond to the horror of such a machine (or in this case, operation) by saying that some things are worth doing for their own sakes, but the propaganda in the United Government newspaper is designed to persuade those with uncultivated characters that their own lived utility is paramount:

> It is our fault that you are ill. The name of your illness:
>
> Fantasy.
>
> It is a fever which drives you to run ever further, but this 'further' begins where happiness ends. [Your disease] is the last obstacle on the path to happiness. But you can rejoice: this obstacle has been blown up, and the path lies open. Behold the latest discovery of Government Science: the cause of fantasy is a mere knot in the brainstem. With three X-ray blasts, you can be cured -
>
> Forever.
>
> You will be perfect, machine-like; the path to 100% happiness is open! Rush to the auditoriums to book your slot, young and old, for the Great Operation![716]

D-503 is faced with the impending 'crash of two logical trains': the 'happiness' promised by the Great Operation is, as I-330 reminds him, a kind of spiritual 'absolute zero'[717], while 'desire' can be a tortuous, unpleasant business: 'I can't do without you; I don't want to do without you. […] Everyone else will be saved [by the Great Operation], but there is no rescue for me; I don't want to be rescued.'[718]

D-503 has an inner spiritual life alright, but he is struggling to cultivate it, to reach the horizon of a humanism:

> Do you believe that you will die? 'Yes, human beings are mortal; I am a human being, therefore…' I don't mean that; I know that you know that. I am asking you whether you have *really* managed to believe it, not with your brain, but with your whole body - to feel that one day, the fingers holding this very page will be yellow and cold.
>
> Of course not, you don't believe it. That's why you haven't jumped from the tenth floor yet, why you still keep walking, turning the page, shaving, smiling, writing…[719]

The *spiritual* suicide alternative, however, is not attractive either, as D-503's sighting of the first 'operees' makes clear:

> In the corner of the auditorium there was a wide-open door, through which a slow-moving column of 50-odd heavy-footed people emerged. 'People' is a generous word here; their legs were like wheels rolling down a single leaden

[716] Zamyatin, *My*, pp. 171-172.

[717] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 177.

[718] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 178.

[719] Zamyatin, *My*, pp. 178-179.

> track: these were not people, but human-shaped tractors. Above their heads, a white banner flapped in the breeze: […] We are the first! We are the operees! Everyone with us!'[720]

The Benefactor, of course, has only good intentions, even if he has no apparent intention of undergoing a lobotomy himself. Like all dictators, he says he wants D-503 to talk with him 'like an adult' and 'disagree' if he can: 'This is the ancient dream of Paradise. Remember: in Heaven there are no desires, no regrets, no love.'[721] D-503, however, fails to find his tongue at the crucial moment: 'How could I disagree when I had thought the same for so long? […] I stayed silent.'[722]

Whereas I-330 fails to capitulate even under torture, D-503 is lobotomised into obedience:

> I am healthy - completely, absolutely healthy. I am smiling; I can't not smile ([…] smiling is the normal state for a normal human being).
>
> The facts are as follows. That evening they took my neighbour, who had discovered the finitude of the Universe, and me, and everyone who was with us, to the nearest auditorium, where we were tied to our chairs and submitted to the Great Operation.
>
> The next day I, D-503, went to the Benefactor and told Him everything I knew about the enemies of happiness. Why had it been so difficult for me before? I don't know. The only explanation must be my former illness (my spirit).[723]

The novel ends with the United Government at war: 'I hope we will win. Nay, I am sure we will win. Because reason has to win,'[724] a lobotomised D-503 concludes.

My and the Future of the Humanities

Like his Russian compatriot and contemporary Zinaida Gippius (1869-1945), Zamyatin (1884-1937) wants to preserve a space for spirituality and meaningful freedom in modern life without either denying the basic biochemical preconditions of such freedom or shying away from the political power of lowest-common-denominator appeals to individual 'happiness' made from the totalitarian left (the immediate threat in Zamyatin's Soviet Russia), the totalitarian right (the emerging threat of European fascism), or even the postwar and post-Cold War liberal-democratic centre. Like all the authors in this book, Zamyatin insists on a separate,

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[720] Zamyatin, *My*, pp. 180-181.

[721] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 205.

[722] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 205.

[723] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 222.

[724] Zamyatin, *My*, p. 223.

non-utilitarian dimension of meaning well summarised by one of his chief influences[725] - Vassily Kandinsky - in *On the Spiritual in Art* (1911):

> Our spirit, only recently awakened from a long period of materialism, harbours in itself the germ of despair - a consequence of the disbelief, meaninglessness and aimlessness [of recent times]. The nightmare of materialism, which made an evil, pointless game out of the life of the universe, is not yet fully over. Our awakening spirits still hold it strong in the memory; only a faint light flickers, like a lonely tiny dot on a huge circle of black. This faint light is only an aspiration for the spirit, and it still lacks courage in its current state to see it; it wonders whether the dot of light is the dream, and whether the big black circle is still reality. This doubt, as well as the oppressive torment that accompanies it - a consequence of the philosophy of materialism - strongly distinguishes our spirits from those of our artistic ancestors. There is a crack in our soul, and the soul, if it can be touched, feels like a cracked precious vase found deep in the earth.
>
> [A proper modern artist tries] to evoke subtler, unnamed feelings […] which cannot be expressed in our current language. The contemporary viewer, however, is rarely capable of such vibrations. He wants to find in a work of art […] a pure imitation of nature that could serve practical purposes.[726]

If the artist is a 'person who can paint and write everything', as Tolstoy claims, or 'shed light on the depths of the human heart' in Schumann's formulation, then the whole idea of art merely for art's sake 'leaves hungry spirits to go hungry' instead of providing an art for the *self*; even if we can never 'reinhabit the world of the Greeks' or Warring States China, there is still

> another art, capable of further development, [which] also has roots in its own spiritual epoch, and [which] is not only the echo and mirror of the latter, but also has an awakening power, capable of acting deeply and over a long distance.
>
> […] Our physical selves disappear, though mad means may still be enlisted to preserve and magnify this body in marble, iron, bronze and other stones, as if the body had any meaning for the real divine servants and martyrs of mankind, who spurn the physical and serve only the spiritual.[727]

As we approach the centennary of Zamyatin's *My*, we may ask who the contemporary global heirs of Zamyatin, Kandinsky and Gippius's antitotalitarian, respiritifying project are. It would be irresponsible to address the theme of 'learning for the self' in the late 2010s without at least mentioning again in passing the name

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[725] See Christopher Collins, *Evgenij Zamjatin: An Interpretive Study* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1973) for a scholarly overview of Zamyatin's work and an account of the influences of Jung, H.G. Wells, Kandinsky and others on Zamyatin's artistic development.

[726] Vassily Kandinsky, *O Dukhovnom v Iskusstve (On the Spiritual in Art)*, (Munich: Piper, 1911), http://www.graphic.org.ru/kandinskij.html#2 (accessed 30/12/2018), 1. Vvedenie.

[727] Kandinsky, *O Dukhovnom v Iskusstve*, 1. Vvedenie.

of the man who has done the most - or at least made the most money trying - to persuade a generation of Youtube-watching young people that life is about self-responsibility and effortful self-cultivation rather than passive, rights-based happiness. Jung-influenced like Zamyatin, Jordan B. Peterson presents himself not as an artist, but as a 'clinical psychologist' with 'rules for life'[728]. Challenging his critics to do better at changing the world and improving individual people's spiritual lives than he has ('the purpose of life is finding the largest burden that you can bear and bearing it', as he tweeted in 2018), Peterson is unabashed in his instrumentalisation of psychology - and the humanities - to try to help people, as his November 2018 exchange with Roger Scruton highlights:

> Peterson: There is a call to you that isn't from within you. I don't know how else to put it exactly: you walk into a bookstore and a book will 'reveal' itself to you, or you have a conversation, and part of that conversation will trigger something in you. […] That's a portal into the transcendent. It's a phenomenon we don't understand very well. It's something to do with its convergence with the narrative that drives us, whatever that happens to be.
>
> *Scruton: This connects with the general problem of what the humanities are in the university. I've always assumed that if you're teaching literature, or musicology or the history of art, you are opening young people to those moments when the world ceases to be a mere accumulation of facts and, as it were, addresses you. That requires literary criticism, it requires opening yourself to experience in a way that requires a serious education of a special kind. I think if we thought of the humanities as directed towards that, we can see why they might be one way to fill the moral void that grows so easily in people's lives.*
>
> JP: Jung had this sophisticated idea: the self. […] For Jung, the self was the totality of the individual across time and space, so it's whatever you are as a transcendent object - that's a good way of thinking about it. […] It would be that if you *are* engaged in the teaching of humanities and literature, you *are* trying to engage that part of the person. It's to pull them into the story, open that up to them, and then it's a portal - it's not words on

[728] See Jordan B. Peterson, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (Random House Canada, 2018). I only subsequently realised that my initial dedication in this book - to which I have stuck - echoes Peterson's subtitle here. In some respects, indeed, my book *is* an attempt to globalise - or to 'high-resolution', as he irritatingly likes to say - some aspects of Peterson's work, most notably his mission to rescue the humanities from various ideological and institutional enemies, and to propose an altogether new vision of global humanistic learning fit for the demands of 21st-century life. Since Peterson's own work scarcely needs more 'high-resolution' treatment than is already generously forthcoming (both from fans and critics alike), I have preferred to offer readers - many of whom may also be readers of Peterson himself - something slightly different here. This does not, of course, preclude the possibility of future critical engagement with his work; indeed, it is fast becoming impossible for those dedicated to reform of the global humanities to ignore it. This 'addendum' to my chapter on Zamyatin's *My* was my compromise solution to this dilemma: to have made him a central figure in the book's overall discussion would have been too polarising and distracting; to have ignored him altogether would have been unfair both to him and those (hopefully many) readers whose interest for the themes of 'Spiritual Humanism' and 'learning for the self' derives from their contact with Peterson and his work.

paper. It's a portal towards their further development towards the manifestation of this higher and more transcendent mode of being.

RS: That's like the Hindu idea of the transition from samsara *to* brahman*, isn't it? You pass through a barrier that can't actually be described, because you can only know it when you're on the other side of it. … Coleridge [for example] was an advocate of a form of education - a form of knowledge - which shows the meaning of things, as opposed to the mere facts accumulated by Bentham and [other utilitarians].*

The only response [to Benthamites and Foucauldians respectively] is to try to put back into the subject matter one's own inherent belief in it, and to recognise that we are not around on this Earth for very long, and we do have an obligation to find the things that we love. […] The best way towards them is to look at things that other people have loved, for that is what a culture is: it is the residue of all the things that people have thought worthwhile to preserve. Teaching that will reconnect us to what matters.

JP: [… Without the humanities] you deprive people of that sense in their life. […] If you're the sort of person who runs a small diner, it's incumbent on you to run the highest-quality diner that you possibly can, because what you're doing there is not merely providing people with basic nutrition: there's way more to the space than meets the eye. Your noble acceptance of your limited responsibility is also simultaneously a way to transcend it. That can be a place where the neighbourhood meets; it can be a place where tired people revivify themselves before they go off to do their difficult work; it can be a place where you can mentor your employees and help them to develop their lives. It's a rich - an unbelievably rich - microcosm.[729]

A century on, what 'survives' of Zamyatin's *My* is not its foregrounding of a specific totalitarian dystopia, the Benefactor's brutal hypocrisy or the neurobiological conditions of possibility of our existence as free beings: it is rather the omnipresent danger of embracing any narrative which promises an easier happiness than the 'meaning' which self-cultivation alone - independent of the reigning political and economic circumstances in one's life - can provide. This is, of course, deeply political, even if it is not a 'message', let alone a 'set of rules' by which to live all 24 hours of one's daily life.

If we are dragged kicking and screaming to the lobotomy, like D-503, then that is one thing; to circumscribe our lives freely, however, is entirely another: it is *infinitely* preferable to do one's best at surviving under the United Government, running Peterson's diner or living in Viktor Frankl's concentration camp (see Chapter 9) than it is to have a zero-sum relationship with oneself, regardless of the outward ease or success of one's station. Zamyatin's *My* jolts us into realising that; it is still, in other words, 'acting deeply' 100 years on:

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[729] Jordan Peterson and Roger Scruton, 'Apprehending the Transcendent', (The Cambridge Centre for the Study of Platonism and Ralston College, 2018), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvbtKAYdcZY (accessed 30/12/2018).

> There *is* a way out. It's the way out that truly 'religious' people [everywhere] have been trying to offer humanity for thousands and thousands of years: the way out of the conundrum posed to you by your reliance on ideological beliefs and vulnerability in the face of the unknown is the development of a truly integrated and powerful character. That's an individual development, and it means constant confrontation with things you don't understand and constant attempts to ensure that your character is composed of truth and solidity rather than deceit, to make of your self something that is built on rock and not predicated on sand. […] As Solzhenitsyn said, every single person is the centre of the world, *a* centre of the world.[730]

A true 'World Ethos', in other words, is not a universal list of principles or calendar of obligations, and certainly not a blueprint for a totalitarian United Government: it is a global invitation to everyone everywhere to develop a relationship with herself. Overcommercialising this invitation, as Jordan Peterson seems happy to do, is at the very least problematic, because it risks destroying the integrity of the invitation; but Zamyatin, like Peterson and other modern anti-totalitarians, at least reminds us that we have everything to lose by not accepting it.

[730] Jordan Peterson, 'Angry Student Calls Jordan Peterson a "Moron", Watch How He Responds', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIeI5kBylpI, 25/12/2018 (accessed 31/12/2018).

12. Milena Jesenská's *Alles ist Leben*

One could, if one preferred, choose to approach Milena Jesenská (1896-1944) as a war correspondent (Czechoslovakia) or concentration camp victim (Ravensbrück), but before all that, she was something else, and something more than that for which she is best known (i.e. as the great love and early translator of Franz Kafka[731]). Here we select the highlights from Jesenská's 1920s 'Feuilletons und Reportagen', translated from the Czech by Reinhard Fischer, and finally included in *Alles ist Leben (Everything is Life)*, a 1984 German collection of Jesenská's assorted writings.

'Kino' (1920)

Just as we sit on the precipice of a printing-press-style information revolution, in which independent media entrepreneurs like Jordan Peterson supplant traditional authorities and pin their not-so-metaphorical theses (or 'rules for life') to the metaphorical church doors of our time[732], so too did Jesenská witness, from Vienna (before returning to Prague), the struggles for authenticity of the emerging medium of *her* time:

> [After the war as before,] many coffeehouse-goers are outstanding artists who daily develop new ideas and concepts with their efforts. Many go after work, and spend the rest of the day there. That's not a bad way to live. It is the search for a neutral milieu, a chance to forget, not to think about oneself, the need to exist as little as possible as a private I. This all makes life easier.
>
> But I now know people who would happily go to the cinema every day. It is not that they don't want to work or have nothing to do, rather that it is so easy for the spirit to sit in the cinema.[733]

The problem is that the spirit needs both rest and work; the primitive cinema of Jesenská's Vienna provides only the former, even if she lumps herself in with the over-indulgers:

> Truly, how beautiful the world would be if it were [as simple as this cinema shows]. How easy it would be if a person were guaranteed in advance to be good or evil, and if women were noble or base, faithful or unfaithful, seduceable or unseduceable, kindhearted or subversive!
>
> […] In our world, people are good and bad, true and untrue, loathed and proud all at the same time. Every heart is complicated, every life is

[731] See Mary Hockaday, *Kafka, Love, and Courage: The Life of Milena Jesenská*, (New York: The Overlook Press, 1997) for a biographical overview.

[732] See Jordan Peterson, 'YouTube is the Modern-Day Gutenberg Press', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nALQe3L9Os, 7/12/2017 (accessed 19/4/2019).

[733] Milena Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, trans. Reinhard Fischer et al., (Frankfurt: Verlag Neue Kritik, 2008(1984)), p. 18.

> difficult and unresolved, and happiness is fickly independent of good and bad deeds.
>
> […] We struggle to figure out the meaning of our existences, and lo and behold, in the cinema, our problems are solved with all the falsehood of our existing prejudices! How easy! [… This] cinema is something other than entertainment; one can compare it to alcohol for the drinker or opium for the addict: it allows us to forget, and tickles us pleasantly in our stupor. Such cinema is something we cowards happily cling to, for it helps us to endure our lives, to cope with them a bit more easily, and we are otherwise powerless in the face of something so disfigured.[734]

The remainder of the articles and dispatches in this collection are an attempt precisely to do what this contemporary cinema is as yet unwilling to do: to provide something more than the 1920s equivalent of clickbait for procrastinating selves.

<u>'Briefe bedeutender Leute' ('The Letters of Important People' (1920)</u>

Jesenská is not directly interested here in the question whether the private letters of great artists should be published, but rather in why we might want to read them in the first place: 'We often hear that it is dangerous to meet an artist in real life, and that one is often disappointed. […] If you think so, sweetheart, then it is only because you don't know how where to find art and don't know how grotesquely odd the individual human spirit is.'[735] There is a corresponding, intellectually and spiritually legitimate reason for wanting to know more about the private life of an artist:

> The work, the created thing, is not enough for us; we want to know where it comes from, to explain the inner act which drives the creation. This is not least because every great work of art is by definition unsummarisable and new, for an artist does not say what *is*, but rather what *isn't*; and in saying so, it appears. […] Hamlet naturally existed before Shakespeare, and Myshkin before Dostoyevsky; the Earth turned on its axis before Galileo, and electricity pulsed before Galvani. The world, however, did not yet know. […] This is the property of the artist: her exclusive worldview, her ability to see something *for the first time*, to see something in a new way. […] The correspondence adds to the work, just as a map enriches our understanding of the world. We unbelievers, for whom a wonder of nature is not enough by itself, and for whom terrestrial explanations are needed, seek justifications and logical connections in the letters.
>
> Biographies are something completely different, and interesting in a quite different way. Stendhal's biography of Napoleon contains more of the author's view of his subject than any portrait of the man himself: it is a work of art in its own right.

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[734] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, pp. 19-20.

[735] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, p. 22.

> […] The views of important people on other important people can certainly be worth knowing. It is, however, a pure misunderstanding to think that a collection of reports 'without claim to artistic merit' of its own, published on the assumption that the world should be interested, offer us an intimate glimpse into the life of the great person concerned. […] Such mere collections of facts will be boring as long as they lack deep penetration through to the world within. […] It is not a matter of revealing unknown tidbits of information to the world, but rather of enriching individual [spirits] with understanding. It is about the logical relationship between the world of the meaningless and the world of the meaningful.[736]

'Meine Freundin' ('My Friend') (1921)

Jesenská is more than brutally honest about the master-slave dynamic of her 'friendship' with her housemaid Frau Kohler; she is, indeed, exaggerating, but for a precise effect:

> A person is only capable of friendship when she is very young. Have you also noticed? Later, when she gets older, or 'matures' as we might say, it is only with great effort, reluctantly and grumpily that she is able to build new ones, and certainly no lasting ones. But one is sometimes forced into such a friendship by life itself, perhaps a very unique relationship which, on closer inspection, is no real friendship at all. […] This common, lumpen, uneducated proletarian aunty has the best heart in the world, and I feel a deep, heartfelt affection for her. […] If something bad has happened, her face turns white and rigid with horror, as if she were dead, as if the whole of creation were jolted on its axis, and as if she had been struck a blow from above, from directly above. When I see this face, I shiver in my deepest soul: there is always a good reason for it.
>
> […] This is my friend. I cannot imagine a life without her. If I were to move to America, she would be the first thing I would pack. I can't wake up early on my own, or at least not until she is standing over my bed with a broom and a stained apron. […] My dinner doesn't taste right until I know she has stolen her portion as a fee. […] We have a silent pact never to separate. As soon as you see me, Frau Kohler is nearby; and if you see Frau Kohler, I am not far away either.[737]

A man will force them apart in the end[738], leaving Jesenská's 'faith in humanity truly shaken'[739]; although the new maid will be pathologically thorough - so thorough that

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[736] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, pp. 22-24.

[737] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, pp. 25-26, 30.

[738] See 'Scheiden tut weh' ('Parting Hurts'), in Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, pp. 56-60.

[739] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, p. 56.

‘even my aunt Marena would find nothing to complain about if she visited’[740] - there is in her relationship with her new maid none of the mutual theft and vulnerability on which any healthy spiritual covenant (as opposed to a merely economic and contractual relationship) must silently be based.

‘Geheimnisvolle Erlösung’ (‘Mysterious Liberation’)

Alongside other more concrete ailments, Jesenská suffers from what we would, today, happily call ‘depression’, but this is no bad thing in itself:

> The relationships between people and things are much closer and richer than we largely bother to realise. How strange it is that the happier we are, the easier our access to *people* is, and the grumpier we feel, the stronger our connection to *things* becomes. […] Pain pulls us into a narrow room without doors and windows; there is no way out, and the air grows thin. People pass us by; they are blind and dumb to our sufferings, but as soon as a roof, car or piece of sky pierce the wall of pain, invisible doors are opened wide, and we breathe freely, as if liberated.[741]

After a night out in which she simply couldn’t face going back to her 30-square-metre apartment, she eventually returns home:

> My untouched bed behaved in this morning hour as if someone had died. The water glass I had left out for the night, the fruit bowl and the slippers all looked at me with such melancholy that I was afraid to move from the windowsill where I was sitting.
>
> My body was rigid with horror: how was I going to survive the day to come?
>
> […] And as if in the half-second before waking from an anaesthetic, in which all of created space - the sun, the sky, the world - is suddenly present, I was shaken awake, and, regaining consciousness, broke out in tired tears: how wonderful, how wonderful it is to live!
>
> […] I firmly believe that the world helps. Somehow, suddenly, unpredictably, simply, compassionately. Sometimes, however, the rescue is as painful as the pain itself. […] One should build a heart for oneself and fervently love life with it, such that it might be further softened by this great love and freed from the curse of unhappiness.[742]

‘Der Fall Georg Kaiser’ (‘The Case of Georg Kaiser’) (1921)

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[740] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, p. 60.

[741] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, p. 31.

[742] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, pp. 34-35.

A widely publicised embezzlement scandal involving German playwright Georg Kaiser (1878-1945) is less interesting to Jesenská than the scandalous behaviour of those journalists covering it; rather than rushing to *explain* Kaiser's behaviour, the responsibility of the fourth estate lies in preserving a certain spiritualised form of justice:

> If we are making our decisions on the basis of justice, to the extent that this is possible, and if laws are something we all accept as a necessary subset of a higher human striving, […] then those - even the most tactful and careful - who express their opinions on the quality of the human soul in question are like thorns on a whip, extracting flesh with every blow.
>
> […] In both good and bad deeds, we discover that *something has happened*. The only acceptable empathy consists in allowing a person who has sinned to feel that your relationship with her *has not changed*. If she notices a change in her friends' behaviour two days after the crime, or after her sentence has been served, then a cool greeting will hurt just the same as a seemingly warm one. If, on the other hand, she feels the same essence in the greeting, then trust is retained.
>
> […] I don't think that hunger forces anyone into prostitution, but I do think it drives some people to become millionnaires. […] I didn't want to write exclusively about Georg Kaiser. […] His struggles, sins, crimes, sufferings and debts are matters between him and God. […] I wanted very simply to point out what becomes of someone when many different people express their ostensibly 'justified' opinions about him. I wanted to say that, worse than any year in prison or other deprivation of freedom, one thing above all hurts: this explaining away. I wanted to say that *psychology* is the lie, the poison and the crime of our time. Nothing more. Please don't misunderstand me.[743]

<u>'Reklame des Elends' ('Advertising and the Wretched') (1921)</u>

Even if the 'misery and wretchedness trade' needs its version of clickbait too, fake beggary still has something uniquely wicked about it:

> Capitalism, with its shiny advertising, has ingeniously extended itself, then, even into these reaches: an infinite cynicism of helplessness, the entire ugliness of humanity in one foul display. Money is a terrible thing, and it is also a symbol. This lowlife's loud, deliberately horrible busking may well end up being his damnation. […] One at least senses that man and beast have lost their divine value in this charade, and leaves a coin behind to make up for it.[744]

Citizens of Vienna, however, may also be treated to the opposite spectacle:

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[743] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, pp. 37, 39-40.

[744] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, pp. 45-46.

> In front of the Wiener Oper, an entrepreneurial invalid performs a service which leaves many openmouthed in admiration. He is a shoeshiner, but that's not the point: what matters is *how* he does his shining. Next to his wooden leg he has a stool covered in tiny glass bottles, cream tins, brushes and bristles. His hands move like quicksilver. His welcoming, bright face confirms that there are people that life cannot conquer. Whether white, yellow, black, grey, blue, red, green or any other colour, *all* shoes get the special treatment. He has a strategy for dealing with any challenge the shoe industry could care to throw at him. His love for his job attracts crowds; the man has become a hero of the city. I imagine he has a wife and children; his stump does not prevent him from being happy in any case.[745]

Between these two extremes - so easy to loathe and so easy to admire - hides the city's real beggary, against which Jesenská admits to being spiritually defenceless:

> Yesterday I experienced something terrible. I saw a woman, as white as a sheet, clinging to a church pillar. There was no advertising here, only terrible suffering. There were no requests or tears, only a face which couldn't cry anymore. The woman was holding a child who had just died. It was covered in a rash. She didn't look at me. She didn't answer me. But as I got closer, she suddenly reacted with a gesture in which so much contempt for *everything* lay, so much loneliness - the loneliness of a person properly reduced to *begging* - that I ran away in horror as if saving *myself*.[746]

<u>'Der Teufel am Herd' ('The Devil at the Hearth') (1923)</u>

Having passed by windows and kitsch, the next subject of real note to be duly spiritualised by Jesenská is marriage:

> If two people get married on the basis that they think they will be happy together, then they remove and exclude the possibility of happiness in advance. To get married for the sake of happiness is as narrowly utility-oriented as marrying for money, a car, or a noble title, and as insufficient for happiness as all the above combined. If anything in this world gets its comeuppance, then it is utility maximisation in spiritual matters. There is only one reasonable ground for two people to get married: namely, that they can't do otherwise, that they really can't live without each other. There is nothing romantic, sentimental or tragic about this. […] This is where marriages today break down: *people get married without definitively choosing each other, or rather, without deciding to forego everything else.* […] Every marriage hides a thousand risks of disappointment in it, countless

[745] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, p. 47.

[746] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, pp. 47-48.

> opportunities for inner failure, and there is only one possible form of defence: to accept all the risk autonomously before one starts.[747]

Marriage, then, is not a choice as such, rather the result of forged circumstance, a circumstance in which only a certain form of prior and ongoing self-cultivation can place us; not everyone, and perhaps only a minority of people, will ever be ready for it, or sustain it across a whole lifetime:

> Does a home have any other function than to protect, protect and protect again, against the world, and above all against our own inner mirror? The biggest promise that two people can make to each other is the thing we say jokingly to our children: 'I'm not going to give you up.' Is that not the same thing as saying 'I will love you until death' or 'I will remain eternally faithful to you'? I'm not going to give you up: this is the whole point. Decency, truthfulness, homeliness, loyalty, belonging, stability, friendship. How infinitely large such promises are compared to mere happiness. […] Try looking into the night sky for once, for five whole minutes. Or find a mountaintop on which to look down on the Earth. It won't take you long to realise the importance of life and the unimportance of happiness. Happiness! As if the possibility of happiness did not depend exclusively on ourselves![748]

Jesenská's embrace of life, however, is not an invitation to antiscientific fatalism or a mere resignation to the facts of the *status quo*; it is something much closer to the free acceptance of the burdens and rewards of a true, adult vocation:

> There are two options in life: either accepting one's destiny, actively choosing it and assuming responsibility for it, recognising it and binding oneself to all the advantages and disadvantages, all the happiness and frustration bound up with it, bravely, honestly, without cutting corners, magnanimously and humbly. Or you can carry on looking for your destiny. But beyond a certain point, one starts to lose not only energy, time, illusions, a proper form of naïveté and a sure sense of the world's myriad things, but also a sense of the value of one's own self.[749]

<u>'Amerika contra Deutschland' (1923)</u>

This review of the 1920 Swedish film *Erotikon* takes the form of a reasoned critique, from a broadly spiritual humanist point of view, of the American and German film industries respectively; the reasoning employed, however, is the dangerous form of induction known a century later as 'racism' (even though Jesenská's comments have everything to do with culture and ostensibly nothing to do with 'race' as such).

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[747] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, pp. 80-82.

[748] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, pp. 83-85.

[749] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, p. 85.

After saying some complementary things about 'American cinema' and 'German cinema' in general, she then leaps to the following conclusion:

> American films see reality, but they don't look *behind reality*; they have no spirit and no spiritual dimension. They tell us what life is, often in a quite extraordinary way, but they don't say what lies above the everyday. They always feature the same character types and the same plots. […] German cinema does not have such weaknesses. It shows individual people. […] But there is a problem: it shows only German people. May God forgive me the word '*boche*', but there is not a single German film where it does not automatically pop into my head. […] This unbalanced mixture of brutality and the lowest form of sentimentality, […] the strict and stiff Prussian way virtue is expressed, […] the intellectual arrogance…[750]

Is it necessarily wrong to make such cultural generalisations in the name of global spiritual development if one is careful to recognise them as such? Attending an architecture expo in Stuttgart in 1927, Jesenská goes even further in her condemnation of mainstream German culture:

> Why is this land - of such remarkable industrial prowess, and with such a taste for order and prohibition - so horribly unpleasant, grey and sad, despite all the praise we are obliged to pay it? Maybe it is because there is no place in the world where the gap between ordinary people and élites is so wide. Every Czech has a bit of the blessed and the damned, the song-happy and poor Slavic soul in her; in France every storehouse wench is proud of her Frenchness; it is only in Germany that the spirit and feelings of an ordinary citizen know nothing of Goethe and Mozart. Nothing of the magic of the greatest Germans, the breadth of their wingspan, has been passed on to the common people. […] They are sentimental and brutal. A love of order is no longer a gift from God if a person lives for order instead of creating order so as to live well. For a German, the meaning of life consists in doing what she is told and avoiding all that is forbidden. […] Germans lack all sense of enjoyment for life, all appreciation for the meaning of things; they are simply blind to the magic of the world. They never go anywhere unless it is their duty to do so, and one notices with horror that such duty, as soon as it becomes an end rather than a means, looks ridiculous to God and eternity. This is something that every Slavic soul, by contrast, even in her most banal daily activities, and with every breath she takes, simply knows.[751]

Such generalising talk is surely both dangerous and necessary; there is, or might well be, something true in it, even if it can by no means be said to apply uniformly to all members of the alleged group(s) all the time. Jesenská's goal is to make a general point: people of different cultures can learn from the best of each other - in this case, from a Swedish film:

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[750] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, pp. 90-91, 92.

[751] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, p. 131.

> The film is perfectly clean and pure, by which I mean 'pure' in an ideal sense which people in Scandinavia seem to understand, and which we know little about; their spiritual lives are clearly a few degrees warmer than ours. Not much happens in the film, but […] everything plays out against an unprecedented backdrop of human warmth and openness, […] much, much more *realistically* than in other films. This is a film which breaks fundamentally new ground, and it is an infinite shame that Prague audiences do not know it. […] It is truly something beautiful and fine. More like that please![752]

For all the casual disdain shown to Germany *in general*, Jesenská eventually shows - this is the difference between la(z)y anthropology and genuine racism - that German *individuals* are as welcome in her global republic of the spirit as anyone else, even as late as 'Prague, on the Morning of 15 March, 1939':

> A couple of days ago I had a chat with a German - to be clear, a National Socialist. […] Since the political situation today is in such flux, and since even the most informed of us have only the rawest of opinions on the subject, I will leave aside what he had to say about politics. His opinion of the Czechs, however, was interesting: why, he asked me, did so many Czechs come up to him and greet him with a Heil Hitler? I was told that any German would have a certain sympathy for national pride and a national backbone; submissive behaviour, on the other hand, would only elicit a smile reserved for animals and babies.
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> […] Every year, on 15 March, Czech mothers take their children to the Grave of the Unknown Soldier. […] At the back of the mourning crowds I saw a German soldier walk by, stop, and salute. He looked into the tear-red eyes of the congregation, and he saw: the people were crying because he was there. And he saluted: he understood why we were grieving. I looked at him again and thought of the 'Great Illusion': will we really one day live amongst each other - Germans, Czechs, French, Russians, English - without hurting each other, without having to hate each other, without being unfair to each other? Will there really be a day when the governments understand each other the way we as individual people can? Will the borders between countries fall as they do when we grow near to one another? How beautiful it would be to live to see that![753]

<u>'Herz auf Probefahrt' ('The Heart on a Testride') (1923)</u>

This short piece also 'doubles as a travel diary', but it is really a journey to the borders of Spiritual Humanism:

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[752] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, pp. 93-94.

[753] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, pp. 242-244.

> If these train tracks could take you everywhere, if a ticket and this strange locomotive were enough to get you to Paris, to *the Paris* that you have imagined to yourself for your whole life, then you wouldn't need to go to Paris at all. […] But when you get off the train - in Venice, actually - you forget why you have come in the first place, and that you were looking for something. The fairytale buildings, the water, the gondolas and the sun - you had simply never imagined that anything like this was possible. […] But from that day on, you sensed a clear mistrust towards that which you had once called the World. You saw that there were beautiful things in it, wonderful, illuminating, exciting impressions. […] You saw that this world could be reached, if only in 60-kilometre-an-hour rail stretches, and you also saw that, for all its overwhelming immensity, there was no place in it for a new start and a new life. You saw with crystal clarity that there is only one thing in the whole world on which you can rely, little heart, and that is you yourself.[754]

'*Eine Frau aus Paris*' ('*A Woman of Paris*') (1924)

Like *Erotikon*, Charlie Chaplin's *A Woman of Paris* pushes the cutting-edge art form of Jenenská's day - the cinema - to new places not reachable by rail:

> *This is the World*, our true, living World, Life, which is deeper than moral rules, faith and coincidence. It is a life of terrifying fatedness, gradually unfolding, irrecoverable, irreversible, where every move leaves a mark on our destiny, and every half hour is another small step forward. […] Chaplin is a man with the sensitivity of a fine membrane. Everything has its own face, for better or for worse. Objects have their moods, their tricks, their malice and unreason. […] The [human] relationships in this film are full relationships. […] How modest of him not to psychologise! How humble not to explain! The worst and most realistic thing about the film is the way that we feel, with our whole bodies, how people talk past each other.[755]

In this 'sensitivity', Chaplin resembles (as well as Confucius and the many other authentic 'selves' on display in this book) Kafka:

> [Kafka] saw the world as full of invisible demons that could annihilate and tear up people who lacked defences of their own. […] He knew the world in an unusual and deep way; he *was* an unusual and deep world. He wrote books which are among the most significant in recent German literature; the current generation's struggle plays out in them, but not in a onesided way. […] He was a man and an artist with such a fine conscience that he sensed

[754] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, pp. 95-96.

[755] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, pp. 100-103.

> things which others, who were not so sensitive, failed to perceive as threats.[756]

A Daunting Subject for Biography

Dorothea Rein faces a delicate task introducing readers of *Alles ist Leben* to the life of its author; nobody could have been clearer than Jesenská in her opposition to 'psychologising' explanation. There are, however, important details to be retrieved from her 'Biographical Sketch'; one is Jesenská's letter to her high school teacher Albina Honzáková after graduation:

> I would like to thank you. Not only for my final grade. For all eight years. And for the fact that you never judged me for the things I love, and that you alone refused to laugh at what I read and what I like. And that you never told me I was too highly-strung just because I like to have music, pictures and books. I will never forget any of this about you.[757]

A lot of sex, drugs and depression are mixed into this particular life, but when the shit of the Munich Agreement hits the fan of Czechoslovakia in 1938, one person is ready to face it:

> Milena Jesenská commented with illusionless clearsightedness on the events in Czechoslovakia after the Munich Agreement. She wrote, travelled widely, seemed indefatigable. The inner peace which had apparently eluded her for much of her life visited her in the years of greatest external unrest. She was dauntingly productive, writing articles, translating, organising her household, taking care of people and still finding time for the coffeehouse and the cinema.[758]

Perhaps there is even something in Jesenská's story to speak to Justin E.H. Smith's 2019 concerns:

> Human subjects are vanishingly small beneath the tsunami of likes, views, clicks and other metrics that is currently transforming selves into financialized vectors of data. […] This gutting of our human subjecthood is currently being stoked and exacerbated, and integrated into a causal loop with the financial incentives of the tech companies. People are now speaking in a way that results directly from the recent moneyballing of all of human existence. They are speaking, that is, algorithmically rather than subjectively.
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> […] I often think of an essay I read a while ago by a prize-winning photojournalist who had tracked down Pol Pot deep in Cambodia, had taken

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[756] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, pp. 104-105.

[757] Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, p. 250.

[758] Dorothea Rein, in Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, p. 272.

> pictures of him, spoken with him, conveyed this historical figure's own guilty and complicated and monstrous human subjectivity to readers. The essay was about the recent difficulty this journalist had been having paying his bills. He noted that his teenage niece, I believe it was, had racked up many millions more views on Instagram, of a selfie of her doing a duck-face, than his own pictures of Pol Pot would ever get.
>
> […] My own book may be crap, but I am certain, when such an imbalance in profitability as the one I have just described emerges, between photojournalism and selfies, that it is all over. This is not a critical judgment. I am not saying that the photos of Pol Pot are good and the selfies are bad. I am saying that the one reveals a subject and the other reveals an algorithm, and that when everything in our society is driven and sustained in existence by the latter, it is all over.
>
> What to do, then? Some of us are just so constituted as to not have quietism as an option. […] As we enter our new technological serfdom, and along with liberal democracy we lose the individual human subject that has been built up slowly over the centuries as a locus of real value, we will be repeatedly made to know, by the iron rule of the metrics, that our creative choices and inclinations change nothing. Creative work will likely take on, for many, a mystical character, where it is carried out not from any belief in its power to influence the world as it is at present, as it may remain for the next millennia, but as a simple act of faith.[759]

It may be melodramatic to compare the plight of the contemporary humanities to Prague in 1939, but the dynamics of the choice for humanities 'practitioners' are - as they have always been - the same as those which faced Jesenská herself:

> Cured of her morphine addiction but still caught under the influence of sleeping pills, which she took in quantities to tranquillise a horse, she nevertheless had everything in hand. She cooked for the refugees, drove away their worries, and offered them matchless good advice. She also helped many to escape - including her friend Evzen Klinger, who as a Jew was unable to stay. His pleas to Jesenská to join the wave of emigration, however, fell on deaf ears, as did those of other friends. She didn't want to leave Prague, where she felt needed, where there was so much to do, […] and where she had taken on a struggle towards which she felt her whole life had been building.[760]

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[759] Justin E.H. Smith, 'It's All Over', https://thepointmag.com/2019/examined-life/its-all-over, first published at https://www.jehsmith.com/1/2018/12/its-all-over.html, 30/12/2018 (accessed 6/1/2019).

[760] Rein, in Jesenská, *Alles ist Leben*, p. 274.

13. Bernard-Henri Lévy's *Eloge des Intellectuels*

With his deliciously coiffed hair, open shirts and inherited wealth, as well as the conflicting diversity of his political engagements and general polarising willingness to court media celebrity, Bernard-Henri Lévy (1948-) will be viewed by some as an unserious or polemical subject for attention here. Leaving broader questions of Lévy's status as a global public intellectual aside, his 1987 book *Éloge des Intellectuels* will concern us here on its own terms.

'Confusions'

Lévy's goal in *Éloge des Intellectuels* is to modernise the idea of the 'cleric' as an intellectual and spiritual guardian in a context of declining religiosity and, in France particularly, structuralist and poststructuralist discourses which undermine the autonomy of the humanities from 'explanation':

> The goal [of these movements] was, even in the spheres of taste, giftedness or the simple pleasure of reading, to impose the strange idea that, behind the most beautiful of poems, at the very source of its creation but also at the source of its charm and genius, there was always a 'subtext', anonymous and quiet, which secretly governed it and made all its effects possible. […] By reducing works of art in this way, by plugging them into a matrix, pretending that they obeyed rules and that even their most extraordinary attributes could be predicted and measured, […] one obliterated the thin but vital border between products of culture and other commodities.[761]

If everything and everyone - 'from the ad-man to the prêt-à-porter stylist and the heirs of Joyce and Flaubert' - is reduced to the level playing-field of supply and demand, then 'for the first time in history', culture 'has no definition'.[762]

'Au commencement était le Sartron'

Describing an intellectual atmosphere specific to his Parisian milieu in the late 1970s, Lévy writes:

> We had had enough of Marxism. We had had enough of Hegelianism. We hoped to demolish a specific type of ideology which we believed, not without reason, to have been directly linked to totalitarian nightmares. A mixture of fashion, media influence, the demands of debate and the power of rumour pushed us to conclude that 'ideology' in general was the problem, and that the whole idea of a 'system' had to be kept away from our spirits. It was a war, in other words, on *all* systems, a war on coherence, a phobia of all that

[761] Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, (Paris: Grasset, 1987), pp. 14-15.

[762] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 17.

> might in any way resemble a global claim. […] In effect, philosophy itself was condemned.[763]

This unforeseen and unintended consequence of poststructuralist-dominated French intellectual life - namely, that a rejection of outdated dogma would itself harden into dogma - left Lévy and his comrades enfeebled:

> As happened with existentialism and structuralism in their day, a kind of sad vulgate crystallised [around poststructuralism]. […] The worst thing of all, in this situation, was that the very idea of difference among intellectuals, and therefore of debate, fatally disappeared from our mental universe.
>
> […] The key date in this story, I fear, was the famous [1979] meeting between Aron and Sartre during our campaign in favour of the boat people. […] From now on, the role of clerics would be to agree with each other. Union became a virtue, conciliation an imperative, compromise a benediction. The first lesson was this: in the face of the evils of the world, its horrors and tragedies, there ought to be a single, uniform, unanimous intellectual front. A religion of consensus. A fascination with cliché.[764]

The culmination of this reductive tendency - out of which the calls for a 'Global Ethic' would grow in the 1990s - was 'Human Rights' discourse:

> Oh, not the rights themselves! Not respect for individual people! Not concrete assistance for concrete human beings, a principle on which I will never be swayed. […] Intellectuals drowned and invalidated themselves [in the soup of Human Rights]. In a burst of masochism matched only in the pomp of Stalinism by those who gave way to the 'straightseeing eye of the people', intellectuals created the conditions for their own demise.[765]

<u>'La dissolution des clercs'</u>

The complex genealogy of this decline can be linked to the fate of ideas of Truth and Justice, the oxygen of intellectual life, in the postcolonial era; if the products of any given culture are no longer repositories of truth and justice, then those who have studied them are no longer in a position of any authority whatsoever to express their views on matters beyond their limited area of 'professional' competence. Lévy goes so far as to call this scientistic anti-intellectualism 'the death of the humanities':

> Who does not see that if the current fetish for [academic] specialisation is allowed to triumph, it will be the end of the intellectual? […] It invalidates the mediating role which she has always performed, one which made her a

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[763] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 19.

[764] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, pp. 19-20, 21.

[765] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, pp. 22-23.

> sacred intercessor between human beings and knowledge. Clerics, as we all know, were the descendants of monks. […] They appeared on the cultural scene - no coincidence - at the precise moment that France separated its churches from the state.[766]

If the modern French 'intellectual' emerged from this clerical shadow with Zola and the Dreyfus Affair, she must not be forced to hover indefinitely in a grey space between between formal educational institutions, the media, and religious organisations; an argument in favour of intellectuals - an *éloge* - is needed in order to carve out space for her in the modern world, and to prevent the species from extinction.[767]

'Terrorismes'

> *Baudelaire was reproached for having been himself, for having written a dark masterpiece* - Les Fleurs du mal - *and for not having been a* bien-pensant*, quietly left-leaning* quarante-huitard *happy to add his voice to the chorus of the day.*[768]

Unashamed to exaggerate for a small but real effect, Lévy compares writing - the true exercise of spiritual independence and freedom - to 'terrorism' against the *status quo*:

> In every writer worthy of the name, there is this certainty that one is alone, absolutely alone when she writes. In each of us, whatever our degree of talent or ambition, there is this conviction that our religion is not theirs, and an automatic distrust, therefore, of communitarian pressure, even if it takes a 'generous' outward form. Should one engage in politics? Yes, why not - we do so gladly, but only on the condition that our engagement does not make us forget the irreducibly rebellious and antisocial nature of writing.[769]

This is not in any way to deny the social side of, or background to, our individual natures as 'centres of relationships', or whatever communitarian formulation one might prefer for such Confucianesque insights. It is no coincidence, however, that Baudelaire ironically privileges the human right to self-contradiction - including the right to walk away from a cause[770] - above all others; without it, the 'political

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[766] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 28.

[767] See Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 29.

[768] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 36.

[769] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 37.

[770] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 34.

reduction' of 'clerics' to servants of revolution can have grotesque and inhuman consequences.

'Misère de l'engagement'

> *If a writer is really this asocial, amoral, uncommunitied being, if she is really this bizarre character who dreams only of literature and regards all collectivities as foreign to her, if she is really this monster, this parasite, living in the alleyways of the world and eating its food, then one is free to wonder whether there might not be, in this sudden desire to […] engage for a political cause, a formidable dose of regret, if not outright repentance.*[771]

Lévy is keen to avoid 'savage psychoanalysis' in 'explaining' why certain 19th- and 20th-century French intellectuals - on both left and right - threw themselves so wholeheartedly into their various political causes.[772] There are, however, 'happy exceptions' to 'all the fascisms (Céline curing France of its Jewish negativity), demagogies (Sartre piously prostrate before the sacrosanct proletariat) and comedies (Hugo loudly looking for a barricade to get himself killed)'[773]: namely, individual authors responding humbly as individual human beings to individual cases of injustice, not distracted by their own spiritual struggles, but precisely motivated by them:

> I don't know any great writer who has not, at the solitude of her desk, reached into abominable abysses and, face to face with shadows, not suddenly been terrified by the monsters she has called forth. […] Mallarmé, for example, even while murmuring his '*en creusant les vers à ce point, j'ai rencontré des abîmes qui désespèrent*', was able - one does not mention this enough - to figure among the first intellectuals to go into bat for Dreyfus.[774]

'La Littérature et le mal'

There are forms of 'engagement', Lévy argues, *beyond* engagement, ways of doing 'literature' (or philosophy or the humanities) which avoid the 'rival and symmetrical errors of the "socialist temptation" on the one hand and "art for art's sake" on the other':

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[771] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 39.

[772] See Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 39.

[773] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 43.

[774] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 42.

> Desocialising literature is not to make light of it or to render it futile. It is not to free it from its dialogue with the world. […] It brings the individual [reader] face to face with death, crime, sin and madness. […] The writer is more alone still, confronted with forces of extreme violence which threaten at any moment to annihilate her.[775]

As long as this realm of the self - of individual 'readers' - survives, then 'clerics' - or in other words, great writers - will be needed to mediate between individuals and their raw experience of the world: not a privileged caste, but a humble group of self-selecting and mostly underpaid individuals with a prior sense of vocation. Self-cultivation is lonely business, and we all - even the very best of us - need genuine guidance in our own solitude, the kind of guidance which only a humanistic education, beyond profiteering self-help guruism, can provide; when Lévy writes that 'the fate of the cleric has not yet been decided' and that 'before it is left or right, literature is metaphysical'[776], he means precisely that literature is this shared aloneness and mutually assisted self-cultivation; it begins where the imagined 'togetherness' of politics ends (or rather, politics is conducted by more or less cultivated selves). His preferred examples - Flaubert, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Proust, Kafka[777] - all share the latter's conviction that literature is 'payment for services to the demon'[778], a demon we all face on our own, but not, if we are lucky, alone. 'Self-cultivation' is a struggle, in other words, which precedes politics; public goodness can and does come out of individual struggle, but such self-cultivation is - even in Lévy's postmodern France - an effortful and private business for which no political formula can ever be developed.

'L'Honneur de l'Esprit'

> *By making these accusations, I am aware that I expose myself to the full force of Articles 30 and 31 of the defamation laws passed on 29 July 1881. I do so here of my own free will.*
>
> *As for those I am accusing, I do not know them personally, have never seen them, and have no private rancour or hatred towards them. […] My enflamed protestation here is merely the cry of my spirit.*
>
> Émile Zola, '*J'accuse*' (1898)

Lévy describes the history of a certain intellectual 'engagement' in France, from the Dreyfus Affair through the World Wars and Algerian independence, as driven

[775] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, pp. 45-46.

[776] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 47.

[777] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 44.

[778] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 46.

always by ‘the same obscure calling’ and a willingness to ‘take every manner of risk’[779]:

> The various ‘moments’ of this century do not, of course, all resemble each other. […] In each case, however, those writers concerned behaved as intellectuals: that is to say, they ceased for a moment to be the writers that they otherwise were, and made the strange gesture - stranger and unlikelier as the century has worn on - to reply in conscience to the call of the Universal.
>
> What would the century have looked like without this ‘engagement’? A giant void, nothing more.[780]

‘La Démocratie et nous’

Lévy wants to argue for a social role, parallel to the law, for individual intellectual ‘engagement’; if he oversimplifies things - again, more for effect than anything else - by saying that ‘the intellectual is truth, reason, justice etc.’ and ‘one of our last lines of defence against what Freud famously called “the black tide of occultism”’, it is only to present an individualist antidote to tribalist tendencies which are bad, in his view, both for their own sakes and the world:

> The intellectual herself has no smell. She doesn’t really have a colour either. If you ask her where she’s from and what she belongs to, she will be the one to say, along the lines of Saint-John Perse to the American immigration officer in 1940: […] I inhabit my name, I come from my language, I have no other true nationality than that of my ideas, and I am only truly at home in the families of spirit I have freely chosen for myself. The world is full of people who feel - and say - that they are the children of a given land, a given bloodline, race or root. It is because there are clerics that this type of filiation is not even more widespread and dangerous than it already is.[781]

The intellectual ‘engagement’ of a cultivated individual spirit is thus an automatic outgrowth of her prior spiritual disposition, which by definition has at least something cosmopolitan about it, even if it can take an infinite variety of concrete forms:

> It is not that an intellectual has absolutely nowhere to go, or that she must turn her back on every form of association. […] She has a home, of course. She even has a nation; it is simply that it is an open nation. […] The cleric has a nationality alright, but this nationality is always a point of departure, an invitation to travel and exile. There is, in the nature of the cleric, and of the

[779] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 52.

[780] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 55.

[781] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 57.

> way she faces the world, something which, whether she knows it or wills it or not, opposes blind patriotism.
>
> […] The intellectual is a mediator. This involves moving around, trading in ideas and speculating on them. […] It is not that the figure of the intellectual should be assimilated to the figure of the Jew, or the Jew to the merchant, but there is something in all three which represents the sum of all phobias to have enflamed the imagination of a certain France in the last century. A 'Pétainist intellectual' is a contradiction in terms; a true 'intellectual' is an anti-Pétainist war machine.
>
> The intellectual is a debater. She is, indeed, the embodiment of debate. […] The intelligentsia is that section of society which reminds the rest by its own example that there is no certainty beyond debate. […] Perhaps, in the strict sense, there is no such thing as an atheist intellectual.
>
> […] The intellectual embodies concern for others. […] Should we really mock the stubbornness of those who, extending their circle of familiarity as wide as possible and expanding the idea of 'humanity' in unrivalled ways, end up feeling connected to everything that happens everywhere? There is in this [spirit], which some of our intellectuals have tried to sloganise, something of the dignity of Europe.[782]

This may be true, but it is not - as this book shows - by any means uniquely 'European': the idea that 'one can be alone, or almost alone, to manifest the truth', or that the responsibility of the 'cleric' consists in 'opposing public opinion' and 'the religion of majorities'[783], can pop up anywhere; it is the outcome of a certain form of spiritual self-cultivation which takes unique forms in every *individual*, let alone in different 'civilisations'.

<u>'Les Tâches de la Pensée'</u>

This infinitely personalised realm of the individual spirit, then, is the 'fortress' from which the cleric fulfils her vocation:

> The world is full of talkers. It is full of preachers. It is not short on slogans, syrupy distortions, readymade ideas and clichés. If there is a [social] need for intellectuals, […] it is because no better way has been found for societies to resist the great wave of stereotypes that threaten us every day. […] If we don't want the struggle against racism, the fight for the right to be different, and other progressive causes to descend into totalitarian nightmares, intellectuals must remain on hand to resist the wave.[784]

A society's need for 'public intellectuals', however, must not be confused with the individual's motivation for abandoning her primary vocation - whatever that may be -

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[782] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, pp. 57-60.

[783] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 61.

[784] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 61.

and temporarily entering the public fray as the circumstances dictate: 'If it is clear that we do not always exercise this office as we might, it should be no less clear that there will never be anyone else to perform our specific role for us.'[785]

'L'Avenir d'une illusion'

Lévy wants to 'spiritualise' the Reason, Truth and Justice of the Enlightenment, to make these concepts, discredited in the 20th Century, fit for service again in the 21st:

> I have admitted that faith in Reason has been ruined, and I have shown how and why. But couldn't one now say the same thing for the irrationalisms which replaced it? […] We cannot push for a *grand retour* for Reason, but we can perhaps rediscover the art of debate.
>
> With Truth, too, it is hard to go back; I don't even think it would be desirable, not given the regression, decline and fall [of Truth] precipitated, whether we like it or not, by the 20th-century human sciences and philosophies of suspicion at their best. What I *do* think, however, is that there is truth and truth, idols and ideas. When belief has lost its authority, then gambling becomes reasonable; nothing forbids us from betting on an Idea of truth which these days could have no other function than to wield its slingshot against the mighty theoreticians of the strict equivalence of all points of view. This 'truth' would not 'exist' as such; it would not have a safe haven within the House of Being or a throne in a possible 'ontology'. Open, informulable, indefinitely pursued, definitively unreached and unreachable, it would be the exact opposite of the fixed truths of yesteryear, […] a possible horizon of universality [which] would not leave any border undefended against relativist ideologies.[786]

Such a 'spiritual turn' requires a 'reconstitution of internal hierarchies of value', but such pyramids do not need to be fixed in stone, and it is not the role of 'clerics' to try to draw up blueprints for them[787]; rather, the cleric's responsibility is to embody the 'audacity' required to 'speak beyond one's area of competence', to follow Zola's example of interrupting his work to draft his "*J'accuse*"[788]:

> There is a passage in *La Prisonnière* where Proust compares the music of Vinteuil to a voice which has reached 'its own essence insofar as it replies in the same authentic accent to any question posed to it'. The great musician, he continues, is 'the person who, regardless of the subject in question,

[785] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 61.

[786] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, pp. 71-73.

[787] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 74.

[788] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, pp. 74-75.

remains the same, thereby illustrating the solidity of the architecture of her spirit.' I dream of such surety of accent for all intellectuals.[789]

'Ne Pas Céder sur la pensée'

> *The American right and the 'classical liberals' continue to denounce the 'postmodernism' of the academic left, as if it were still 1984, as if nothing ever changes. They have not detected the massive upswell in the past few years of what is in crucial respects the exact opposite of postmodernism.*
>
> *[…] The millennial revolutionary guard has, by now, mostly through the social media that still confuse the elders, seized symbolic power, and institutional power cannot be far behind.*
>
> *[…] Perhaps, soon enough, if the new guard does not place an outright ban on these materials, it will be possible to go back and read Derrida (though I will not be the one doing this) in the only way any scholar should ever read anyone: as a product of his time and place. I certainly think this is scholarship worth doing; it is something like what I am doing right now in my research on the intellectual context of the University of Halle in the 1730s, discovering all sorts of obscure figures who expressed ideas very much like those of their contemporaries, and who together give a picture of what it would have been like to have inhabited that context. I would never even think of worshipping or fawning over any of them. Late-20th-century Parisian mandarins deserve exactly the same level and kind of interest. It is in fact all any mortal human author ever deserves.*
>
> Justin E.H. Smith

Lévy's ideal view of the 'intellectual' - what he calls an 'intellectual of the third type' - is diametrically opposed both to his postmodern relativist 'mandarin' contemporaries (including Derrida) and to the views expressed here, however eloquently, by Justin E.H. Smith. While Lévy declares 'peace' with 'all those writers who face specific challenges in solitude', such 'work' - whether in the form of academic scholarship or private novel-writing - is only part of the 'work' of the humanities: beyond legitimate 'research on intellectual context' (i.e. the history of ideas) and private literary and artistic creation, there is public problem-solving as well, of a certain spiritual kind:

> The intellectual of the third type will write. She will talk sometimes. But she will no longer blindly follow the religion of engagement.
>
> Still, she will engage. […] For how could she not? How could she resist the invitation? […] She knows that truth is real, but that it doesn't exist. […] If

[789] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 76.

> she thinks of 'socialism' as a mania which insists on telling us that all the world's miseries […] will be cured by a perfect system, then our intellectual of the third type won't be a socialist. […] If she understands 'liberalism' […] as blind faith in the invisible hand, then she won't be a liberal either. […] To love everyone is to love no one. […] I don't love the human 'race'; I couldn't care less about its abstract health. Like Baudelaire - yet again, Baudelaire - I claim the right to choose my individual brothers and sisters in history.[790]

'*Homo Cathodicus*'

The question *how* (i.e. by which means or medium?) to become a contemporary public intellectual is left by Lévy until last; he explicitly wanted to show that the general status of intellectuals could and should be discussed on its own terms without premature reference to the 'famous media trap'[791], which in 1987 meant television. As early as 1926, indeed, Paul Valéry was able to 'lament that Marx, Nietzsche and Darwin had all seen their ideas "instrumentalised, divorced from the intellect that conceived them, isolated from their complex conditions of birth, cut up into punchy and crude formulae", or in other words, "mediatised"'[792]. This oversimplification continues in the television age in the work of 'all those who are persuaded that a soul can be lost or saved in a cathode-ray tube. We aim to offer a bit of distance from this hypnotic idea. […] The TV is there; I use it.'[793] Yet in his epilogue, Lévy is able to see beyond television and into our Jordan Peterson Era, where a 'third way' for the humanities - nay, for public intellectual life - has yet to be found between crude media decontextualisations on the one hand (even if it is 'absurd and unworthy of an intellectual to speak of "the media" in general'[794]) and pigeonholed, inaccessible academic discourses on the other:

> In the coming confrontation between the spirit and that which does not deserve the name of 'culture', nothing would seem to me to be more disastrous than to sulk instead of fighting, to abandon to sloganeers the platforms where the game will from now on be played.
>
> […] It is not the time, in other words, for suave clandestinity. […] We are not like the Troglodytes, or the Christians of the catacombs, or any other chosen élite savouring in secret the intoxications of knowledge vomited forth by the day. We stand for *gai savoir* and shared lights. The season is ripe for it. It is time, therefore, to wage the battle in broad daylight.[795]

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[790] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, pp. 77-78, 81-82.

[791] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 84.

[792] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 84.

[793] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, pp. 84-85.

[794] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, p. 85.

[795] Lévy, *Eloge des Intellectuels*, pp. 93-94.

14. Helen DeWitt's *The Last Samurai*

> *Mr Casaubon's theory of the elements which made the seed of all tradition was not likely to bruise itself unawares against discoveries: it floated among flexible conjectures… it was as free from interruption as a plan for threading the stars together. […] The effect of [Dorothea's] being on those around her, [meanwhile], was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts, and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life.*
>
> George Eliot

Helen DeWitt's The Last Samurai (2000) is dedicated to Ann Cotton, who in 1991 'went to a school in Mola, a village in a remote rural district of Zimbabwe, with the idea of doing research on girls' education. She ended up talking to two schoolgirls who had come 100km alone to attend the school. […] Ann went back to Britain and started raising money for scholarships by selling cakes in Cambridge Market.'[796] The action of The Last Samurai focuses on the unique education of a boy called Ludo in London, but DeWitt's plea to her readers is for a world in which everyone everywhere might enjoy a version of Ludo's freedom.

The idea of vocation as a serious moral category - independent of specific outcomes and in a sense divinely willed - is placed front and centre by DeWitt: already in the Prologue, Ludo's great-grandfather, a Methodist minister, coaxes his son into rejecting a scholarship from Harvard at the age of 15 on the grounds that 'a man with a degree from Harvard would find it hard to resist the temptation of going instantly into a career'[797]. Goaded by his great-grandfather, Ludo's atheist grandfather ends up attending a fee-paying provincial theological seminary instead, because 'it's only fair to give the other side a chance'[798]. While there, he meets the brother of his future wife (Ludo's grandmother), and wins money at the pool table which he later successfully invests in motels. Despite resenting his own father's efforts to 'ruin his life' by denying him the easy privileges of a Harvard education, Ludo's grandfather concludes:

> What would be the odds against going to a seminary and going to synagogue and learning to play pool, just suppose he fell in love with a Jewish girl from Philadelphia and made a fortune in motels and lived happily ever after, say the odds were a billion to one that was still not the same as

[796] Helen DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, (New York: New Directions, 2016(2000)), p. ix.

[797] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 4.

[798] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 3.

> impossible so it was not actually impossible that his father had not, in fact, [ruined everything].[799]

Ludo himself, the reader will see, is the fruition of all this intergenerational effort and angst: his grandfather falls in love with 'a 17-year-old girl with fierce black hair, fierce black eyes & ferocious red lipstick [who] did not look up because she was halfway through her 41st consecutive rendition of Chopin's Prelude No. 24 in D minor'[800], and he is determined to encourage her to follow her unsanctioned dream of becoming a musician. This accumulated sense of purpose - moral rather than utilitarian - will play out in unforeseen ways in the life of Ludo's mother Sibylla, the novel's first narrator, and then in Ludo himself.

Sibylla begins her story across the pond at Oxford in 1985, stranded in graduate coursework which compels her to read obscure and pointless German philological texts:

> 49 people in the English-speaking world know what lay in wait. No one else knows or cares. And yet how much hangs on this moment of revelation! It is only if we can conceive of the world without Newton, without Einstein, without Mozart, that we can imagine the difference between this world and the world in which I close [Roemer's] *Aristarchs Athethesen* and take out *Schachnovelle* in cool disregard for the terms of my scholarship. [But] if I had not read Roemer I would not have known I could not be a scholar, I would never have met Liberace (no, not the) and the world would be short a [genius named Ludo].[801]

Sibylla does not believe her vocation is to 'call up books from the dust and the dark and write thousands of words to be sent down to the dust and the dark which can be called up so that other people can send further thousands of words to join them in the dust and the dark'[802]. This vision of humanities 'scholarship' is doubly wrong:

> I had spent 46+ hours on [Roemer's] bizarre piece of logic at a time when I had read not a word of Musil, or Rilke, or Zweig. But I did not have a scholarship to read things that were merely good; I had a scholarship to make a contribution to knowledge. I had squandered 47 hours at a time when people were dying of starvation & children sold into slavery.[803]

Sibylla is, instead, an obsessive fan of Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*, which provides the kind of 'embodied knowledge' which she and her son need:

> Today I read these terrible words in the paper:

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[799] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 10.

[800] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 10.

[801] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 20.

[802] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 19.

[803] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, pp. 23-24.

> *In the absence of a benevolent male, the single mother faces an uphill battle in raising her son. It is essential that she provide the boy with male role models - neighbours, or uncles, or friends of the family, to share their interests and hobbies.*

> This is all very well but Ludo is an uncleless boy. […] I thought: well, if L needs a role model then let him watch Seven Samurai & he will have 8.[804]

Ludo is an obsessive young child - 'a two-year-old workaholic'[805] - and Sibylla insists that she 'never meant [his education] to happen' the way it did, but in the end the fruits of her method - breaking big tasks like language-learning and mathematics down into tiny, masterable units for her son - liberate him to begin educating himself at a very young age. Sibylla senses that Ludo 'might' be a genius of the Newton or Mozart type, the kind that 'people 10 centuries from now will be interested in'[806], but she also understands that that is not the point, either for her son or herself:

> About a year ago I snatched a moment [from my underpaid typing job] to read *Iliad 16*. [… Later in my typing] I reached the point in an interview with John Denver where the singer explained:
>
> > I have a definition of success, and what success is to me is when an individual finds that thing which fulfils himself, when he finds that thing that completes him and when, in doing it, he finds a way to serve his fellow man. When he finds that he is a successful person.
> >
> > It doesn't make any difference whether you are a ditch-digger or a librarian or someone who works at the filling station or the President of the United States or whatever, if you're doing what you want to do and in some way bringing value to the life of others, then you're a successful human being.
> >
> > It so happens that in my area, which is entertainment, that success brings with it a lot of other things, but all of those other things, the money, the fame, the conveniences, the ability to travel and see the rest of the world, all of those are just icing on the cake and the cake is the same for everybody.[807]

Ludo has not yet reached the service part; he is busy just reading *The Odyssey* in Greek and 'asking every word as he goes along', but for the time being Sibylla finds it 'lovely that he is enjoying the story'[808]; she is convinced that, as her hero

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[804] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 26.

[805] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 41.

[806] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 28.

[807] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, pp. 44-45.

[808] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 53.

Schoenberg puts it in the novel, meaning in art and life 'will not come through imitation of some prototype, and not as technical accomplishment; for it is far more a matter of mind and spirit (Geist) than of material, and the Geist must be ready'[809]. Ludo's thirst for multilingual vocabulary is an expression of this desire for self-cultivation - strongly felt but not knowing where it will lead. Sibylla is naturally anxious about the social consequences of educating her son so differently from his peers, but she quickly senses that reading *The Odyssey* in Greek at home (and on the cheap and warm London Underground) will do Ludo much more good than sending him into a stultifying and dangerous school system; by the end of the novel we see that the young man has become a moral example, not just an intellectual one, and that he is capable of friendship with great human beings of all ages.

Sibylla's one-night stand with a midbrow bore she nicknames 'Liberace' was just that: she decided there was no reason to involve him in the education of a boy who, despite the single-parent family's ongoing economic hardships, was doing just fine. She finds creative ways to balance the demands of her work-from-home typing job and Ludo's learning:

> He got out the dictionary and the Tanach and *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* and he sat down near the fire to read.
>
> I went back to the computer to type, and behind me I could hear the rustle of pages as he looked up word after word after word without asking questions.
>
> An hour went by. I got up to have a cup of tea, and he said Is it alright if I ask a question now?
>
> I said Sure.[810]

Sibylla is offering her son a specific range of high-cultural options - no easy rubbish - but the choices are broad enough to allow Ludo to pick his own path through them. Something in Sibylla has survived of her mother Linda, who had 'seen four [siblings] before her do something that was not so terrible and already there was something about them, their whole lives ahead of them and the best thing cut off', and so there is no question of Ludo being railroaded into 'accounting' or the like; and yet, like her mother, Sibylla ends up missing the train of a true, independent vocation of her own, in her case because of one drunken night. Ludo's education is necessary, but it is not sufficient for her happiness:

> I remember once about 10 years ago, or rather 8, reading *Nicomachean Ethics* Book X in a Circle Line train that had stopped at Baker Street. That lovely soft-grained sepia light filtered down; it was about 11:00 and very quiet. I thought: Yes, to live the life of the mind is the truest form of happiness. Reading Aristotle was not even then my idea of intellectual felicity, but after all it is possible to lead the life of the mind without reading Aristotle. If I could read anything I wanted I would read *The Semantic Tradition from Kant to Carnap*.

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[809] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 59.

[810] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 74.

> This is absolutely not possible today, with L interrupting every minute or so to ask a word. […] He is in a bad mood because he hates having to ask; I think he thinks if he asks enough I will let him bring the Homeric dictionary tomorrow. James Mill wrote an entire history of India in the intervals of providing lexical assistance to little John - but he did not have to load a twin pushchair with a small library [and] a small child […] - and with all the advantages of a wife, servants & a fire in the room he was still impatient and short-tempered.[811]

Still, Ludo 'hates having to ask' his mother as much as she hates having to take him on the Circle Line as a way of keeping warm in winter (they can't afford to have the heating on at home all day). These outings do allow mother and son to confirm to each other, and the reader, that the wider society in which they live has no real idea why the two of them are doing what they are doing, and what the difference is between instrumental reasoning and so-called 'vocational' training on the one hand, and true 'learning for the self' on the other:

> He has been reading the *Odyssey* enough for a straw poll of Circle Line opinion on the subject of small children & Greek.
>
> Amazing: 7
>
> Far too young: 10
>
> Only pretending to read it: 6
>
> Excellent idea as etymology so helpful for spelling: 19
>
> Excellent idea as inflected languages so helpful for computer programming: 8
>
> Excellent idea as classics indispensable for understanding of English literature: 7
>
> Excellent idea as Greek so helpful for reading New Testament, camel through eye of needle for example mistranslation of very similar word for rope: 3
>
> Terrible idea as study of classical languages embedded in educational system productive of divisive society: 5
>
> Terrible idea as overemphasis on study of dead languages directly responsible for neglect of sciences and industrial decline and uncompetitiveness of Britain: 10
>
> Stupid idea as he should be playing football: 1
>
> Stupid idea as he should be studying Hebrew & learning about his Jewish heritage: 1
>
> Marvellous idea as spelling and grammar not taught in schools: 24
>
> (Respondents: 35; Abstentions: 1000?)
>
> Oh, & almost forgot:
>
> Marvellous idea as Homer so marvellous in Greek: 0

[811] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 95.

Marvellous idea as Greek such a marvellous language: 0[812]

DeWitt consciously extends the parallel with John Stuart Mill, but Sibylla finds only 'specious reasons for cruelty' in denying her son the kind of classical education which Mill received as a young child, and which he believed was possible for 'any boy or girl of average capacity and healthy physical constitution'[813]; it is really only laziness and a lack of patience which prevents most parents from doing much better: 'The ease with which a small child may be introduced to what are commonly considered the higher branches of education is nothing to the ease with which it may not.'[814] Nevertheless, Sibylla is conscious of avoiding the spiritual pitfalls of Mill's education; one can keep the baby of Greek while dispensing with the bathwater of soulless utilitarianism:

> Once a failed candidate for Presbyterian ministry, James Mill transferred his devotion to the Utilitarianism of Bentham. As a result, he subjected young John to a cruel rationalist pedagogical experiment. Not only was the latter denied any religious formation, but he was also denied the opportunity to cultivate friendships lest their influence taint the experiment. It's when the adolescent John asserts his own agency and starts to make friends that we see not only a new openness but even a persistent attraction to friends shaped by religious devotion.
>
> […] The young Mill […] 'had the spiritual equivalent to being tone deaf or colour blind.' His capacity for […] 'a devotional sense' — 'a way of fostering one's own identity and sense of self through one's loyalty and emotional connection to another entity' — was, early in his life, stunted and undeveloped. But here's another way that Harriet Taylor was so central to Mill's life. Not only was she his intellectual soulmate, but she also triggered something in Mill: his 'relationship with Harriet Taylor […] causes his sealed devotional sense dramatically and emphatically to burst forth and flow in torrents down this one tunnel of love'.[815]

The plot of *The Last Samurai* will be driven by Ludo's quest for a father - a 'soulmate' rather than a mere genetic forebear. Far from wishing to deny Ludo this privilege, Sibylla seeks to liberate Ludo to search for his own spiritual equal(s) by first allowing him to cultivate his own spirit, which he does partly through 'loyalty and emotional connection' to his mother. This connection immunises him against all the 'wonderful marvellous far too young what a genius' comments on the Circle Line, which Sibylla worries must be 'so bad for him'; still, she doesn't regard her son as a 'genius' in any conventional sense, and he therefore avoids the poison of arrogance: 'It seems to me that it does not take miraculous intelligence to master

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[812] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, pp. 97-98.

[813] See DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, pp. 100-101.

[814] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 101.

[815] James K. A. Smith, 'A (Not So) Secular Saint' (Review of Timothy Larsen, *John Stuart Mill: A Secular Life*, (Oxford Spiritual Lives Series, OUP, 2019)), (https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/a-not-so-secular-saint/#!) 6/2/2019 (accessed 18/2/2019).

the simple fact that Ὀδυσσεύς is Odysseus, if you go on to master 5000 similar simple facts you have only shown that you are a master of obstinacy,'[816] Sibylla plausibly concludes. She continues to have pangs of conscience about the path she has chosen for Ludo's education ('Should never never never have told him to read all those things - but too late to retract'[817] etc.), and the reader continually questions the reliability of her narrative: is she responding to the 'monomaniacal'[818] nature of her son or unconsciously imposing her own vicarious agenda on him?[819] Sibylla is certainly interested in geniuses (such as pianist Kenzo Yamamoto, 'currently on concert tour in Britain'[820]), but is this because she is now confronted with one, or because she has been trying to fashion one all along? On the one hand, Yamamoto is as 'monomaniacal' as Ludo; he goes to Chad in search of musical wisdom, survives a brutal and tragic massacre there, and can only conclude 'Well I'd like to go back someday because my last visit wasn't as helpful as I had hoped from a musical point of view.'[821] Something in the callousness of Yamamoto's testimony is haunting to Sibylla - an echo of all she wants to avoid with Ludo - but at the same time there is something in Yamamoto's music which brings her to tears:

> It was as if after the illusion that you could have a thing 500 ways without giving up one he said No, there is only one chance at life once gone it is gone for good you must seize the moment before it goes. […] If there was a mistake then the piece was played just once with a mistake if there was some other way to play the piece you heard what you heard and it was time to go home.[822]

If there is anything 'monstrous' about Ludo's education, DeWitt argues, it is the economics which limit his access to help with his learning and force him to feel guilty about interrupting his busy solo mother all the time:

> I thought if I went downstairs I would probably not bite his head off so I went downstairs.
>
> Ludo was sitting on the floor.
> He said I've finished *Odyssey* 24!
> I said That's WONDERFUL

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[816] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 117.

[817] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 121.

[818] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 142.

[819] A good example is the name Ludovic itself: after hesitating between David and Stephen, Sibylla felt that 'when I got home [from the hospital] it was obvious that his name was actually Ludovic so I called him that having really no choice in the matter' (p. 131).

[820] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 149.

[821] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 156.

[822] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 163.

> and because I always do what I say I'll do I said Well, shall I teach you the *hiragana*?
>
> And he said It's all right, I already know it.
>
> I said What?
>
> He said I learned it myself. Out of the *Japanese Reader*.
>
> I said Well, do you want me to teach you the *katakana*?
>
> He said I know that too. It wasn't too hard.
>
> I said When did you do this?
>
> He said A couple of weeks ago. I thought I would spare you the hassle.
>
> […] I said well do you want me to show you some kanji?
>
> He said I think I can probably do it myself.
>
> I knew what this meant, it meant for all my good intentions I had been a monster.[823]

Perfectionism, nevertheless, is a redeeming force: as mother and son watch *Seven Samurai* together on Ludo's sixth birthday, Sibylla

> suddenly realise[s] that everything is going to be all right, I am providing my fatherless uncleless boy not with 8 male role models (6 samurai 1 gatecrashing farmer's son 1 fearless farmer) but 16 (8 characters 8 actors) 17 including Kurosawa who does not appear. Only one of the characters is a perfectionist in the practice of his art but all 8 actors & the director who does not appear show this terrible perfectionism making a total of 17 male role models (not including the extras).[824]

Ludo takes over the narrative voice in the novel from here, though the identification between mother and son is total ('now we are six,'[825] Sibylla writes as she hands over the narrative baton). She will not let him meet his father until he has learned, like her, to distinguish *poshlost'* in art and 'reached a state of grace beyond pity'[826] for the purveyors of such lazy vulgarity. Ludo is correspondingly worried about the state of his education: he finds Mill's achievements at a corresponding age 'blood chilling', and fears that since 'Mr. Mill was rather stupid and had a bad memory and grew up 180 years ago', he himself will find school difficult.[827] Instead, however, school is unbearable because it is too easy; although his teacher Miss Lewis insists 'there is more to life than how much you know', the problem is not at all that Ludo fails to understand this or to help his classmates, but rather that his mere *presence* in the class, through no fault of his own, demoralises his peers and shows up mainstream education for the disastrous failure it is. Sibylla acquiesces to Ludo's demand to be homeschooled, and enrols him in a judo class up the road instead, where he will 'meet other children [his] age in a structured and moral environment

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[823] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 168.

[824] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, pp. 174-175.

[825] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 175.

[826] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 191.

[827] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 192.

and strive to achieve satori'[828]. This enlightenment has nothing to do with tangible social success or individual utility: Sibylla understands, with Kurosawa, that 'a hero who actually becomes is tantamount to a villain', and that 'to suggest that peace, contentment, happiness, follows a single battle, no matter how important, is literally untrue'[829]. Ludo, however, is forced to watch Sibylla harden slowly into someone 'become' over the course of his childhood; he asks her less and less for help because he doesn't want to hear again, for the umpteenth time, 'about how pay for schoolchildren, the right to death, homosexual marriage and all the other basic requirements of a culture not irredeemably sunk in barbarism will be commonplace by the year 2065'[830]. Ludo's quest for his father begins to feel like a quest for a spiritual equal as much on his mother's behalf as his own. The intrepid smoothtalking luckbox Red Devlin is one such candidate:

> Is Red Devlin my father? I asked.
>
> She said: I don't want to talk about it.
>
> She did not come to earth. My mother was now on a planet with a deadly atmosphere and a gravitational force of 17. Leaning heavily on the chair and looking down at *The Eskimo Book of Knowledge* she said after a pause with a gallant effort:
>
> But what a marvellous language…[831]

In between these moments of gallantry, however, Sibylla is as unable as ever to go soft on those she considers aesthetically, and therefore morally, mediocre: 'Even if she's right, what's bad about these people is that they are bad artists. […] Sibylla does tend to take art too seriously,'[832] Ludo concludes, though perhaps now he is reaching the exact 'state of grace beyond pity' which Sibylla was calling him to all along:

> I thought of saying [to her], I thought you disapproved of people who purely because they happened to arrive on the planet a few years earlier make other people who happened to arrive on the planet a few years later obey them without persuading them of the justice of their position. I thought you thought disenfranchisement on grounds of age the hallmark of a BARBARIC SOCIETY. I thought of saying, How do you know something I don't know is something I don't *want* to know?[833]

Ludo wants to know who his father is because *he* wants to know; he is no more objective in this cause than his mother, but that is beside the point: he does not want to live under the arbitrary tyranny of any single person: 'The great thing about

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[828] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 215.

[829] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 214.

[830] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 224.

[831] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 228.

[832] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 233.

[833] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 238.

having two parents [must be] that each protects you from the other,'[834] he imagines to himself. Still, he is not without love, gratitude or sympathy for his jailer:

> She stopped the video and said she had to work.
>
> She turned on the computer and began typing in text from *Practical Caravanning* 1982. […] She looked about the way you'd expect someone to look who'd once made a terrible mistake.[835]

An 'average' child who had not already tackled *The Odyssey* or similar great literature would, DeWitt whispers to us, be incapable of narrative insights and flights of empathy like this. Likewise, Ludo sees that the problem with the works of midbrow art Sibylla so deplores is that 'they are classicistic rather than classic, pursuing both truth and beauty not for themselves but because manifested in these forms in the great works of the past'[836]. But he should not have to prove this to Sibylla in order to find out who his biological father is: 'All I wanted was something that everyone else in the world takes for granted.'[837]

Ludo finds out soon enough through his own initiative, but it turns out Sibylla had been right all along: 'I'd kept hoping for something so brilliant I couldn't have thought of it myself,'[838] but Val Peters is a first-order disappointment, no match for his Sibylla-educated son: 'If we fought with real swords I would kill him. […] I can't say I'm his son, because it's true.'[839] A good samurai, by contrast, 'will parry the blow' of being told he has a lost son; now that the biological facts are out of the way, Ludo can concentrate on his spiritual quest: finding a grown man who can teach him something he doesn't already know: 'I saw in my mind a street full of tough-looking samurai. […] I could have anyone I wanted [as a mentor].'[840]

<u>Hugh Carey</u>

> *I thought, HE could fight with swords. Here I thought was a man to challenge, a man who knew 50 languages, a man who had faced death a hundred times, a man impervious to praise and ridicule alike. Here was a man who on meeting his son for the first time would*

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[834] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 242.

[835] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 244.

[836] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 244.

[837] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 248.

[838] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 261.

[839] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 280.

[840] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 317.

SURELY encourage him to go to Oxford at the age of 11, or at least take him on an expedition instead.[841]

It is Hugh Carey's extraordinary backstory, involving secret tribes and languages in Central Asia, which initially encourages Ludo to hunt him down. Guilt is the first reflex, but Ludo goes ahead and lies to Carey anyway, not least because he will be world-worn enough to 'parry the blow':

> I thought of him walking across China with the boy [he rescued], and walking across Kazakhstan with a tiny band of men; it was cheap and contemptible to play a trick on someone like that. I should make some excuse and leave. [… But then] I thought that if I were a coward I really would be my father's son.
>
> I said: I wanted to see you because I am your son.[842]

Carey's reaction - 'Nobody ever did anything for me and it never did me any harm'[843] - knocks Ludo off balance at first ('if we had been [fighting with real swords] this might have killed me'[844]), but he soon realises that Carey, for all his exotic exploits, lacks the spiritual finesse of a genuine samurai: 'He had not killed to learn those moodless verbs and uninflected nouns [in Central Asia], but he had brought a slave into existence for their sake.'[845]

<u>George Sorabji</u>

Sorabji was interested in things that bored 90% of the country, and he had strong views with which 99% of the country strongly disagreed, but nobody held it against him. Some people said that say what you like he had the courage of his convictions, and some people said say what you like his heart is in the right place. They said he would lay down his life for his friends. Sorabji had once saved the life of a friend when, visiting the observatory at Mauna Kea, they had taken a helicopter up over a live volcano and crashed inside it, and he had rescued a member of his team, a Ugandan from the Lango tribe placed under house arrest by Idi Amin, by smuggling him out over the Kenyan border under a hail of bullets.

Sorabji had originally come to the attention of the British public through a programme called Mathematics the Universal Language.

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[841] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 318.

[842] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 320.

[843] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 323.

[844] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 325.

[845] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 326.

> *99.99% of the British public were not interested in mathematics, but they were interested in the fact that Sorabji had succeeded in teaching mathematics to a boy from an Amazonian tribe when neither spoke a word of the other's language, and in the fact that he had nearly laid down his life for his friend.*[846]

Nobel Prize winner George Sorabji had more than the gift of the gab; he made viewers of his popular astronomy show feel 'that things might have been different'[847] if only they had had a teacher like him. Sorabji himself was 'largely self-taught'[848], but unlike Carey he seems to understand that, no different from martial arts, 'the more you progress the more you realise that there is more to it than trying to progress': one must also be willing to 'take time away' to 'help train young minds'.[849] His own deficient schooling, moreover, ensured that he 'had never forgotten the things that were kept from people at school'[850]:

> He was obsessed with distance. He had read of stars whose light had left them millions of years ago, and he had read that the light we see may come from stars now dead. He would look up and think that all the stars might now be dead; he thought that they were so far away there would be no way to know.
>
> […] One day he found a book on astronomy in the school library. Because he was interested in distance and the deaths of stars he turned first to a chapter on stellar evolution, and the book fell open on something called the Hertzsprung-Russell diagram, which used brightness and temperature to plot the evolution of stars. Sorabji had never seen anything so wonderful in his life. He had never imagined that a piece of knowledge so wonderful could exist in the universe.
>
> He kept looking at the page thinking: Why have I never heard of this before? Why doesn't everyone know about this?[851]

Crucially for Ludo, however, the evidence suggested that Sorabji 'was not only brilliant but a genuine hero'[852]. At first it all goes swimmingly enough:

> A Nobel Prize winner was saying he thought I could do anything. A Nobel Prize winner was glad I was his son. The whole time he was saying it, even

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[846] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 336.

[847] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 342.

[848] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 345.

[849] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 344. Sorabji's guest, martial arts guru James Davis, is saying these things, but in reference to Sorabji as well as himself.

[850] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 350.

[851] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 349.

[852] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 351.

> though he was saying it seriously, he would suddenly break into a smile as if he had been saving the smile for the son he had always wanted and never had. He was brilliant and he thought I was brilliant. He looked like a movie star and he thought I looked exactly like him.[853]

As Sorabji, however, recounts his weasling out of responsibilities both to his first wife and to the woman he assumes must be Ludo's mother, Ludo gradually begins to worry that 'if we fought with real swords I would kill him; I couldn't tell him I wasn't his son because it was true'[854]. Eventually, however, he realises that he can't not tell him; Sorabji's hotheaded and cruel reaction disqualifies him from the highest rungs of samuraihood.

Mr. Watkins

Next, Ludo finds himself thinking about 'someone who had never pretended to be a hero'[855]: a painter chasing the essence of colour known only as Mr. Watkins, a man capable of travelling to the Arctic and dodging polar bears to find white and bathing in lambs' blood for red. Pursuing the essence of blue in the ocean, Watkins generously invites his boatman to take a plunge of his own and see what he has seen:

> The boatman said later that though later you wanted to find words for it, at the time it was so beautiful that, or rather beautiful would be a word that you would use later but at the time it was so much bigger than that that it would have hurt to talk. He said the one thing he respected in Mr. Watkins was that he had seen just in the look in his eyes that he had seen how big it was and that it would hurt to talk. A lot of people would have had to make a joke or something, but we both knew it was too big for that and we both knew we knew it.[856]

Meeting Watkins in person, however, Ludo realises that he 'could imagine [Watkins] lowering himself into the bathful of blood, and I couldn't imagine him sending the boatman down to a pocket of blue. I was glad to have no part of him.'[857] Watkins admits that he 'couldn't give a toss about religion' and 'cared only about colour'[858]; this sick divorce between passion and moral or spiritual purpose leads Watkins to

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[853] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, pp. 361-362.

[854] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 368.

[855] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 379.

[856] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 381.

[857] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 391.

[858] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 390.

find ‘specious reasons for cruelty’; he even makes Ludo bleed - in the name of art of course[859] - in an act of animal revenge for his ‘son trick’.

Mustafa Szegeti

> *Sibylla thinks no one is put off by difficulty only by boredom and if something is interesting no one will care how hard it is. […] I was getting rather frustrated but I thought I would rather die than sell the heart, not because I wanted to keep it but because it would be horrible to take money for it.*
>
> *[…] This is delightful, said Sibylla. If you were at school they would not let you read a book like this, they would keep you from reading it by involving you in sport. […] I wish I understood [it], said Sibylla, and she flashed a bitter look at [the]* Carpworld 1991 *[she was forced to type for money], but I’m glad you’ve come upon it so young. Approximately simple harmonic motion - it sounds so Platonic, doesn’t it? Plato says - oh what does Plato say?*
>
> *[…] Her face was pinched and grey. Her eyes were burning. The next day I took the heart out and put it in my backpack and left the house.*[860]

Mustafa Szegeti’s background as a card-playing humanitarian diplomat impersonator offers Ludo both a chance to make money and to realise that ‘it’s not just the money’[861]: instead of typing for less than minimum wage and watching her life slowly disappear, Sibylla would be better off following Szegeti’s example:

> When I got home Sibylla had finished *Carpworld.* She sat in the soft chair in the front room huddled over *Teach Yourself Pali*. Her face was as dark and empty as the screen.
>
> […] Anything would be better than this. Is this supposed to be for my sake? How can it be for my sake if I hate it? It would be better to be wild and daring and gamble everything we had.[862]

Szegeti comes closest of the samurai so far to providing Ludo with spiritual nourishment: he sees through Ludo’s son routine ‘in a second’[863], invites him in for a meal, tells stories of his reluctant heroism in - among other places - Guatemala (‘I

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[859] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 395. ‘You know the old joke. I suffered for my art and now it’s your turn.’

[860] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 399.

[861] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 403.

[862] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 409.

[863] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 413.

thought: I'm damned if I spend the rest of my life telling myself I'm not yellow'[864]), and generally forces Ludo to consider the limits of his own Circle Line education ('if you'd got out of as many tight spots as I have with no better protection than a diplomatic immunity you'd invented five minutes before you'd take luck a damn sight more seriously than any arguments'[865]). But in the end, he cannot help Ludo with his Sibylla problem:

> Do you really want me to pronounce on someone you've known for 11 years and I've never met, on the basis of a lot of other people I have met?
>
> […] I'm not likely to be much good to you on this one. If you need a friend one day give me a shout. In the meantime I'll give you an arrow against misfortune - I'll teach you piquet.
>
> […] I hope you find what you're looking for. Look me up in ten years or so. If you've learnt bridge and are halfway decent I'll take you to the Jockey Club.[866]

Red Devlin

> *I had started by picking the wrong kind of father, but now I knew what to look for I could build up a collection of 20 or so. I felt ashamed, really ashamed of all the years I'd spent trying to identify the father who happened to be mine, instead of simply claiming the best on offer.*[867]

Unlike the 'dandy' and 'charlatan' Szegeti, who always fortuitously escapes his scrapes, the equally exotic Red Devlin has seen and survived the wicked worst of humanity, from Lebanon to Azerbaijan and beyond: kidnapping, torture, years of imprisonment:

> What do you think it's like to see a bloody socket where a thumb went? He was crying with the other eye. […] It's not the blood, it's the fact that a human did that.
>
> […] You need to set something against it.[868]

Red's problem is that he cannot; Ludo will try everything to prevent him from committing suicide, but in the end there is nothing he can say:

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[864] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 419.

[865] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 424.

[866] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 428.

[867] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 432.

[868] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 441.

> It's not just that you've seen stupid thugs with another language and a foreign uniform commit atrocities, but someone pretty much like yourself say I'm sorry there's nothing I can do. If you're lucky the person will say Well, I'll write to the Minister.
>
> […] If I've got 50 years ahead of seeing the eye and the leg and the girl and the rest and the best I can hope for is someone promising to write to the Minister I'd be better off if I were out of it now.
>
> The friendliness [of my Azerbaijani captor] was the horrible part, because he'd be hurt, genuinely *hurt*, when I wasn't pleased to see him or took offence because he'd beat the shit out of me the day before. And now that I'm back [home in London] that's all I see. That horrible friendliness everywhere.[869]

Ludo identifies the question his new friend faces - 'the question is whether it is really the case that nothing will blot out these memories and that nothing could be good enough to make it worth undergoing them' - but then reaches the unavoidable conclusion that 'if that's the question you can't seriously expect me to know the answer'.[870] Still, he just wants to spend time with this man:

> It didn't really matter what he said. You could see that he was someone who could make someone who had seen his male relatives lined up and shot at the age of four and his female relatives raped and then shot want to play chess. When you were with him you wanted to go on being with him whatever he said. When you made a joke and he laughed you wanted to do ten handsprings. […] And I started thinking: What if he changed his mind?[871]

But he doesn't change his mind; Ludo finds the body:

> I put his arm by his side again and cried on its chilly shoulder. It was alright to do this now that it couldn't make him feel he had to make an effort, maybe even that he had to go on being sick.
>
> I spent the night beside it. I felt better with the dead thing beside me, reminding me that he had killed the clubbed child and the weeping eye.[872]

<u>'I'm a Genuine Samurai'</u>

'A good samurai,' DeWitt reminds us a hundred times, 'will parry the blow'. Ludo 'didn't look for another father'[873] after Devlin, but he did try to persuade Kenzo Yamamoto to make a CD 'for the type of person who [like Sibylla] thinks boredom a

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[869] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, pp. 442-443, 445.

[870] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 446.

[871] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 452.

[872] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 463.

[873] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 473.

fate worse than death'[874] and who is unafraid to flout convention and petty feelings in search of the 'marvellous'.

Afterword

DeWitt's 2016 Afterword focuses less on Ludo than the conditions of his possibility:

> We don't even live in a society where libraries have, as a matter of course, the sort of collection that might inspire exploration of great literary repertoires outside school. […] We do live in a society where the humanities are increasingly dismissed as impractical, and whatever counts as STEM is A Good Thing because practical.
>
> […] It's not hard to imagine a world where the effect of the book on what has been a coterie of readers is multiplied to the point where general assumptions about what is possible are changed.
>
> […] A world in which large numbers of small children steal their siblings' *Imagier Franco-Japonais* is by no means unflawed, but it looks better than what we have. We should fight for it when and where we can.[875]

If Ludo was unable to prevent Red Devlin from committing suicide, then that was only because Red, for all his human qualities, did not have the spiritual resources of a Sibylla-style education to call on: 'It was hard to imagine him fitting into the kind of lifestyle where you could learn Greek at a reasonable age'; he was the kind of parent who thought Sesame Street was 'about the right level' for young children.[876] Sibylla, by contrast, is able to soldier on as a working solo mother because she is unable to 'live with nothing unknown in front of her'[877]; she constantly forces new, unknown and marvellous things into her mind as a way of challenging the *status quo*. She wants the same for her son, and is willing to make enormous sacrifices to ensure he gets it. Rather than imprisoning ourselves in the assumption that an education and career should play out according to a standard, safe script, DeWitt shows us that true spiritual freedom - of the kind achieved by Ludo thanks to his privileged education - consists in the ability to 'parry the blows' of fortune.

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[874] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 480.

[875] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, pp. 483-484.

[876] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 452.

[877] DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, p. 470.

15. Taha Abdurrahman's *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*

Every spirit is a life, but not every life is a spirit.

Taha Abdurrahman

Taha Abdurrahman's 2013 book *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr (Dialogue as Horizon of Thought)* is an attempt by a Muslim philosopher (1944-) to defend the 'Islamic right to philosophical difference' while at the same time impressing upon his readers the urgency of universal 'kinship-creation' to correct the ills and excesses of modern instrumental rationality. We will focus on excerpts from this short book in a bid to provide an introduction for the uninitiated to a prolific Moroccan author whose recent book titles include *The Spirit of Religion* (2012), *The Poverty of Secularism* (2014) and *The Religion of Decency* (2017).

'From the Experience of Poetry to the Experience of the Spirit'

In the first of several dialogues with Tunisian journalist Malik al-Tariki, Abdurrahman recounts his journey from poetry to philosophy:

> I started my intellectual life at an early age by writing poems, and I continued until I was 22. I wrote poems which even drew positive critical attention, but I gave up writing poetry for several reasons.
>
> The first of these - though there were several - was the Arab defeat in 1967. This defeat produced a veritable earthquake inside me. […] I felt that the intellectual path which lay before me wasn't the right one, and I was seized at the time by the question of my destiny and by the question: What force of reason defeated us, a nation with such a large population and proud history?[878]

Abdurrhahman would go on to complete a PhD in Philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris before returning to Morocco to teach. This experience of immersion in 'Western' modes of thought, however, eventually led him back to the realm of poetry, but this time in an adult way:

> By the time I had completed my specialist training in Philosophy, the limits of narrowly 'philosophical' thinking were already clear to me; the 'reason' which had defeated the Arabs [in 1967] was itself limited. The Islamic Umma possessed a reason which was broader than the one which had defeated us, but it had not accepted responsibility for this inheritance; a feeling was born in me that my philosophical training obliged me to seek truth even beyond the limits of reason. […] This all led me to seek another path to the beyond of logic, and I was sure that language at this level of knowledge

[878] Taha Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr (Dialogue as Horizon of Thought)*, (Beirut: Arab Network for Research and Publishing, 2013), p. 17.

> could not be the mere language of ordinary communication, but rather the language of suggestion, authentic and beautiful.[879]

This *lughat ul-wujud* ('language of existence') or *lughat ur-rawh* ('language of the spirit') is found in a poetry beyond philosophy, not the pre-philosophical poetry of Abdurrahman's adolescence but a mature, philosophically self-aware creativity.[880] Complex feelings of humiliation play an obvious part in this evolution, as if the goal all along were to reaffirm the Islamic cultural heritage in the face of what he perceives as a dominant, modern, 'Western' instrumentalism, and as if the West has no spirituality or poetry of its own to offer. His post-1967 dialogue with Western philosophy, however, is the *start* of his adult journey; beyond all postcolonial wrangling and guilt, there is something excessive in modernity's reliance on reason, and something which civilisations everywhere can bring to bear on the problem, both for themselves and others:

> Among the fruits of this spiritual experience [of poetry] was the fact that it infinitely broadened my horizons. […] It added a hue to the knowledge I had acquired via the path of simple and limited reason, the reason which had nevertheless been the cause of Arab and Islamic defeat [in 1967].
>
> […] If the defeat had pulled me out of myself and brought me to feelings for an Other, it was a national Other, a sense of belonging to the Umma; this second turn brought me to the Universal Other, a sense of belonging to existence as a whole. […] I started looking at the things around me as if they contained secrets of faith, […] and as if they were expressing that faith in their own private languages.[881]

'The path of the spirit is the path of falling in love with the universe,' Abdurrahman concludes, 'based on a relationship of courtship and proximity to things, not domination over them or action upon them.'[882] The paradigm example of this attitude is Wittgenstein, 'no simple scientist or thinker, but a spiritual man'[883] capable of quoting the poetry of Tagore in his lectures.[884] Like Wittgenstein and even Borges, Abdurrahman has reached the end of 'philosophy' understood as a narrow, technical, adversarial discipline, and seen beyond to the 'horizon' of a more narrative, experiential and dialogical vision of humanistic endeavour.

<u>'From the Competition Paradigm to the Logic of Dialogue'</u>

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[879] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 18.

[880] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, pp. 18-19.

[881] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, pp. 19-20.

[882] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 21.

[883] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 22.

[884] See Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 22.

If the sciences are necessarily characterised, on at least one level, by ruthless struggle for triumph over error, the humanities, though no less serious, are ultimately participative in a different way: 'My dialogue with others is a dialogue for self-knowledge. […] Such dialogue is a human duty,'[885] Abdurrahman argues, a duty made manifest by the sheer plurality and diversity of the universe as a whole. Since we so obviously have independent spiritual lives from one another, we are compelled, upon perceiving this diversity, to celebrate it both in ourselves and others; since 'we cannot deny the plurality of religious truths'[886] in the human world, we are bound to give and take from each other. There can be no lasting zero-sum victory in this sphere for any of the individual participants; individual battles may be won by philosophical argument or aesthetic and poetic means, but there is no overall war in which victory is either desirable or possible: we are the inalienable possessors of our own spiritual lives. Dialogue is simply the means *par excellence* by which we each become conscious of this unique patrimony.

At its best, adversarial debate can be a 'shared quest'[887]; the challenge for Abdurrahman is how to keep his feelings about the glories of Islam and the shortcomings of Western-driven modernity in check for long enough to be balanced both in his praise of Islam ('the argumentative power of the sacred texts of Islam has no equal among other religious texts'[888]) and his critique of limited 'Western' reason ('even Habermas is now looking for a dialogical form of rationality'[889] etc.): claiming that Islam is the most dialogical of all faiths is in any case a contradiction in terms. He does better when he says simply that 'a good Muslim has no reason to fear dialogue'[890]; moreover, engagement with foreign traditions is exemplarily embedded in the rich Islamic philosophical tradition itself (witness Ibn Sina 'reading Aristotle forty times in order to understand him'[891]); without this commitment to learning - both the knowledge it transmitted and the example it provided to others - the Western Renaissance and Enlightenment would themselves have been impossible.[892]

'From Ranking Translations to the Concern for Creativity in Translation'

The translation ethic which emerges from this dialogical view of intellectual exchange is one in which beauty is privileged, not over truth, but over

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[885] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, pp. 29-30.

[886] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 32.

[887] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 33.

[888] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 34.

[889] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 35.

[890] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 34.

[891] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 71.

[892] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, pp. 35-36.

meaninglessness; genuine creativity is more loyal to an original text and its author than blind submission:

> The concern for creativity reached the point of obsession with me, […] for it is the sign of health; if you are creative you are alive. But - sorry to say this - we are now like the walking dead; to come back to life, we have no choice but to walk through the doors of creativity.[893]

Instead of blindly 'translating' Western philosophy and other foreign intellectual material, Arab translators must recover the self-confident art of adding their own creative twist to it:

> Creativity produces something which has never existed before, something which no one else has ever done. But it is also more than mere innovation insofar as it adds beauty to the world; when we say that something is 'marvellous' we mean that it has reached the end of the rainbow, where beauty lies. The true creator is the one who gives birth to things in which the meaning of beauty is realised.[894]

It is the attempt that matters; Abdurrahman offers the example of translating Descartes's *Cogito ergo sum* into Arabic:

> This expression - 'Look, and you will find' - opens the doors of creativity insofar as it adds something to the Latin and French originals. The author of the *Cogito* wanted, first and foremost, to establish 'the existence of the self', and then to infer the existence of God and the world from this premise. My solution opens up this path [for the Arab reader]: we can say 'Look, and you will find yourself'; 'Look, and you will find God'; and 'Look, and you will find the world' in that order.[895]

If a translation is not loyal, it cannot be beautiful, but if it is not beautiful, it cannot be loyal; Abdurrahman wants at all costs to avoid a dull aping of Western rationalism in the Arabic rendition, and to give his reader the strongest possible text to read. This involves his own creative addition to the Cartesian project, not in the name of

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[893] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 68.

[894] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 68.

[895] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 78.

competition or wilful misrepresentation for personal advantage, but precisely in the name of a 'shared quest'.[896]

'Modernity on the Weighing Tray of Ethics'

Abdurrahman wants desperately in his work to 'transcend the values of globalisation', which he believes have turned human beings into tradeable merchandise - above all to themselves - and destroyed the authentic and autonomous spiritual dimension of individual human life. 'Price is the opposite of value,' he decides, but instead of recognising this, we are busy 'drowning in the selfishness of consumption', and are correspondingly squeezed, out of a 'limitless love of profit', into 'pitiless competition' with each other for scarce resources.[897] This 'mercantile relationship' - with the natural world, with God and ultimately with ourselves - reduces us to 'means' to the higher end of abstract profit, even our own profit; initiatives in the 1990s and early 2000s to define a Global Ethic, at the level of the United Nations, the Parliament of the World's Religions and beyond, have all failed to challenge this central phenomenon of mercantilisation unleashed by the forces of global trade.[898] At best, such well-meaning projects seek to 'sterilise' the wounds of individual alienation (with concepts like 'sustainable development', the 'Golden Rule' and other such platitudes); they do not reconnect the individual with the 'sources of faith', but instead merely reflect the materialism which has already carried the day.[899] The challenge of 'spiritual development' in the age of globalisation, meanwhile, requires a wholesale shift from a desire for mere control over the world to a desire for 'trusteeship' (*i'timaniyya*) of the world and oneself, a desire to assume responsibility for everything that happens in the world on our watch. Beauty alone, not the convenience of modern technology and trade, can

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[896] This vision of the ethics of translation also fits closely with that offered by Mark Polizzotti in his *Sympathy for the Traitor* (MIT Press, 2018):

> Less interested in general claims than particular choices, Polizzotti invites us to discard much if not all of contemporary translation theory, as well as old chestnuts like the pessimistic notion that translators are traitors to their source texts (as in the famous Italian pun *traduttore, traditore*), or its more optimistic counterpart, that translators are basically benign servants of cross-cultural understanding. Instead, Polizzotti urges us to consider translation as 'less a problem to be solved than an achievement to be celebrated'. He affirms translation for its own sake as a kind of art. […] 'One's primary responsibility as a translator,' writes Polizzotti, 'is to create a new literary text to the best of one's abilities and by whatever means appropriate.' (V. Joshua Adams, 'Translation Without Theory', https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/translation-without-theory/, 7/10/2018 (accessed 22/2/2019)).

[897] See Taha Abdurrahman, 'Su'al al-Qiyam wa Tahaddiyat al-'Awlama', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WrXNnpHs7Kc&t=2160s, 29/5/2013 (accessed 22/2/2019).

[898] See Abdurrahman, 'Su'al al-Qiyam wa Tahaddiyat al-'Awlama'.

[899] See Abdurrahman, 'Su'al al-Qiyam wa Tahaddiyat al-'Awlama'.

achieve this transcendence of the present moment and unleash a sense of transtemporal and transgenerational responsibilty.[900]

True 'modernity', Abdurrahman argues, is more than a series of Western historical developments - the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution and so on - but rather a 'generalisable' spirit of creativity: 'Modernity is the gift of creativity itself.'[901] Nevertheless, the very historical developments which liberated this creativity in the first place inadvertently risk placing it in a new straitjacket of 'rationalism' and 'secularism', a 'reason devoid of all reference to divinity' and a 'modernity which follows the path of science in all things'[902]. It is the dialogical responsibility of individuals and civilisations everywhere to ensure that modernity does not devolve further than it already has from its creative promise: 'A person's interest in the world beyond the grave is not a departure from her interest in this one, but rather a means of redoubling her interest in the here and now.'[903]

The Muslim commitment to 'revelation' as an intellectual category is seen by Abdurrahman as a fertile corrective to Western approaches which have sought to 'sever the link with religious faith' and even - post-Rousseau and post-Comte - to question the 'immortality of the human spirit itself'.[904] Attempts to preserve Christian values without Christian faith - as enshrined in the 'Liberté, Fraternité, Égalité' of the French Revolution - ultimately fail; by the second half of the 20th Century, the need for a 'reenshrinement' of humanistic values was apparent to all those concerned with human survival into the 21st Century.[905] From Anglo-American megachurch leaders to French philosophers such as Levinas and Derrida, evidence of a late-20th-century 'respiritualisation' of Western intellectual and cultural life abounds[906], but the Islamic world, with its rich heritage, can add much to this global 'call for reenshrinement'; whereas Christianity has a long tradition of distinguishing 'what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God', thereby fomenting the illusion that one can have 'applied ethics' devoid of reference to divine law[907], Muslims can add their own creative twist to the project of modernity:

> We have already defined modernity as creativity. […] I am not against importing creative ideas from others, but only on the condition that we remain open to improving what we import. Those of us who take from the

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[900] See Abdurrahman, 'Su'al al-Qiyam wa Tahaddiyat al-'Awlama' as well as several recent titles, including Taha Abdurrahman, *Din al-Haya: Min al Fiqh al-intimariyy ila-l-Fiqh al-I'timaniyy*, (Al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya lil-Fikr wa-l-Ibda'', 2017).

[901] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 97.

[902] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, pp. 97-98.

[903] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 99.

[904] See Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 101.

[905] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 102.

[906] See Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 103.

[907] See Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 104.

> West - and I have taken plenty in my time - have to inject our own something into them.[908]

The Enlightenment idea that human beings are 'individual selves capable of taking matters into their own hands', and that these selves 'have both rights and responsibilities', is entirely consistent with the Islamic heritage; what is now needed is a 'refounding of faith' in human creativity itself, lest the spark of selfhood be lost in a sea of scientism.[909] Abdurrahman wants to argue that this is only possible, in the final analysis, with an embrace of our *'ubudiyya lil-Lah*[910], but this will require some very creative translation: 'slavery to God' is unlikely to win the hearts and minds of a generation of Westerners raised on a diet of New Atheism. Still, this creativity is what we owe both to ourselves and our dialogue partners; perhaps there are, without returning to premodern literalism, ways of understanding the concepts of *wahy* ('revelation') and *'ubudiyya* ('submission') which pay Islamic civilisation the same respect that Abdurrahman pays Western philosophy by creatively engaging with it.

'Freedom of Expression and the Right to Difference'

The idea of 'binding restrictions' (*taqyid*), Abdurrahman argues, is understood by many 'in both East and West' to be 'hostile to the very idea of freedom', even if it is impossible to understand rights without duties or freedom without responsibility.[911] The challenge is to shift language to more positive talk of 'cultivation' (*tahdhib*) of freedom of expression and the right to difference; in other words, what are the 'bonds of value' (*al-quyud al-akhlaqiyya*) that precede and constrain freedom of expression and the right to difference in the first place, beyond all legal and political considerations?[912] And what, ultimately, is the relationship between freedom of expression and the right to difference?[913] Do I squash your right to difference when I exercise my freedom of expression (or *vice versa*)? Abdurrahman sees a 'contemporary conflict between Muslims and Westerners' in these mutually vicious terms:

> It is a struggle between the right of Muslims to difference and the right of Westerners to freedom of expression. [Too many] Muslims have their own peculiar need for 'religion', just as [too many] Westerners have their own pathological attachment to 'expression'. […] [On the one hand], the attachment to [Islam] has become stronger [for many] than their attachment to their own spirit, while [on the other] outsiders see nothing in this religion

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908 Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, pp. 104-105.

909 Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 107.

910 Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 111.

911 Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 174.

912 See Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 176.

913 Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 177.

> which is worthy of individual self-sacrifice. […] There is no doubt that the abuses and assaults and attacks on our religion, our Prophet, our history and our people will continue unabated; indeed, they will harden and spread. Some on our side will encourage this by aping those around them and enjoying the pleasures of belonging to the tribe, and some on the other side will fuel the conflict out of a desire to prolong our subjugation. […] [On both sides, however,] what I call the 'person stuck in the present hour' (*insan al-sa'a*) has lost her direction and spiritual orientation, […] that which guides her in cultivating a sense of self which transcends the whims of the present moment.[914]

Abdurrahman calls on his predominantly Muslim readers to understand what they can do from their side to halt the spread of this spiritual blindness: namely, to return to the very sources which inspire satire and mockery beyond the walls of the House of Islam - the Qur'an and Sunna - and creatively to 'extrapolate' from them until both they and the critics and satirists of Islam are forced to confront the limits of their own outlooks.[915] This is also a simultaneous challenge to non-Muslims to do the same in reverse - with non-canonical texts from other literary, philosophical and religious traditions - in the name of an ongoing 'shared quest' synonymous with the 'creativity' of modernity.

'Dialogue in the Shadow of a Single Civilisation and Myriad Terrorisms'

After a few contortions defining 'civilisation' and 'culture', Abdurrahman asks how 'dialogue' is possible 'in a world dominated by a single civilisation'[916], by which he presumably means Western-style capitalism as adopted in more and less democratic forms around the world. Under the yoke of such cultural hegemony, 'terrorism' in a multiplicity of guises - economic and psychological as well as physical, perpertrated by those in power as well as those without it[917] - seems inevitable. Reigning secular materialism is described as *mutafarrida* or 'self-isolating', uninterested in dialogue[918] with spiritual traditions; and while it may seem that there can be no dialogue with terroristic violence of any kind either, this deadlock of hegemony and terrorism must somehow be broken. Between 'dialogue as kinship-creation' (*al-hiwar at-taqwimiyy*) and 'dialogue as negotiation' (*al-hiwar at-tafawudiyy*), Abdurrahman infinitely prefers the former, because it is 'not about one of the parties winning or establishing the superiority of her own existing cultural values' or 'defending her own private material interests', but rather about penetrating the circle of trust in the first place, from which both praise and constructive critique can successfully be launched: 'The best civilisation is the one

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[914] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, pp. 177-179.

[915] See Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 180.

[916] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 182.

[917] See Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 183.

[918] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 183.

where dialogue as kinship-creation dominates, and the worst is the one where dialogue as negotiation prevails.'[919]

Abdurrahman is far from optimistic that the current global civilisational *status quo* encourages dialogue as kinship-creation, but this 'immense civilisational challenge' must be faced by humanity as a whole.[920] If individual nuclear families struggle with the business of 'kinship creation', what hope for a single, globalised world? Abdurrahman at least forces us to confront the dangers of a dismissive approach to any particular doctrine: if something is taken seriously by someone somewhere, then there must be reasons for it and beauty in it; if the 'creativity' of modernity is as limitless in scope as we might like to think, or as we might need it to be, then surely we can all find ways to engage authentically with things we don't think we like without falling into either relativistic platitudes or cheap and nasty putdowns. This spiritual responsibility to be creative in the name of kinship-creation with others, however, only emerges once we have a sense of ourselves as transcending our own immediate bodily interests; it involves effort and sacrifice, the patience to learn entire languages. It is the credibility of the effort which counts, never what you say exactly, but always why you say it.

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[919] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, pp. 186-187.

[920] Abdurrahman, *Al-Hiwar Ufuqan lil-Fikr*, p. 187.

16. David Brooks's *The Road to Character*

You go online, you do work nobody else wants to do so somebody pays attention to you, and then you get well known for being a smart person who's willing to work hard. I think that's probably still the way to go. The obvious lessons are: say yes to everything. You don't know what's going to lead to what. So when you're 24, say yes to every opportunity.

[…] And the other thing is… This was Richard Holbrooke's advice to young people, which was, 'Know something about something.' You've got to have a body of information to bring to the table.

[…] There's a guy, a friend of mine named Fred Swaniker, who grew up in Africa, and his mother was a teacher, and he was educated here. He founded a school in South Africa called the African Leadership Academy, and he was trying to figure out what to do with the rest of his life. And he said—which is true advice—when you're thinking about what to do with your life, don't say what do I want from life? Ask: what is life expecting of me? […] What problems are around me that are really calling me? And then, one, is it a big problem? You've got to fall in love with a big problem because if you have some human capital, you might as well go for the big problem. Two, is it a problem your life history has made you uniquely qualified to serve? So Swaniker decided education in Africa is the big problem, and there need to be more universities for all of Africa.

And he said, 'Actually, I'm uniquely qualified to do that because I did grow up across all of Africa. I was an educator; my mom was an educator. I did have the advantage of an American education. I did go back and form a Pan-African high school. So I'm going to start universities.' He's already started one in Mauritius, and I think he's on schedule to start another 10 or 15 universities across Africa, which is an audacious goal, but it's one that he was uniquely qualified to serve.

Fred Buechner has [a great definition] of a vocation, which is, 'Find the spot where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need.'[921]

David Brooks

The Road to Character (2015), a '#1 New York Times bestseller', begins by breaking human nature down into a simple binary designed to be grasped by any reader, whether she literally believes in the idea of Adam or not: 'Adam I' is the unimproved, greedy animal intent on pleasure and survival from one hour to the

[921] David Brooks, 'David Brooks on Youth, Morality and Loneliness', https://medium.com/conversations-with-tyler/david-brooks-tyler-cowen-religion-plurality-loneliness-new-york-times-diversity-eb051a4b47cc, 6/6/2018 (accessed 25/2/2019).

next; 'Adam II' is that other, cultivated thing, with a sense of overall narrative purpose in life, not teleological as such, but still somehow meaningful:

> The subjects of the portraits [in this book] are a diverse set, white and black, male and female, religious and secular, literary and non-literary. None of them is even close to perfect. But they practised a mode of living that is less common now. They were acutely aware of their own weaknesses. They waged an internal struggle against their sins and emerged with some measure of self-respect. And when we think of them, it is not primarily what they accomplished that we remember - great though that may have been - it is who they were.
>
> […] Occasionally, even today, you come across certain people who seem to possess an impressive inner cohesion. They are not leading fragmented, scattershot lives. They have achieved inner integration. […] They are not blown off course by storms. They don't crumble in adversity.
>
> […] They make you feel funnier and smarter when you speak with them. They move through different social classes not even aware, it seems, that they are doing so. […] They aren't dropping little hints of their own distinctiveness and accomplishments.
>
> […] In these people, […] the climb to success has surrendered to the struggle to deepen the soul. […] Adam I bows down before Adam II. These are the people we are looking for.[922]

Though the cast of characters - mostly Anglo-American - is less 'diverse' than claimed, and though the book is written squarely in and for the United States, most readers outside the Anglosphere will still recognise a similar cultural shift in their own countries (not least under the influence of American popular culture). After listening to a radio broadcast on the American victory in the Second World War, Brooks got out of his car,

> went inside and turned on a football game. A quarterback threw a short pass to a wide receiver, who was tackled almost immediately for a two-yard gain. The defensive player did what all professional athletes do these days in moments of personal accomplishment. He did a self-puffing victory dance, as the camera lingered.
>
> It occurred to me that I had just witnessed more self-celebration after a two-yard gain than I had heard after the United States had won World War II.
>
> This little contrast set off a chain of thoughts in my mind. It occurred to me that this shift might symbolise a shift in culture, a shift from a culture of self-effacement that says 'Nobody's better than me, but I'm no better than anyone else', to a culture of self-promotion that says 'Recognise my accomplishments, I'm pretty special'. That contrast, while nothing much in itself, was like a doorway into the different ways it is possible to live in this world.[923]

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[922] David Brooks, *The Road to Character*, (New York: Random House, 2015), pp. xvi-xvii.

[923] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 4-5.

A culture in which 'self-advertising' and 'self-promotion', however shameless, is so richly and easily rewarded is in any case a culture in which it is 'harder to be good'[924]; by contrast, 'there is 'something aesthetically beautiful' about the 'ethic of self-sacrifice and self-effacement' on display in the old radio shows about the war, the old Girl Scout handbooks and so on[925]: 'The external drama up the ladder of success is important,' Brooks concedes, 'but the inner struggle against one's own weaknesses is the central drama of life. As the popular minister Harry Emerson Fosdick put it in his 1943 book *On Being a Real Person*, "The beginning of worthwhile living is thus the confrontation with ourselves."'[926] This self-cultivation, however, is not exactly a solitary or antisocial pursuit: 'As Thomas Merton wrote, "Souls are like athletes that need opponents worthy of them, if they are to be tried and extended and pushed to the full use of their powers."'[927]

Brooks finds himself trapped in a very sin-heavy, almost medieval vocabulary when trying to talk about this individual 'moral struggle' in English, but he wants creative translation solutions fit for a diverse modern readership:

> Character is built not only through austerity and hardship. It is also built sweetly through love and pleasure. When you have deep friendships with good people, you copy and then absorb some of their best traits. When you love a person deeply, you want to serve them and earn their regard. When you experience great art, you widen your repertoire of emotions. Through devotion to some cause, you elevate your desires and organise your energies.
>
> Moreover, the struggle against the weaknesses in yourself is never a solitary struggle. No person can achieve self-mastery on his or her own. Individual will, reason, compassion, and character are not strong enough to consistently defeat selfishness, pride, greed, and self-deception. Everybody needs redemptive assistance from outside - from family, friends, ancestors, rules, traditions, institutions, exemplars, and, for believers, God. We all need people to tell us when we are wrong, to advise us on how to do right, and to encourage, support, arouse, cooperate, and inspire us along the way.
>
> […] It doesn't matter if you are at the top of the income scale or at the bottom. There are heroes and schmucks in all worlds.[928]

Out of the 'crucible' of this individual spiritual experience - by turns 'austere' and 'sweet' - those who make it through 'don't come out healed; they come out different. They find a vocation or calling. They commit themselves to some long obedience and dedicate themselves to some desperate lark that gives life purpose.'[929] There is

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[924] See Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 6.

[925] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 8.

[926] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 10.

[927] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 11.

[928] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 12-13.

[929] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 14.

no scientistic formula for any of this: 'You can't build Adam II out of a recipe book. There is no seven-point program. But we can immerse ourselves in the lives of outstanding people and try to understand the wisdom of the way they lived.'[930]

Frances Perkins

> *There come a time when you goin' have to decide if it's about you - or the work.*
>
> Cedric Daniels (*The Wire*)

The *Invictus* idea of being 'the master of my fate' or 'the captain of my soul' is all well and good for Brooks, but this always translates as the question 'What are my circumstances calling me to do?'[931] In short, 'we don't create our lives; we are summoned by life.'[932] The first 'summoned self' on *The Road to Character* is Frances Perkins, whose life is transformed by the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire in New York:

> Up until that point she had lobbied for worker rights and on behalf of the poor, but she had been on a conventional trajectory, toward a conventional marriage, perhaps, and a life of genteel good works. After the fire, what had been a career turned into a vocation. Moral indignation set her on a different course. Her own desires and her own ego became less central and the cause itself became more central to the structure of her life. The niceties of her class fell away. She became impatient with the way genteel progressives went about serving the poor.[933]

The fire, however, only has its transformative effect on Perkins because of an underlying and preexisting spiritual orientation, a perspective which

> begins with an awareness that the world existed long before you and will last long after you, and that in the brief span of your life you have been thrown by fate, by history, by chance, by evolution, or by God into a specific place with specific problems and needs. Your job is to figure certain things out: What does this environment need in order to be made whole?[934]

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[930] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 15.

[931] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 21.

[932] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 21.

[933] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 20.

[934] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 21-22.

Citing Nietzsche ('He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how'), Brooks compares Perkins with Viktor Frankl at Auschwitz:

> Frankl, like Perkins, had a vocation. […] A person does not choose a vocation. A vocation is a calling. People generally feel they have no choice in the matter. […] A person with a vocation is not devoted to civil rights, or curing a disease, or writing a great novel, or running a humane company because it meets some cost-benefit analysis. Such people submit to their vocations for reasons deeper and higher than utility and they cling to them all the more fiercely the more difficulties arise.
>
> […] It is important to point out how much the sense of vocation is at odds with the prevailing contemporary logic. A vocation is not about fulfilling your desires or wants, the way modern economists expect us to do.[935]

Such intrinsic motivation to complete the job at hand is a product of a long process of 'learning for the self'; 'serving the community' is not enough:

> People who seek to serve the community end up falsifying their work, […] whether the work is writing a novel or baking bread, because they are not single-mindedly focused on the task at hand. But if you serve the work - if you perform each task to its utmost perfection - then you will experience the deep satisfaction of craftsmanship and you will end up serving the community more richly than you could have consciously planned.[936]

While any 'wonderful certainty of action that banishes weariness from even the hardest days'[937] certainly has a dangerous side - you may not even listen to the objections of the community if you feel you are serving a higher purpose which has been privately 'revealed' to you - there is an ear for beauty in any cultivated self which prevents degeneration into solipsism. After a 'parsimonious, earnest, and brutally honest' upbringing (her father 'began to teach Frances Greek grammar when she was seven or eight'[938]), Perkins was lucky enough to receive an education at Mount Holyoke College which helped her further in this direction:

> Mount Holyoke was the sort of school that leaves a permanent mark on its students. It did not see its role, as modern universities tend to, in purely Adam I cognitive terms. It was not there merely to teach people how to think. It was not there merely to help students question their assumptions. Instead, it successfully performed the broader role of college: helping teenagers become adults. It inculcated self-control. It helped its students discover new things to love. […] A dozen voices from across the institution told students that while those who lead flat and unremarkable lives may avoid struggle, large parts of the most worthy lives are spent upon the rack,

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[935] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 23-24.

[936] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 25. He is approvingly citing the views of Dorothy L. Sayers.

[937] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 25.

[938] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 26.

> testing moral courage and facing opposition and ridicule, and those who pursue struggle end up being happier than those who pursue pleasure. […] 'Do what nobody else wants to do; go where nobody else wants to go,' the school's founder, Mary Lyon, implored her students.[939]

While such an education may leave an individual 'stronger, fortified, ardent for service and clearly unsuited to the narrow bourgeois world'[940] (and while it will generally diminish 'tolerance for any pose that might put the server above those being served'[941]), it may also leave the graduate less than 'excellent at intimacy'[942]; Perkins's 'rectitude and reticence,' indeed, 'pinched her private life and made her bad at public relations'[943]: 'She did not receive love well, or give it, or display vulnerability. Even her care for her daughter often took the form of a moral improvement crusade, which backfired. Frances exerted iron control over herself and expected it in her daughter.'[944] It should be possible, Brooks wants to tell us from the beginning, to be 'vulnerable' and 'loving' to those around us while still leading 'a summoned life, a life in service to a vocation', even one which involves 'tasks which transcend a lifetime', 'throwing yourself into a historical process' and 'compensating for the brevity of life by finding membership in a historic commitment'.[945] If these proved mutually exclusive for Perkins, it was chiefly owing to the weaknesses inherent in New England culture[946]; despite her admirable strengths as a public servant, 'there was a fragility within herself' which her provincial education, for all its merits, had failed to overcome.[947]

Ida Eisenhower

When future US President Dwight D. Eisenhower 'was about ten', his parents refused to let him go Halloween trick-or-treating with his brothers:

> Weeping and screaming, he rushed out into the front yard and began pounding his fists against the trunk of an apple tree, scraping the skin off and leaving his hands bloody and torn.

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[939] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 28-29.

[940] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 30.

[941] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 32.

[942] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 38.

[943] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 46.

[944] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 38.

[945] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 46.

[946] See Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 37.

[947] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 43.

> His father shook him, lashed him with a hickory switch, and sent him up to bed.[948]

His mother Ida took a different approach:

> About an hour later, with Ike sobbing into his pillow, his mother came up and sat silently rocking in the chair next to his bed. Eventually she quoted a verse from the Bible: 'He that conquereth his own soul is greater than he who taketh a city.'
>
> As she began to salve and bandage his wounds, she told her son to beware the anger and hatred burning inside.
>
> […] When he was seventy-six, Eisenhower wrote, 'I have always looked back on that conversation as one of the most valuable moments of my life.'[949]

Unlike Frances Perkins, Ida Eisenhower 'always had a smile on her lips. She was always willing to be a little naughty, to violate her sense of rectitude, even taking a shot of alcohol if the situation warranted'.[950] She 'seemed to understand, as her husband did not, that you can't rely just on self-control, habit, work, and self-denial to build character'[951]; if 'freedom has been defined as the opportunity for self-discipline'[952], as Ike himself would go on to say in his 1957 State of the Union address, and if 'a personality is a product of cultivation'[953], it is equally clear to Brooks that none of us can begin this path towards a true vocation without the tenderness of another human being.

Dorothy Day

> *She had, as usual, said her prayers at bedtime. She was the only religiously observant member of her household and had become, as she wrote later, 'disgustingly, proudly pious'. She had always had a sense, she wrote in her diary decades later, of an immanent spiritual world.*[954]

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[948] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 52.

[949] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 52.

[950] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 58-59.

[951] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 59.

[952] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 61.

[953] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 68.

[954] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 74.

Dorothy Day's spiritual education would extend beyond family and religion and into the province of literature; coming of age in New York during the First World War, 'Russian writers defined the spiritual imagination'[955] of her milieu:

> She protested on behalf of the working classes. But the most vital dramas of he life were going on inside. She had become an even more avid reader, especially of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky.
>
> It's hard now to recapture how seriously people took novel reading then, or at least how seriously Day and others took it - reading important works as wisdom literature, believing that supreme artists possessed insights that could be handed down as revelation, trying to mold one's life around the heroic and deep souls one found in books. Day read as if her whole life depended on it.
>
> Fewer people today see artists as oracles and novels as a form of revelation. The cognitive sciences have replaced literature as the way many people attempt to understand their own minds. But Day was 'moved to the depth of my being' by Dostoyevsky.[956]

Still, she struggled through her twenties under the Dostoyevskian illusion that 'If there is no God, then everything is permitted':

> The life of the flesh called to me as a good and wholesome life, regardless of man's laws, which I felt rebelliously were made for the repression of others. The strong could make their own law, live their own lives; in fact they were beyond good and evil. What was good and what was evil? It was easy enough to stifle conscience for a time.[957]

Eventually, however, she saw through her own charade:

> Day was not just lost in a world of shallow infatuations, tumultuous affairs, fleshly satisfaction, and selfishness. Her extreme self-criticism flowed from a deep spiritual hunger. She used the word 'loneliness' to describe this hunger. For many of us, that word brings to mind solitude. And Day was indeed solitary, and she did suffer from it. But Day also used the word 'loneliness' to describe spiritual isolation. She had a sense that there was some transcendent cause or entity or activity out there and that she would be restless until she found it.
>
> […] Day had spent her twenties throwing herself down different avenues, looking for a vocation. […] She looked back on her early activism with disquiet and self-criticism. 'I do not know how sincere I was in my love of the poor and my desire to serve them… I wanted to go on picket lines, to

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[955] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 78.

[956] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 79.

[957] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 81.

> go to jail, to write, to influence others and so make my mark on the world. How much self-seeking there was in all of this.'[958]

More than romantic love, it was the birth of her daughter Tamar which 'began her transformation from a scattered person to a centred one'[959]; nevertheless, her love for Tamar's father Forster Batterham eventually

> broke through the shell and exposed the soft and more vulnerable regions of her heart to other loves. It provided her with a model. As Day put it, 'It was through a whole love, both physical and spiritual, [that] I came to know God.' This is a more mature understanding than her tendency, as a teenager, to divide the world between flesh on one side and spirit on the other.[960]

By her early thirties, Day was working to 'apply Catholic social teaching toward the goal of creating a society in which it [was] easier for people to be good'[961]. This meant the opposite of grandstanding:

> We sometimes think of saints, or of people who are living like saints, as being ethereal, living in a higher spiritual realm. But often enough they live in an even less ethereal way than the rest of us. They are more fully of this earth, more fully engaged in the dirty, practical problems of the people around them. Day and her colleagues slept in cold rooms. They wore donated clothes. They did not receive salaries.
>
> […] The atmosphere was similar to the one Albert Schweitzer, the German medical missionary, described at his hospital in the African jungle. He did not hire idealists for that hospital, nor did he hire people with a righteous sense of how much they were giving to the world. 'Only a person who […] has no thought of heroism but only of a duty undertaken with sober enthusiasm, is capable of being the sort of spiritual pioneer the world needs.'[962]

Day struggled to manage the 'competing demands and vocations'[963] of Catholic social work and motherhood ('she travelled often, while a parade of others looked after Tamar; she often felt she was failing as a mother'[964]), but in the end she succeeded both in raising a daughter whom 'people described […] as a gentle,

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[958] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 82.

[959] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 84.

[960] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 87.

[961] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 89-90.

[962] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 91-92.

[963] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 98.

[964] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 97.

hospitable person'[965] while also 'inspiring generations of young Catholics because she wasn't merely a champion of Catholic social teaching, but a concrete living example'[966]. Moreover, as one admirer put it,

> 'she had an enormous capacity for close friendships. Really quite extraordinary. Each friendship was unique, and she had many, many of them - people who loved her, and people that she loved.'
>
> Others remembered her intense love of music and the sensual things of the world. As Kathleen Jordan put it, 'there was Dorothy's deep sense of beauty. […] She used to say, 'Remember what Dostoyevsky said: "Beauty will save the world." We would see that in her. She didn't separate the natural and the supernatural.'[967]

Although she 'never achieved spiritual tranqullity'[968] on account of a morbid obsession with sin, Day nevertheless succeeded in providing a genuine 'countercultural' example for young people everywhere - in a way that rock and roll never did:

> The Woodstock counterculture seemed, superficially, to rebel against mainstream values, but as the ensuing decades have demonstrated, it was just a flipside version of the Big Me. […] In commercial society you expressed self by shopping and building a 'lifestyle'. In Woodstock culture you expressed self by casting off restrainst and celebrating yourself. The bourgeois culture of commerce could merge with the bohemian culture of the 1960s precisely because both […] encouraged people to measure their lives by how they were able to achieve self-gratification.
>
> Day, by contrast, […] practised a sort of public confession, which has attracted people ever since. She was open about her interior life. […] She was the opposite of reticent. The premise behind her confession was not mere self-revelation, though. It was the idea that in the long run our problems are all the same.[969]

<u>George Marshall</u>

> *This is a common trait among modest people who achieve extraordinary success. […] At some crucial point in their lives,*

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[965] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 97.

[966] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 96.

[967] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 100.

[968] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 103.

[969] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 102-103.

> *somebody told them they were too stupid to do something and they set out to prove the bastards wrong.*[970]

George Marshall was outshone in childhood by his older brother Stuart, who worried aloud that George would 'disgrace the family name'[971]; but 'while his father was [also] perpetually disappointed in his son, his mother rejoiced in him, offering unconditional love and support'.[972] Arriving at the Virginia Military Institute as a 17-year-old in 1897, the wayward teenager would learn

> a sense of reverence, the imaginative ability to hold up a hero in his mind to copy in all appropriate ways, to let him serve as a standard by which to judge himself. […] The work of the Roman biographer Plutarch is based on the premise that the tales of the excellent can lift the ambitions of the living. […] Character, James Davison Hunter has written, does not require religious faith. 'But it does require a conviction of a truth made sacred.'
>
> […] VMI was an academically mediocre institution, and Marshall was not then a good student. But it held up heroes who were regarded as sacred.[973]

As well as helping him to cultivate an unfashionable 'institutional mindset', 'the whole object of VMI training was to teach Marshall how to exercise controlled power. The idea was that power exaggerates the dispositions - making a rude person ruder and a controlling person more controlling. The higher you go in life, the fewer people there are to offer honest feedback or restrain your unpleasant traits.'[974]

Brooks is eager to show that Marshall was a paradigm example of a person defined by what he calls 'covenant relationships':

> Contracts are what we do for our individual benefit. A contract is about interest. But a covenant is when we make a promise to each other that transforms our identity. And when we make a covenant, one with another, whether it's a marriage covenant or to our nation, we serve the relationship more than we serve ourselves.
>
> That's why people are willing to die in a battlefield. That's why people are willing to risk their lives for their children. And it seems to me the more covenantal relationships we're involved in, the more our life feels fulfilled.[975]

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[970] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 106-107.

[971] See Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 106.

[972] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 107.

[973] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 107-108.

[974] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 111.

[975] Brooks, 'David Brooks on Youth, Morality and Loneliness'.

The two central covenants in Marshall's life were with his wife Lily ('he felt himself extraordinarily lucky to have won her, and he carried that gratitude with him forever after'[976]) and the US Army:

> In 1918 in France, Marshall was close to being promoted to brigadier general. The war ended and it would take him eighteen long years to get his first star. He returned home, where he spent five years in Washington doing paperwork. He served his superior officers but received few promotions for himself.
>
> […] People who have an institutional mindset, as Marshall did, have a very different mentality, which begins with a different historical consciousness. [On this view] life is not like navigating through an open field. […] It is accepting the gifts of the dead, taking on the responsibility of preserving and improving an institution and then transmitting that institution, better, on to the next generation. […] By practising the customs of an institution, we are not alone; we are admitted into a community that transcends time.
>
> With this sense of scope, the institutionalist has deep reverence for those who came before and the rules he has temporarily taken delivery of. The rules of a profession or an institution are not like practical tips on how best to do something. They are deeply woven into the identities of the people who practise them. A teacher's relationship to the craft of teaching, an athlete's relationship to his or her sport, a doctor's commitment to the craft of medicine, is not an individual choice that can be easily renounced when the psychic losses exceed the psychic benefits. These are life-shaping and life-defining commitments. Like finding a vocation, they are commitments to something that transcends a single lifetime.[977]

Marshall would earn a peerless reputation as a man capable, in all circumstances, of 'telling the truth as he sees it'[978]; everybody knew that 'in Marshall's case, there was no underhanded or selfish motive. The British knew that he was not out to make American points or British points, but was trying to win the war the best way. The Congress knew he was talking to them straight, with no politics involved'.[979] Even intellectuals of the stature of Orson Welles saw in Marshall 'the greatest man I ever met, […] a tremendous gentleman, an old-fashioned institution which isn't with us anymore'.[980] Marshall was, in short, one of those rare people in any age who

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[976] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 117.

[977] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 114-116.

[978] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 122.

[979] See Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 123. Brooks is quoting Marshall's deputy chief of staff, Tom Handy.

[980] Orson Welles, 'Orson Welles Talks About Cornelia Lunt', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1fauAc48tA, 6/5/2008 (accessed 27/2/2019).

> seem to have been born into this world with a sense of indebtedness for the blessing of being alive. They are aware of the transmission of generations, what has been left to them by those that came before, their indebtedness to their ancestors, their obligations to a set of moral responsibilities that stretch across time.
>
> […] Marshall lived in the world of airplanes and the nuclear bomb, but in many ways he was formed by the moral traditions of classical Greece and Rome. His moral make-up owed something to Homer, to the classical emphasis on courage and honour. It owed something to the Stoics, with their emphasis on moral discipline. But particularly later in life it also owed something to the ancient Athenian Pericles, who embodied the style of leadership that we call magnanimity, or great-souled.[981]

Welles summarised this 'magnanimity' in one of his infinite anecdotes:

> Can I tell a little story about [Marshall]? […] There were only about four or five civilians in the room; all the rest were tremendous brass, dripping with gold medals and everything else. […] The door opened, and a GI more innocent-looking than anything you could possibly imagine - and younger than anything you could dream of - stuck his head in at the moment when General Marshall happened to look toward the door. The boy looked at him, and he said 'Gee, General Marshall, can I come in and say hello to you?', and Marshall said 'Yeah, come in.' Now Marshall didn't know anybody was watching - this wasn't a grandstand play - he took the boy aside, away from everybody, and sat down with him, and I heard as he went that the boy had been away from home. The boy recognised Marshall as somebody like family. […] Marshall just sat with this boy, made him feel at ease, made him feel at home again, for fifteen minutes, and left all the rest of us. He was that kind of fella. […] There are not many Generals in the Army who could do that with simplicity, and without the slightest hint of demagoguery - he didn't think one of us was admiring him for being a human being - and he was *such* a human being that that little boy from the prairies of Kansas or wherever *instantly* saw that he could talk to him without embarrassment.[982]

<u>A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin</u>

> *At school, Randolph was taught by two white New England schoolmarms who had come south to educate black underprivileged children, and whom Randolph would later call 'two of the finest teachers who ever lived'. Miss Lillie Whitney taught Randolph Latin and math, while Miss Mary Neff taught him literature and drama.*
>
> *[…] Most people are the product of their circumstances, but Randolph's parents, his teachers, and he himself created a moral*

[981] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 126-127.

[982] Welles, 'Welles Talks About Cornelia Lunt'.

> *ecology that transcended circumstances, a way of behaving that was always slightly more elevated, slightly more formal, and much more dignified than that of the world around him.*[983]

Like George Marshall, A. Philip Randolph faced the challenge of amassing power for himself in the name of service to something higher - in this case, the Civil Rights movement - 'while not being corrupted by power'[984]; like Marshall, '[Randolph's] great power […] derived from his obvious moral integrity, his example as an incorruptible man in service to a cause'[985]; and like Marshall, he inspired fierce loyalty and devotion: 'It is hard,' the columnist Murray Kempton wrote, 'to make anyone who has never met him believe that A. Philip Randolph must be the greatest man who has lived in the U.S. this century, but it is harder yet to make anyone who has ever known him believe anything else.'[986]

Bayard Rustin, by contrast, despite the benefits of a solid education[987] and an ability to 'behave heroically' during well-publicised stints in prison and beyond, fell victim in early adulthood to 'an arrogance and an anger and sometimes a recklessness' which were 'not in keeping with his stated beliefs'[988] as a Civil Rights activist. This culminated in a bout of promiscuity and public scandal which eventually forced Rustin to accept a 'new role' in the Civil Rights cause, 'working behind the scenes, receiving no credit, shifting the glory to others, like his friend and protégé, Martin Luther King'.[989] The problem with Rustin's behaviour had not been his homosexuality - taboo though that was at the time - but the 'relentlessness' of his search for sexual partners; as mentor A.J. Muste wrote of Rustin's 'constant rounds of seduction',

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[983] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 131.

[984] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 132.

[985] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 137.

[986] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 132.

[987] See Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 138-139:

> Bayard Rustin grew up in West Chester, Pennsylvania, and was raised by his grandparents. […] Rustin remembered his grandfather as having 'the most erect carriage of any person you have ever seen. None of us can remember a single unkindness in him.' His grandmother had been raised a Quaker and was one of the first black women in the county to receive a high school education.
>
> […] In high school Rustin was a good athlete and wrote poetry. […] One high school classmate recalled, 'He would tackle you and then get up and recite a poem.' As a freshman he became the first black student in forty years to win his high school's oratory prize. By senior year he made the all-county football team, and he was a class valedictorian. He developed a passion for opera, Mozart, Bach, and Palestrina, and George Santayana's novel *The Last Puritan* was one of his favourite books. On his own he also read Will and Ariel Durant's *The Story of Civilisation*, which, he testified, was like 'taking a whiff of something that simply opens your nostrils except that it happened in my brain.'

[988] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 140.

[989] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 144.

> You are still far from facing reality in yourself. […] Only so can your true self come to birth. […] You remember Psalm 51: '[…] Create me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.'
>
> [With promiscuity] we come close to the travesty and denial of love, for if love means depth, means understanding above the ordinary… means exchange of life blood, how can that happen among an indefinite number of people?[990]

An encounter with a woman, fellow activist Helen Winnemore, would help Rustin out of his acute spiritual predicament:

> Now since I believe that once redeemed your power for service and redemption of others will be vast, and since I believe your greatest immediate need is for real love, real understanding, and confidence, I tell you without shame of the love I have for you, of my desire to be with you thru light and darkness, to give all that I possess that the goodness within you shall live and flower. Men must see the goodness that potentially is yours and glorify your creator. This, Bayard, she went on to say in effect, this [is the] love I have for you and I offer it joyfully not for myself or for you alone, but for all mankind, which would profit by what your integration would mean.[991]

Though Rustin ultimately refused this offer of a 'heterosexual relationship, or at least cover', Winnemore's unconditional support offered him 'a joy that [was] almost beyond understanding - a flash of light in the right direction - a new hope… a sudden reevaluation… a light on the road I knew I should travel'[992]. After his master of ceremonies role on the podium at King's 'I Have a Dream' speech in Washington in 1963 (after which he and Randolph 'finally found each other'), Rustin 'cut his own path, working hard to end apartheid in South Africa, bucking the Civil Rights establishment in New York City during a crucial teachers' strike in 1968, defending the ideal of integration against more nationalist figures, [and] finding personal peace in the form of a long-term relationship with a man named Walter Naegle'.[993]

<u>George Eliot</u>

In her famous preface to Middlemarch*, Eliot writes about the crisis of vocation that many young women feel. They experience a great*

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[990] See Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 141-142.

[991] See Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 143.

[992] See Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 143.

[993] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 151.

yearning inside, she wrote, a spiritual ardor to devote their energies in some substantial, heroic, and meaningful direction.[994]

As a teenager, Mary Anne Evans was by all accounts 'an infuriating mix of attention-seeking and self-punishing behaviour'[995], but she was also 'too intelligent not to be able to observe herself [and the world] accurately'[996]. This observation eventually elicited an awareness of the need for a spiritual turn of some kind in her life, and an understanding that, in an age of scientific revolution, such spiritual nourishment could not come from the narrow organised religion of her family milieu: 'In the society of her time, agnosticism meant ostracism. But she pushed on bravely toward what her heart and head told her was truth. […] At the first dawn of her adulthood, Mary Anne was willing to go out into the world without a home, without an inheritance, without a husband, and without prospects.'[997] Though she later 'deeply regretted' this confrontation with her father and became, as the novelist known to the world as George Eliot, 'an avowed enemy of that kind of stark grandstanding', she was able to remain 'a courageous freethinker' while still recognising her father's 'purifying restraining influence'.[998]

While 'biographers generally argue that the absence of maternal love created a hole at the centre of Mary Anne's being'[999], Brooks feels that, as much as anything, 'she made a drama of herself and indulged in it, […] savouring the sense of her own epic importance. People who see themselves as the centre of their solar system often get enraptured by their own terrible but also delicious suffering. People who see themselves as a piece of a larger universe and a longer story rarely do.'[1000] Her feelings for Herbert Spencer, though unrequited, allowed her to begin this process of attachment to something beyond herself - the endpoint of all self-cultivation - but it was her relationship with George Lewes - 'freethinking and romantic in a society that was in a stringent, buttoned-up Victorian phase'[1001] - which showed her that 'human love and sympathy could serve […] as a substitute for a Christianity [she] could not actually believe in'.[1002] Brooks even compares this love between Eliot and Lewes to the 'intellectual and emotional intensity' of the bond between Isaiah Berlin and Anna Akhmatova: 'They, too, experienced love as a moral force that deepens a person, organising human minds around other souls

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[994] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 154.

[995] See Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 154. He is quoting Eliot's biographer Kathryn Hughes.

[996] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 156.

[997] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 159.

[998] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 160.

[999] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 162.

[1000] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 162-163.

[1001] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 165.

[1002] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 167.

and lifting them so they are capable of great acts of service and devotion.'[1003] Whereas Adam I 'is strategising and calculating costs and benefits', love

> demands that you make a poetic surrender to an inexplicable power without counting the cost. […] You don't fall in love with the person who might be of most use to you - not the richest, most popular, most well-connected person, not the one with the best career prospects. […] Love is a state of poetic need; it exists on a higher and lower plane than logic and calculation.
>
> In this way, love opens up the facility for spiritual awareness, […offering] glimpses into an infinity beyond what can be known for sure.[1004]

Like Berlin and Akhmatova, Eliot and Lewes could 'experience that sort of life-altering conversation because they had done the reading'[1005], but beyond the spark of the first flush came years of effort and sacrifice: 'With a thousand letters and gestures, he put himself second and her uppermost in his mind'[1006], while she variously dedicated her novels, which would 'never have been written but for the happiness which his love has conferred on my life', to 'the Husband whose perfect love has been the best source of insight and strength.'[1007] These lovingly nurtured novels would be no ordinary achievement:

> Her genius as a writer derives from the fact that she was capable of the deepest feeling but also of the most discerning and disciplined thought. She had to feel and suffer through everything. She had to transform that feeling into meticulously thought-through observation. The books had to be pushed out of her like children, painfully and amid exhaustion. Like most people who write, she had to endure the basic imbalance of the enterprise. The writer shares that which is intimate and vulnerable, but the reader is far away, so all that comes back is silence.
>
> She had no system. She was anti-system. As she wrote in *The Mill on the Floss*, she despised 'men of maxims', because the 'complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims, and that to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy.'[1008]

<u>St. Augustine</u>

While Augustine's mother Monica has 'always riveted the attention of historians - and psychoanalysts', she would, for all her 'overbearing harshness', 'love him

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[1003] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 169-170.

[1004] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 171-173.

[1005] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 169.

[1006] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 174.

[1007] See Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 185.

[1008] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 181.

fiercely. […] Some of the sweetest moments of Augustine's life were moments of spiritual communion with his mother.'[1009] Though suffering from seemingly opposite pathologies, Augustine ('history's most high-maintenance boyfriend') was as difficult a teenager as George Eliot: 'He [was] not in love with another human being, he [was] in love with the prospect of being loved. It [was] all about him.'[1010] Like Eliot, however, he will discover a path out of self-absorption:

> 'I was famished within, deprived of inner food.' His hunger for admiration enslaved him rather than delighting him. He was at the whim of other people's facile opinions, sensitive to the slightest criticism, always looking for the next rung on the golden ladder.
>
> […] Augustine found himself feeling increasingly isolated. If you organise your life around your own wants, other people become objects for the satisfaction of your own desires. Everything is coldly instrumental. Just as a prostitute is rendered into an object for the satisfaction of orgasm, so a professional colleague is rendered into an object for the purpose of career networking, a stranger is rendered into an object for the making of a sale, a spouse is turned into an object for the purpose of providing you with love.
>
> We use the word 'lust' to refer to sexual desire, but a broader, better meaning is selfish desire. A true lover delights to serve his beloved. But lust is all incoming.
>
> […] Augustine responded to this crisis by looking within himself. You'd think that somebody who has become appalled by his own self-centredness would immediately head in the direction of self-forgetfulness. His advice would be simple: ignore yourself, pay attention to other people. But Augustine's first step was to undertake an almost scientific expedition into his own mind. It is hard to think of another character in Western history up to that time who did such a thorough excavation of his own psyche. […] 'Who can map out the various forces at play in one soul, the different kinds of love… Man is a great depth, O Lord; you number his hairs… but the hairs of his head are easier by far to count than his feelings, the movements of his heart.'[1011]

The person trapped in the cycle of 'learning for others', the one who continues to seek external admiration and favour rather than embarking on the difficult journey within, remains a ripe target for totalitarian bullying. Augustine himself remembered a pear-stealing incident as a teenager in these terms:

> Even sweet institutions, like camaraderie and friendship, can be distorted if they are unattached to a higher calling. The story of the stealing of the pears is also the story of a rotten friendship. Augustine realises he probably wouldn't have done it if he had been alone. It was the desire for camaraderie, for mutual admiration, that egged the boys on into doing what

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[1009] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 187.

[1010] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 189.

[1011] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 192, 194.

> they did. We so fear exclusion from the group that we are willing to do things that we would find unconscionable in other circumstances.[1012]

By contrast with the shallow banality of totalitarian evil, Augustine's 'internal excavation' reveals 'intimations of perfection, sensations of transcendence, emotions and thoughts and feelings that extend beyond the finite and into another realm'[1013]. In a Proustian flash, Brooks cites Reinhold Niebuhr's view of Augustine as having understood that 'the human spirit in its depth and heights reaches into eternity' and that 'this vertical dimension is more important for the understanding of man than merely his rational capacity for forming general concepts'[1014]. In correspondence with this vision of a transtemporal, narrative self (Brooks's 'Adam II'), Niebuhr goes on to describe the 'harmonious relation of life to life in obedience with the divine centre and source' which governs the mature Augustine's worldview; this law of love 'is violated when man seeks to make himself the centre and source of his own life'.[1015]

Augustine grew particularly hostile to Manichean - or what we would today call scientistic - forms of thinking:

> Having a closed, all-explaining model of reality appealed to [the Manichees'] vanity; it gave them the illusion that they had intellectually mastered all things. But it made them cold to mystery and unable to humble themselves before the complexities and emotions that, as Augustine put it, 'make the heart deep'.
>
> […] This is more or less how many people try to arrange their life today. They attack it like a homework assignment or a school project. They step back, they read self-help books like *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. They learn the techniques for greater self-control. They even establish a relationship with God in the same way they would go after a promotion or an advanced degree - by conquest: by reading certain books, attending services regularly, practising spiritual disciplines such as regular prayer, doing their spiritual homework.[1016]

Brooks has written a whole book - lest we forget, 'bestselling' - about how wrongheaded this 'self-help' approach to humanistic education is; it is hard to disagree with him. The heavily sin-inflected language he uses, however, conflicts with the Confucian preference for a language of 'learning for the self'; when Brooks says that Augustine's spiritual turn is 'a renunciation of the whole ethos of self-cultivation'[1017], we are squarely confronted with the potential for 'mistranslation' of what he is trying to say. The 'implied posture of submission' which Brooks attributes

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[1012] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 196.

[1013] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 196.

[1014] See Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 196.

[1015] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 196-197.

[1016] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 198.

[1017] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 203.

to Augustine 'and much Christian thought since' (or indeed Abrahamic thought more generally) is, to say the least, interculturally problematic:

> Augustine wants you to adopt this sort of surrendered posture. […] Only God has the power to order your inner world, not you. Only God has the power to orient your desires and reshape your emotions, not you.
>
> […] The hero of this sort of humble life is not averse to the pleasures of praise, but the petty distinctions you earn for yourself do not really speak to your essential value as a human being. God possesses talents so all-encompassing that in relation to them, the difference between the most brilliant Nobel laureate and the dimmest nitwit are simply a matter of degree. Every soul is equal in the most important sense.[1018]

One can endorse the egalitarian sentiment of the last sentence without giving up on the idea that spiritual cultivation requires effort; 'submission to Heaven' may be just as fruitfully translated as Confucianesque 'dialogue with Heaven'. After playing with the idea of 'grace' - another slippery one - Brooks more or less says as much:

> The ultimate conquest of self, in this view, is not won by self-discipline, or an awful battle within self. It is won by going out of self, by establishing a communion with God and by doing the things that feel natural in order to return God's love.
>
> […] You didn't get this way simply by following this or that moral code, or adopting a drill sergeant's discipline or certain habits. You did it instead because you reordered your loves, and as Augustine says again and again, you become what you love. […] Education is a process of love formation. When you go to a school, it should offer you new things to love.[1019]

'God' or 'Heaven', then, is simply the abstract endpoint of this 'conquest of self': 'We did not make ourselves, he who made us never passes away,' Augustine concludes.[1020] This spiritual insight - into ourselves, and beyond ourselves - allows us to bear both the deaths of our loved ones and our own mortality, as Augustine discovers after his mother dies:

> 'Because I had now lost the great comfort of her, my soul was wounded and my very life torn asunder, for it had been one life - made of hers and mine together.'
>
> […] Augustine went to take a bath and soothe his self-division, then fell asleep and awoke feeling better. 'And then, little by little, I began to recover my former feeling about Your handmaid, remembering how loving and devout was her conversation with me, of which I was thus suddenly

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[1018] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 204-205.

[1019] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 207, 211.

[1020] See Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 210.

deprived. And I found solace in weeping in Your sight both about her and for her, about myself and for myself.'[1021]

Samuel Johnson and Michel de Montaigne

> *Johnson became a Christian at Oxford, after a fashion. He sat down one day with the theological book by William Law titled* A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, expecting, he wrote, 'to find it a dull book (as such books generally are) and perhaps to laugh at it. But I found Law quite an overmatch for me.'*
>
> *[…] Aware of his own mental abilities, he fixed his attention all his life on the biblical parable of the talents, and the lesson that the 'wicked and slothful servant' who has not fully used the talents that have been bestowed upon him will be cast 'into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'.*[1022]

A mature Samuel Johnson concluded that 'it is always a writer's duty to make the world better', but this 'character' ('Oh Lord, enable me… in redeeming the time which I have spent in Sloth') was formed in a unique intellectual community:

> Johnson happened to come to maturity at a time when Britain was home to a phenomenally talented group of writers, painters, artists, and intellectuals, ranging from Adam Smith to Joshua Reynolds to Edmund Burke. Each raised the standards of excellence for the others.
>
> These were humanists, their knowledge derived from their deep reading of the great canonical texts of Western civilisation.[1023]

Like George Eliot, Johnson 'discounted those who led lives of pedantic research surrounded by "learned dust", and he had a deep distrust of intellectual systems that tried to explain all existence in one logical structure'[1024]; instead of viewing problems of public morality primarily as sociological or legalistic challenges to be 'solved', he saw that 'the happiness of society depends on virtue'.[1025] Unlike science, which can only ever diagnose, literature, for Johnson, 'could be a serious force for moral improvement. Literature gives not only new information but new experiences. It can broaden the range of awareness and be an occasion for evaluation. Literature can also instruct through pleasure.'[1026]

[1021] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 212.

[1022] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 215-216.

[1023] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 219-221.

[1024] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 223.

[1025] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 224.

[1026] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 224.

While Johnson worked mostly in the 'teeming pub life of Grub Street in London', Michel de Montaigne 'retired from public life in his thirty-eighth year' and 'wrote from the seclusion of his own tower library, in a large room decorated with Greek, Roman and biblical maxims'.[1027] In a burst of optimism befitting these idyllic surroundings, Montaigne came to believe that 'much of the fanaticism and violence he saw around him was caused by the panic and uncertainty people feel because they can't grasp the elusiveness within themselves'[1028]; while Johnson 'described other people and the outer world, hoping to define himself obliquely', Montaigne 'started from the other end: […] completely honest self-revelation, and through that, a vision of the moral life. He understood that he was trying to create a new method of character formation and implying a new type of hero, a hero of ruthlessly honest but sympathetic self-understanding.'[1029] These efforts, however, are never 'entirely convincing'; friendship offers Montaigne more hope for his own spirit than mere navel-gazing can:

> 'Our souls travelled so unitedly together, they felt so strong an affection for one another and with this same affection saw in the very depths of each other's hearts, that not only did I know his as well as my own, but I should certainly have trusted myself more freely to him than to myself.' If you were to construct a perfect society, [Montaigne] concludes, this sort of friendship would be at its peak.[1030]

Both Johnson and Montaigne were 'humanists in their way, heroically trying to use literature to find the great truths they believed the human mind is capable of comprehending but also doing so with a sense of humility, compassion and charity.'[1031] Johnson 'investigated the world to become his desired self', and 'Montaigne investigated himself to see the world'; while we are each free to decide 'which master we can learn from on which occasion', Brooks makes clear that he prefers Johnson overall: 'Montaigne's equipoise grew in part from the fact that he grew up rich, with a secure title, and could retire from the messiness of history to the comfort of his estate.'[1032] Johnson, meanwhile, the greatest conversationalist in the history of London, 'even when uproarious, […] meant to be improving'[1033]:

> Johnson socialised with the lords and intellectuals but spent his domestic life with the down and out. His home was perpetually occupied by a strange collection of indigents and the marginalised. A former slave lived with him, as did an impoverished doctor and a blind poetess. […] The beneficiaries of

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[1027] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 228.

[1028] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 229.

[1029] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 230.

[1030] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 233.

[1031] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 233.

[1032] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 234.

[1033] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 237.

> his mercy fought with each other and with him, and they made the home a crowded, fractious place, but Johnson was loath to turn them out.
>
> He also did amazing amounts of writing for friends. The man who said 'no man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money' composed thousands of pages for free. […] Between the ages of sixty-eight and seventy-two he wrote his *Lives of the Poets*, 52 biographies covering 378,000 words, at a time when age seventy really was elderly.
>
> […] 'He whose life has passed without contest, and who can boast neither success not merit can survey himself only as a useless filler of existence,' [Johnson concluded].[1034]

Writing from the 'comfort of his estate', Montaigne would draw the same conclusion in reverse: 'One of the best things about virtue is that it allows us to transcend death; it supplies our lives with a soft tranquillity, and gives us a pure and warm taste for more.'[1035]

'The Big Me'

These portraits - six Americans, two Brits, a Frenchman and a Roman-era North African Christian - together represent an Anglo-heavy *matryoshka* hidden within the larger and more global doll of this book. Brooks's central argument is that there are Western solutions to the problems of excessive materialism and instrumentalism which characterise the America and American-influenced post-Cold War world he sees. One can variously define the date the rot set in - 1989, 1968, 1945, 1914 - but Brooks is adamant that 'if you were born at any time over the last sixty years, you were probably born into what the philosopher Charles Taylor has called "the culture of authenticity"'[1036] (Brooks here seemingly forgets both the Iron Curtain and the import of Taylor's overarching Catholic contribution to modern intellectual life, which is a *defence* of a certain spirituality against an excessive secularism). There is nothing, however, in Taylor's definition of authenticity as a call 'to live my life this way and not in imitation of anyone else's'[1037] which contradicts the central thesis of *The Road to Character*; the problem with 21st-century neoliberal capitalism and social media is not that they encourage Sinatra-style*, My Way* authenticity - a necessary condition of spiritual development in any age - but precisely that they abolish authenticity in the name of meaningless 'self-*promotion*':

> Social networking technology allows us to spend our time engaged in a hyper-competitive struggle for attention, for victories in the currency of 'likes'. People are given more occasions to be self-promoters, to embrace the characteristics of celebrity, to manage their own image. […] This

[1034] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 235-236, 238-239.

[1035] Michel de Montaigne, *Essais (Extraits II: Le philosophe)*, (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1935), p. 11.

[1036] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 249.

[1037] See Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 249.

> technology creates a culture in which people turn into little brand managers.[1038]

'Allows' is generous here; those who refuse to engage in this constant self-promotion are essentially setting money and opportunities on fire, but this is not a law of nature, as Brooks knows:

> Subtly, softly, but pervasively, this system instils a certain utilitarian calculus in us all. The meritocracy subtly encourages an instrumental ethos in which each occasion - a party, a dinner - and each acquaintance becomes an opportunity to advance your status and professional life project. People are more likely to think in commercial categories - to speak about opportunity costs, scalability, human capital, cost-benefit analysis, even when it comes to how they spend their private time.
>
> The meaning of the word 'character' changes. It is used less to describe traits like selflessness, generosity, self-sacrifice, and other qualities that sometimes make worldly success less likely. It is instead used to describe traits like self-control, grit, resilience, and tenacity, qualities that make worldly success more likely.
>
> The meritocratic system wants you to be big about yourself - to puff yourself, to be completely sure of yourself. […] The meritocracy wants you to assert and advertise yourself. It wants you to display and exaggerate your achievements. The achievement machine rewards you if you can demonstrate superiority. […] It encourages you to become a shrewd animal.
>
> The shrewd animal has streamlined his inner humanity to make his ascent more aerodynamic. He carefully manages his time and his emotional commitments. Things once done in a poetic frame of mind, such as going to college, meeting a potential lover, or bonding with an employer, are now done in a more professional frame of mind.[1039]

This 'professionalism' has become, like its 'vocational' cousin, the exact etymological opposite of its origin; nothing is worth doing for its own sake anymore, and everything is simply a means to the end of measurable success - the veritable opposite of 'authenticity'.

Whichever direction the arrow of causality points, the roots of this cultural shift are, Brooks believes - and how could he be wrong about this? - hidden in the intimacy of families:

> Children who are uncertain of their parents' love develop a voracious hunger for it. This conditional love is like acid that dissolves children's internal criteria, their capacity to make their own decisions about their own interests, careers, marriages, and life in general.
>
> The parental relationship is supposed to be built upon unconditional love - a gift that cannot be bought and cannot be earned. […] Lurking in the shadows of merit-based love is the possibility that it may be withdrawn if the

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[1038] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 251.

[1039] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, p. 253.

> child disappoints. […] This shadowy presence of conditional love produces fear, the fear that there is no utterly safe love; there is no completely secure place where young people can be utterly honest and themselves.[1040]

If families cannot provide this 'secure place', then Brooks wants humanistic education - emphatically not 'self-help' - to fill the void by the power of its own example:

> No good life is possible unless it is organised around a vocation. If you try to use your work to serve yourself, you'll find your ambitions and expectations will forever run ahead and you'll never be satisfied. If you try to serve the community, you'll always wonder if people appreciate you enough. But if you serve work that is intrinsically compelling and focus just on being excellent at that, you will wind up serving yourself and the community obliquely. A vocation is not found by looking within and finding your passion. It is found by looking without and asking what life is asking of us. […] Joy is not produced because others praise you. Joy emanates unbidden and unforced. Joy comes as a gift when you least expect it. At those fleeting moments you know why you were put here and what truth you serve.[1041]

[1040] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 255-256.

[1041] Brooks, *The Road to Character*, pp. 266, 270.

17. V.S. Naipaul's *The Writer and the World*

> *Now that he has died, the preparation feels insufficient: the uneasiness remains. I suspect you feel it as well: how to speak about a writer whose work has been meaningful — in my case, profoundly so; I could not imagine my life without it — as well as a source of frustration or real pain. I have admired Naipaul as much as I have found him difficult to admire, a murky admixture that I find difficult to explain or clarify, and which I find with no other writer to anything like the same degree.*[1042]
>
> Nikil Saval

One of the great global literary deaths of 2018, V.S. Naipaul is also the most obvious arsehole featured in this book (though other, hidden arseholes may always lurk[1043]). Many of the obituaries, like many earlier reviews of his life and work, answered the famous 'Naipaul Question' in the negative: 'Carnal pleasure meant violence — in fact it was inextricable from beating Margaret up, degrading her in bed, turning the great man's penis into an object of worship. How do we know these things? Because Naipaul tells them to his authorized biographer.'[1044] Yet even the author of these words, George Packer, cannot refrain from paying simultaneous tribute to

> the painful and unlikely struggle by which the grandson of indentured Indian workers, born in the small island colony of Trinidad [in 1932], made himself into the greatest English novelist of the past half century. It is also a portrait of the artist as a monster. How these two judgments can be simultaneously true is one of this [biography's] central questions. Whether Naipaul himself understands the enormity of the story to which he contributed so much candor is another.[1045]

Ian Buruma puts the Naipaul Question a different way, focusing instead on the colonial problem of a missing 'wholeness':

> History was important to him, as well as literary achievement upon which new generations of writers could build. It irked him that there was nothing for

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[1042] Nikil Saval, in Pankaj Mishra and Nikil Saval, 'The Painful Sum of Things', https://nplusonemag.com/issue-33/essays/the-painful-sum-of-things-2/, Issue 33, Winter 2019 (accessed 28/2/2019).

[1043] See for example, this video and the comments to it: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k1TRWFcEBv0, 19/12/2017 (accessed 1/3/2019).

[1044] George Packer, 'A Life Split in Two' https://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/23/books/review/Packer-t.html, 21/11/2008 (accessed 28/2/2019).

[1045] Packer, 'A Life Split in Two'.

him to build on in Trinidad, apart from some vaguely recalled Brahmin rituals and books about a faraway European country where it rained all the time.

[…] When he finally managed to go to India, he was disappointed. India was a 'wounded civilization', maimed by Muslim conquests and European colonialism. He realized he didn't belong there, any more than in Trinidad or in England. And so he sought to find his place in the world through words. Books would be his escape from feeling rootless and superfluous. […] Writing […] was more than a profession; it was a calling that conferred a kind of nobility.

[…] By going back into the world of his childhood, he found the words to create his own link to that universal literary civilization. He often told interviewers that he only existed in his books.

[…] He understood people who were culturally dislocated and who tried to find solace in religious or political fantasies that were often borrowed from other places and ineptly mimicked. He described such delusions precisely and often comically. His sense of humour sometimes bordered on cruelty, […] but his refusal to sentimentalize the wounds in postcolonial societies produced some of his most penetrating insights.

My favorite book by Naipaul is […] a slender volume entitled *Finding the Center* (1984). It consists of two long essays, one about how he learned to become a writer, how he found his own voice, and the other about a trip to Ivory Coast in 1982. In the first piece, written out of unflinching self-knowledge, he gives a lucid account of the way he sees the world, and how he puts this in words. He travels to understand himself, as well as the politics and histories of the countries he visits.

[…] If he is always clear-eyed about the pretentions of religious fanatics, Third World mimic men, and delusional political figures, his idea of wholeness can sound almost sentimental. […] There is no such thing as a whole civilisation. But some of Naipaul's greatest literature came out of his yearning for it. Although he may, at times, have associated this with England or India, his imaginary civilisation was not tied to any nation. It was a literary idea, […] passed on through writing. That is where he made his home, and that is where, in his books, he will live on.[1046]

We take three essays from one of these many books, *The Writer and the World* (2002), together with the Introduction by Pankaj Mishra, on their own not inconsiderable merits, before returning briefly to answer the 'Naipaul Question' for ourselves at the end.

Mishra's Introduction

[1046] Ian Buruma, 'V.S. Naipaul, Poet of the Displaced', https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/08/13/v-s-naipaul-poet-of-the-displaced/, 13/8/2018 (accessed 28/2/2019).

> *Naipaul did not seek this role of the uniquely positioned reporter on the third world. He found himself in it.*[1047]

Naipaul's arrival at his 'true subject' in the 1960s was 'a discovery that was essentially of his own self'[1048]:

> Of Naipaul's travels in the 1960s, the visits to India seem to have yielded the greatest number of intellectual and personal discoveries. India was the land of his ancestors, about which Naipaul had inherited a noble idea - an idea that long separation rather than first-hand experience had strengthened among the Indian community in Trinidad, and, supported by the prestigious names of Gandhi and Nehru, had formed part of Naipaul's identity in England.
>
> But the India Naipaul had travelled to, in the last days of Nehru, was a country made complacent and sanctimonious by the victories of the freedom movement; and while expecting to find a vibrant post-colonial country with many human possibilities, Naipaul came across wretchedness of the sort his ancestors had escaped from almost a century ago.[1049]

Direct contact with this 'ancient and decaying civilisation, far from the inevitable and many-sided reckoning with the modern world'[1050], would leave Naipaul feeling further from 'home' than ever before; if a Johnsonesque, cosmopolitan, literary London was the imperial 'centre' to which he craved privileged access and belonging, he begins to see 'tribal-religious' bullshit everywhere else he goes, from Calcutta to Dallas and Yamoussoukro to 'missionary gatherings' across the Muslim world[1051]:

> 'The politics of a country' - and this is one of Naipaul's key perceptions - 'can only be an extension of its idea of human relationships.' […] Travelling to Mobutu's Zaire in 1975, Naipaul encountered another kind of cynicism and blindness about the past. Mobutu had carefully preserved the various forms of Belgian despotism. [… Mobutism] was totalitarianism sanctified by a bogus Africanism. Together, it had stifled the nascent intellectual life of Zaire: the growth, for instance, of the bright students at the university, who can talk of Stendhal and Fanon, whose enthusiasm 'deserves a better-equipped country', but who, with only a government job in sight, already are 'Mobutists to a man'.[1052]

[1047] Mishra, in 'The Painful Sum of Things'.

[1048] Pankaj Mishra, in V.S. Naipaul, *The Writer and the World: Essays*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), p. ix.

[1049] Mishra, in Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. xi.

[1050] Mishra, in Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. xi.

[1051] See Mishra, in Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. xii.

[1052] Mishra, in Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. xiii.

The heroes of Naipaul's fiction and travel writing - with all its 'vigorous humanism', its simultaneous 'faith in the redemptive power of modernity' and 'sense of wonder about the past'[1053] - are those individuals, not wildly unlike a young Mishra himself, who are

> in the midst of the chaos and pain of their underdeveloped societies, and 'awakening to ideas, history, a knowledge of injustice and a sense of their own dignity'. You can place them at the beginning or middle of the journey Naipaul himself has made. […] They consistenly uphold a belief in modern civilisation, and all that it offers to people around the world: the dignity of individuality, of self-knowledge.[1054]

'In the Middle of the Journey' (1962)

Naipaul finds his homecoming to Mother India smashed by the realisation that the warmth of the tribe is not what he wants at all:

> An Indian, I have never before been in streets where everyone is Indian, where I blend unremarkably into the crowd. This has been curiously deflating, for all my life I have expected some recognition of my difference; and it is only in India that I have recognised how necessary this stimulus is to me, how conditioned I have been by the multi-racial society of Trinidad and then by my life as an outsider in England. To be a member of a minority community has always seemed to me to be attractive. To be one of four hundred and thirty-nine million Indians is terrifying.[1055]

The 'centre' Naipaul is looking for is not the 'metropolitan' centre of any imagined collective, but rather the elusive core of his authentic, cosmopolitan self:

> A colonial, in the double sense of one who had grown up in a Crown colony and one who had been cut off from the metropolis, be it either England or India, I came to India expecting to find metropolitan attitudes. […] I have found, as I have said, the psychology of the cell or the hive. […] In India, as in Trinidad, I have found the feeling that the metropolis is elsewhere, in Europe or America. Where I had expected largeness, rootedness and confidence, I have found all the colonial attitudes of self-distrust.[1056]

The nagging sense of life as happening elsewhere - and of needing above all to prove and measure oneself against that elsewhere, to mean something both

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[1053] Mishra, in Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. xiv.

[1054] Mishra, in Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. xiv.

[1055] Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. 5.

[1056] Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, pp. 5-6.

individual and universal, to find one's vocation - accompanies Naipaul eveywhere in India he goes:

> Perhaps India is only a word, a mystical idea that embraces all those vast plains and rivers through which the train moves, all those anonymous figures asleep on railway platforms and the footpaths of Bombay, all those poor fields and stunted animals, all this exhausted plundered land. Perhaps it is this, this vastness which no one can ever get to know: India is an ache, for which one has a great tenderness, but from which at length one always wishes to separate oneself.[1057]

'A Second Visit' (1967)

Naipaul does not mellow on India five years later; on the contrary, he is surer now both what the country's problem is and what his ordained role should be in treating it. India needs spiritual rejuvenation, genuine modernisation and entry into the meaning of history, not the drab magic of a superstitious and arrogantly irrational past:

> [A] young poet I met in Delhi had made [a] statement in a long English poem on which he had been working for months. The poem was a dialogue between historical India and spiritual India; its subject was the 'metaphysical timelessness' of India. The absurd words had a meaning. The poet was saying […] that India was infinitely old and would go on. There was no goal and therefore no failure. There were only events. There was no tragedy.[1058]

The total lack of creativity in this posture is unbearable:

> The infinite, metaphysical timelessness: it always came to this. From whatever point they started, […] there always came a moment when Indians, administrator, journalist, poet, holy man, slipped away like eels into muddy abstraction. They abandoned intellect, observation, reason; and became 'mysterious'.
>
> […] There is a hoax in that quaintness. The barbaric religious rites of Hinduism are barbaric; they belong to the ancient world. […] It was even possible for me to anticipate much of what was said at the inaugural meeting of the Spiritual Regeneration Movement. Where there is no play of the intellect there is no surprise.[1059]

Western beatniks may be attracted to Indian 'seers and sages', but that is not because these 'materially affluent but psychologically sick and spiritually rudderless foreigners' find anything which could rightly be regarded as admirable in such

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[1057] Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. 7.

[1058] Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. 17.

[1059] Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. 18.

‘mysteriousness and negation’[1060]; on the contrary, the warm welcome extended by India to such pilgrims is a gesture of solidarity from ‘the maimed to the maimed’, a mutual rejection of the ‘vigorous’ and genuine humanism to which Naipaul aspires. A Professor of Literature he meets has no idea what ‘the point of teaching literature’ is, or what a ‘vocation’ in general might mean:

> The Professor, and the other officers we had met, considered themselves successful. In the midst of insecurity, they drew their rupees. The rupees were few but regular; they set a man apart. […] Survival - the regularity of the rupees - was all that mattered. […] Duty was irrelevant; the last thing to ask […] was why.[1061]

Such a climate of spiritual poverty

> spoke of a more general collapse of sensibility, of a people grown barbarous, indifferent and self-wounding, who, out of a shallow perception of the world, have no sense of tragedy.
>
> It is what appals about India. The palace crumbles into the dust of the countryside. […] The palace might rise again; but, without a revolution in the mind, that would not be renewal. […] Magic is an Indian need. It simplifies the world and makes it safe. It complements a shallow perception of the world, the Indian intellectual failure, which is less a failure of the individual intellect than the deficiency of a closed civilisation, ruled by ritual and myth.[1062]

This inability to engage creatively with tradition extends inward in the first instance, and culminates in exaggerated respect for charismatic local authority. Swami Vivekananda’s work, for example, is ‘full of the technicalities of Hindu metaphysics’ and ‘could never have been easily understood’, but ‘with Indian sages like Vivekenanda’, as with French philosophers of a certain wordy ilk,

> utterance is enough; the message is not important. A nation exchanging banalities with itself: it cannot be otherwise, when regeneration is expected to come, not through a receptiveness to thought, however imperfect, but through magic, through reverential contact with the powerful, holy or wise. The man himself is the magic.[1063]

Even revolutionary heroes like Gandhi have been reduced to empty names in the minds of most Indians[1064]; instead of building critically on the legacy of such pioneers - a task which will also involve a large degree of engagement with the

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[1060] Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. 18.

[1061] Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, pp. 22-23.

[1062] Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, pp. 23-24.

[1063] Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, pp. 26-27.

[1064] See Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. 27.

outside world, spiritually as well as institutionally - it is easier for most Indians to believe that the West is 'materially affluent but psychologically sick', that the West is, in short, 'a sham': 'No Indian can say why, but he doesn't need to; that battle has been won; independence is proof enough.'[1065]

Naipaul is critical of an entire modern nation of autobiographical Indian writers whose world seems

> reduced to a succession of stimuli; […] the reacting organism reports codified pleasure or pain: the expression of an egoism so excluding that the world, so far from being something to be explored, at times disappears, and the writers themselves appear maimed and incomplete. All Indian autobiographies appear to be written by the same incomplete person.[1066]

Naipaul reserves special disdain for Vinoba Bhave, the inept 'Gandhian land-reformer of Bihar':

> Bhave's sweetness adds up to a subtle but vital distortion of the Mahatma's teaching. The stoic call to action and duty becomes, with Bhave, […] an act of self-indulgence and holy arrogance. […] He misapplies the doctrine of bread-labour by which the Mahatma hoped to enoble all labour, including that of the untouchables.
>
> […] Bhave goes back again and again to the scriptures: their rediscovery becomes an end in itself. So, in the nature of reform, the Mahatma and goodness, Bhave slips into reaction. The old world claims its own.
>
> Indians are proud of their ancient, surviving civilisation. They are, in fact, its victims. […] This is not the fragmentation of region, religion or caste. It is the fragmentation of a country held together by no intellectual current, no developing inner life of its own.[1067]

Naipaul is not trying to sever India from its deep Hindu and Buddhist roots; he is simply - as he does in all the countries he visits - calling on locals to live up to the values - spiritual and critical - of a 'vigorous humanism' instead of following the easy and self-absorbed path of believing that 'pain and bewilderment […] can be resolved by the magical intervention of a Vivekananda, a Gandhi, a Nehru, a Vinoba Bhave'.[1068]

'Power?' (1970)

Naipaul's native Trinidad faces the same problem as the India he visits, but at least Trinidadians sometimes do a better job of admitting it: regardless of colour or class

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[1065] Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. 32.

[1066] Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. 28.

[1067] Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, pp. 29-30.

[1068] Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. 33.

background, they largely 'see themselves as futile, on the other side of the real world'.[1069] As in post-independence India, the principal problem in Trinidad - and the postcolonial Caribbean more broadly - is not a lack of raw political power as such:

> Black Power in these black islands is protest. But there is no enemy. The enemy is the past, of slavery and colonial neglect and a society uneducated from top to bottom.
>
> […] In the United States Black Power may have its victories. But they will be American victories. The small islands of the Caribbean will remain islands, impoverished and unskilled, ringed as now by a *cordon sanitaire*, their people not needed anywhere. They may get less innocent or less corrupt politicians; they will not get less helpless ones. The island blacks will continue to be dependent on the books, films and goods of others; in this important way they will continue to be the half-made societies of a dependent people, the Third World's third world. They will forever consume; they will never create. […] Identity in the end depends on achievement; and achievement here cannot but be small. Again and again the protest leader will appear and the millennium will seem about to come.[1070]

Self-cultivation, then, is especially delicate business in any society which 'feels itself part of the great world, but understands at the same time that it is cut off from this world by reasons of geography, history, race'[1071]; if 'identity in the end depends on achievement', and if the universality of provincial achievement can only be confirmed by recognition from the 'centre' (e.g. via Nobel Prizes), then anyone who perceives herself as having been born into the periphery, as Naipaul so acutely did, must work doubly hard to achieve the freedom of true selfhood. While technology has done much in the intervening half-century to lessen the tyranny of geography, the idea of *psychological* distance from the 'centre' will never fundamentally change: Naipaul is writing about the entire human condition, the eternal struggle for a global republic of letters in which all can register achievements and feel equally at home:

> Trinidad is simply small; it is dependent; and the people born in it - black, East Indian, white - sense themselves condemned […] to an inferiority of skill and achievement. […] What is needed is access to a society, larger in every sense, where people will be allowed to grow.[1072]

<u>Answering the 'Naipaul Question'</u>

[1069] Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. 135.

[1070] Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, pp. 137-138.

[1071] Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. 140.

[1072] Naipaul, *The Writer and the World*, p. 140.

Naipaul looks like a brilliant describer of the first half of the path to mature adult selfhood: we can only learn to 'learn for ourselves' once we have received sufficient recognition - from the biggest and best 'master' we can find - for our adolescent efforts; without such recognition, we will never have any real sense of belonging to anything beyond ourselves, nothing big within which to make our selfhood mean anything big, no sense of vocation. Naipaul reached the warm, global house of Literature eventually - a Nobel Prize in 2001 for goodness' sake - but was so wrecked from his long and lonely journey that, once there, he was in no state to enjoy and appreciate its warmth; he never properly exited the cycle of colonial recognition he so brilliantly described in his travels; he never enjoyed a genuine 'spiritual turn' of his own; till the end, he saw himself first and foremost as the victim of a history he at least loved (the great first step to self-cultivation), but this lingering sense of victimhood gave him undue license to treat his nearest and dearest with all the entitlement of a bully:

> Naipaul's code of accountability lies in facing the truth, but it's a limited truth, with no sense of agency. He cannot begin to see himself as his biographer or reader sees him, for the pain of others always reverts back to his own. And yet this bottomless narcissism, together with the uncompromising intensity of his vision, holds the key to Naipaul's literary power. He had the capacity in his writing to project himself into a great variety of people and situations, allowing him to imbue his work with the sympathy and humanity that he failed to extend to those closest to him in life.[1073]

One may draw a viable comparison here between Naipaul and Karl-Ove Knausgaard: both treat their wives appallingly, seemingly in the name of a higher truth-calling. But whereas Naipaul self-justifies ('"I was liberated. She was destroyed. It was inevitable." Note the use of the passive voice.'[1074]), Knausgaard's reader remains unsure whether his revelations in *My Struggle* were worth it:

> The exhilaration of confession becomes the angst of remorse, the drunkenness of setting it all down in print becomes the hangover of seeing the book in stores. *My Struggle* is a monument to candor with few precedents in human history, but then so is *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. What makes *My Struggle* so compelling is that Karl Ove will never forgive himself for it. Is it the unforgivability of these books that makes them great art?[1075]

Knausgaard, however, falls into an 'empathy trap' which Naipaul, for all his private faults, deftly avoids in his writing. Namwali Serpell pinpoints what is wrong with this vision:

[1073] Packer, 'A Life Split in Two'.

[1074] Packer, 'A Life Split in Two'.

[1075] James Camp, 'A Man in Full', https://bookforum.com/inprint/025_03/20134, Sept/Oct/Nov 2018 (accessed 5/3/2019).

I've always found this syllogism—'cliché is evil, therefore literature is good'—both snobbish and self-serving. […Knausgaard] compares the news media, which he thinks takes a remote, drone's-eye view of other people, with an idealized version of the novel:

> There is a vanishing point in our humanity, a point at which *the other* goes from being definite to indefinite. But this point is also the locus for the opposite movement, in which the other goes from indefinite to definite—and if there is an ethics of the novel, then it is here, in the zone that lies between the *one* and the *all*, that it comes into force and takes its basis. The instant a novel is opened and a reader begins to read, the remoteness between writer and reader dissolves. The *other* that thereby emerges does so in the reader's imagination, assimilating at once into his or her mind… This space—that is, the novel's—is idiosyncratic, particular, and singular: in other words, it represents the exact opposite of the media, which strives toward the universal and general.

Knausgaard captures how our concept of empathy has shifted. This isn't just putting another person's shoes on. Rather, the space between people 'dissolves'; the reader 'assimilates' the other into his or her mind. It's a kind of ghostly possession or occupation. Knausgaard goes on to give an example of how to access an individual's experience rather than lazily adopting a generalized, standard account of them. 'If we allowed that remoteness to dissolve, what we would see would no longer be the very image of evil, but a boy growing up in Austria with a violent, authoritarian father and a mother whom he loved. We would see a sixteen-year-old so shy he hadn't the courage to speak to a girl with whom he was in love…' And so, boringly, on. The individual in question turns out to be none other than Adolf Hitler. Knausgaard's perversity here—using a Nazi to exhort us to humanize others—isn't that surprising. After all, he named his multi-volume autobiographical opus *My Struggle*. Many readers feel that its last book is at its worst when he eschews empathizing with his ex-wife, clearly under severe mental duress, because he's too busy writing about… Hitler.

Godwin's Law notwithstanding, Knausgaard's speech unwittingly reveals several problems with this, as he says, 'banal' model of ethics. There's what we might call the unequal distribution problem: Who gets to have our empathy? Hitler or one's wife? The living or the dead? Those near to us or far? Those who resemble and agree with us, or those who don't? The one or the many? And when it comes to art, as Knausgaard rhetorically asks, 'Is it not more important to engage with our neighbor, who after all is real, rather than with one who exists only in a work of fiction?' Jean-Jacques Rousseau raised the same point a couple of centuries ago: 'In giving our tears to these fictions, we have satisfied all the rights of humanity without having to give anything more of ourselves; whereas unfortunate people in person would require attention from us, relief, consolation, and work, which would involve us in their pains and would require at least the sacrifice of our indolence.'

> Knausgaard answers this counterargument by claiming that fictional empathy is in fact better because it takes place 'in the reader's own most private, intimate sphere, where the rules that govern our social interaction do not apply and its practical constraints do not exist.' This feels like a specious little paean to the triumph of the personal over the public good in our time.[1076]

While Serpell wants to reassert the importance of Kantian and Rawlsian categories in this debate, she ends up effectively deferring to Naipaul's ethics of travel writing:

> The empathy model of art can bleed too easily into the relishing of suffering by those who are safe from it. It's a gateway drug to white saviorism, with its familiar blend of propaganda, pornography, and paternalism. It's an emotional palliative that distracts us from real inequities, on the page and on screen, to say nothing of our actual lives. And it has imposed upon readers and viewers the idea that they can and ought to use art to inhabit others, especially the marginalized.
>
> Perhaps worse, it has imposed on makers of art, especially the marginalized, the idea that they can and ought to construct creative vehicles for empathy. This grotesque dynamic often makes for dull, pandering artworks. And it in fact perpetuates an assumed imbalance in the world: there are those who suffer, and those who do not and thus have the leisure to be convinced—via novels and films that produce empathy—that the sufferers matter. The scales remain tilted and this is why cultural appropriation still runs only one way, as does what we might call ethical slumming. To wit, when I, as a black woman, read or watch a white male hero, I'm meant to take on his perspective by default; no one assumes that it humanizes him or makes me more empathic. Unless, of course, he's Hitler.
>
> […] I find that the best way to grasp the distinction between 'representative thinking' and emotional empathy is Hannah Arendt's lovely phrase, 'one trains one's imagination to go visiting'. This way of relating to others is not just tourism. Nor is it total occupation—there is no 'assimilation' of self and other. Rather, you make an active, imaginative effort to travel outside of your circumstances and to stay a while, where you're welcome.[1077]

Just as no one expects a black woman to condescend to a white man, no one expected Naipaul to do what he did in so much of his work, which was to treat Third World charlatans precisely as Third World charlatans. This is ultimately better for them, and better for the reader, than any amount of condescension; this is the magic box that Naipaul's icecold descriptions unlock. Recognising and embracing the autonomous selfhood of others, in other words, is not the same thing as recognising and respecting their 'otherness'; for starters, it requires an 'imaginative

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[1076] Namwali Serpell, 'The Banality of Empathy', https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/03/02/the-banality-of-empathy/, 2/3/2019 (accessed 6/3/2019).

[1077] Serpell, 'The Banality of Empathy'.

effort', which Naipaul mustered in abundance, to travel outside of your circumstances without relinquishing your own prior sense of selfhood. But it also requires the kind of 'representative thinking' which, distinct from mere 'empathy', stands up for others precisely by not condescending to them. If the 'Do unto others' or 'Do not do unto others' Golden Rule can always be perverted to serve naked self-interest, it can also be made to stand as a marker of an established selfhood which, precisely because of its own strength, refuses to deny others the opportunity of true fraternity with it, a fraternity which excludes condescension by definition.

Did Naipaul *condescend* to Patricia, Margaret, and others close to him? Or was he trying too hard not to, thereby justifying his own selfishness? Condescension and callous cruelty in the end prove equally poisonous to relationships between equal selves; authors like Naipaul and Knausgaard perhaps avoid the former, but through their excessive attachment to 'candour', help to show us by default where the line *ought* to be. Naipaul's writing succeeded in pushing the line away from condescension - a necessary phase in 20th-century postcolonial dialectics, but also an important step towards the 'enormous story' of a 21st-century Spiritual Humanism, a World Ethos among a planet of spiritual equals.

18. Vergílio Ferreira's *Na tua face*

Beyond the many other lacunae in this book - take your pick of underrepresented languages and cultures - a 'global anthology' such as this could scarcely hope to remain credible if it did not pay at least passing lip-service to the Lusophone world; likewise, any book-length attempt to build a 21st-century 'Spiritual Humanism' is obliged to mention the word 'existentialism' at some point. We kill these two birds here - well, hopefully more than that - with Vergílio Ferreira's last novel, *Na tua face* (1993), a final reckoning with the mid-century mania for Sartre and company which Ferreira (1916-1996) brought via translation, teaching and torrents of fiction and prose to his native Portugal.

Bárbara and Ângela

The narrator of *Na tua face*, Daniel, is honest about how he married his wife Ângela: she was a pale but real reflection of her friend Bárbara, who first pierced the wrapping of Daniel's adolescent spirit:

> Bárbara!
>
> and she stopped immediately to listen. Then she turned to see where the call had come from. But she didn't move yet, don't move. She stayed there, searching for a reason why I might be calling out to her. It was this brief moment which carved itself into me for my whole life. Destiny. Who was standing in my place? So someone chooses on our behalf what we choose for eternity? Yes. A pact made outside the accidents of everyday life, I am thinking it with an excessive energy, it must be true.[1078]

Bárbara leaves Portugal to study abroad; Daniel falls in love with Ângela:

> There is a universal order, and someone must have responsibility for it if it is not upheld and not our fault. […] Maybe I'll see you again one day. But never again as I am stuck standing here thinking never again. Ângela and I sat down on the wooden carriage seat and unexpectedly I started to love her, like one loves the essence of someone in everything which breathes her. They were like friends who had become kin to me. There was the house she lived in, the things she used which had become contaminated [with Bárbara] - but it wasn't just that. It was Ângela herself. I heard her for the first time.[1079]

In the early part of their relationship, 'Bárbara walked with us'; 'I asked her after a while if she might go away, which she did eventually, though I would summon her

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[1078] Vergílio Ferreira, *Na tua face*, (Lisboa: Bertrand Editora, 1993), p. 9.

[1079] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, pp. 15-16.

again. And Ângela watched it all impassively with the indifferent certainty that some order external to life was being carried out, or so I told myself.'[1080]

While the real-life story with Ângela proceeds - marriage, children, routine, tragedy - Daniel reflects in parallel on the existential import of his private universe of feminine fantasy:

> I search for you in my school days before [Bárbara and Ângela] existed. You are there, but with a different name, […] Alzira, Porfíria, Cesarina, something with an *i* in the middle anyway, I don't remember exactly. 'But you're so ugly, Daniel.' That much I *do* remember. She said it jokingly but she meant it too. Comments like this follow us down the years like dogs. This is what the past becomes: a panorama of images, a freezeframe of individual phrases. They must form a constellation somewhere, but we don't know where.[1081]

Remembering a school dance with this 'Alzira Porfíria Cesarina', Daniel sees Bárbara alone, 'at a distance of how many years?':

> We twirled in the vertigo of space, I breathed in your body in all its terrible reality. We two alone, in the infinity of the night; I asked her for her name, she said Bárbara and I said Daniel, but by the time I had closed my mouth, she had disappeared. I only met her again many centuries later.
>
> […] 'You must be confused. I don't know you at all.'
>
> That's OK. Let's suppose we've never seen each other, I don't want to contradict you. But what does that even mean? All love starts before it starts, you know, with a meeting which never takes place. […] Our meeting was in eternity, which is where anything worth happening happens.[1082]

The narrative tension of *Na tua face* lies between the legitimate demands of Daniel's spiritual life and his responsibilities as a family man, which he also wants to take seriously and sacralise. He interrupts his daydreaming about 'Bárbara' to remind himself that he has to 'go into the office with Ângela' and then 'pick the kids up':

> I wanted to go to Penalva and enter the deserted cathedral, reabsorb the sacred milk of life into myself. Beauty, after all, is what exactly? Learning the truth of the being which beauty has in the infinite, I suppose. But I have to go into the office, Ângela might be there already. She said three, I'll leave at two-thirty. But it *was* forty years ago; the clocks might have changed in the meantime.[1083]

[1080] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 17.

[1081] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 19.

[1082] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, pp. 22-23.

[1083] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 26.

The story is bearable because Daniel is unwilling to give up on either Bárbara or his responsibilites to Ângela, which include love; he trusts in the truth and beauty that his existential explorations in this novel will eventually uncover. On the one hand, he is tough on his own fantasies, and able to create - with the help of the passing of time - a healthy ironic distance from them ('How many times did I go past their door, not in the hope of seeing Bárbara but to feel that she was nearer to my own commotion?'[1084] On the other, however, he is able to be honest about what all these imagined experiences still represent to him:

> I must have waited an eternity, which is the unit in which impatience is measured. I had been facing the door for a long time, and the day was already tiring. But I kept waiting, and at a certain point Bárbara appeared, […] her face lit by an interior smile. I said Babi, and she said my name. And that was when our spirits met. […] She looked at me and I looked at her, and there was a mutual understanding in the essentiality of us which went beyond beauty and shame. […] Still, her beauty was real and unbearable, and I even had to tell her how beautiful she was. And then I thought she was going to tell me the same thing; it was absurd, but I thought it.[1085]

Ângela, by contrast, was a frigid Latin nerd to Daniel at first, and he was correspondingly awful to her:

> 'Bárbara won't come back, ever again. She never existed. I exist.' She looked at me as if she were very serious about existing.
>
> 'But we don't love each other,' I said horribly.
>
> […] 'Love has to be learnt,' she said. […] 'Or invented, which amounts to the same thing. I'll give you my phone number in case you want to talk more about it. […] We have so much to talk about.'[1086]

Daniel comes around soon enough, and the pair are soon married: 'The law got its part, and we got ours. Thus the law only got the exteriority of the children, and we got to keep the inner part.'[1087] The marital relationship itself, however, obeys the 'law of life' which says that 'the more you see something, the less you see it'[1088]; Daniel wants to philosophise his way out of this predicament, but the reality of Ângela keeps interrupting him:

> The sea takes advantage of the night to increase its dreadfulness. Fear is made more from the possible than the real. […] Darkness contains more possibilities. But let me continue the philosophy lesson for as long as I hear the sea inside my own security. Everything is always more than the real.

[1084] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 28.

[1085] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, pp. 28-29.

[1086] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 34.

[1087] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 36.

[1088] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 36.

> Hope, love and so on. What a creature the human animal is! What interests him the most is not what he has, but what he doesn't have, even after he has had it. When he has it, he sits in it like a truck at a stop, and then carries on with his journey. The real is a swindle, like all acquired truth - but that's the end of the conversation because I can hear Ângela's car coming.[1089]

Try as he might, it is easier for Daniel to see the existential 'You' of the novel's title (literally *Facing You* or *Looking at You*) in his children than in Ângela:

> Who told you that you were ugly? It isn't true. I'm your father, and I carry with me the knowledge of all the fathers in the World, and I'm telling you it isn't true. Life can be seen in your inner energy, your solid gaze, your solar hair. It *is* you. And this is immense and categorical like all miracles.[1090]

But such parental reflexes only make the effort with Ângela look nobler somehow: 'There has to be a space in which there can be one thing or another,'[1091] Daniel decides, like the good existentialist his author is: not everything can be reducible to deterministic instinct of the kind teenage boys feel for their first true loves or parents feel for their children. If the world contains beauty on its own, additions can still be made with help 'from the inventive work of human beings, from patient contact with that which does not have it.'[1092]

The Painting

Daniel is an artist, not insofar as he sells art for money (though he does), but in the deeper sense that there is a painting - of Ângela, as it will transpire - that he has 'promised destiny to paint'[1093]. Having 'established this contract in eternity'[1094], will Daniel be able uphold it and fulfil his true vocation? After his university studies in anatomy, he recognises that such work, to have any real creative value, will have to synthesise 'everything from the loftiest so-called beauty, virtue and perfection to the most ordinary and excremental side of existence as well'[1095]. And as his son Luc reminds him, such art must also face the 'Why are there stars?' question: 'One day you will reach the final Why question, and the Earth and Universe will return the

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[1089] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 38.

[1090] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 40.

[1091] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 42.

[1092] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 56.

[1093] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 59.

[1094] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 60.

[1095] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 69.

Why to you in an echo,'[1096] Daniel replies. The ever-present Bárbara is still somehow part of the echo Daniel hears:

> Bárbara. How nice it is to meet you again. It's been such a long time. It's so good. I'm not going to ask you again, I know the answer and it's a sad one. All answers are sad, she says. Why? I say. I don't know, all answers are mortal, something like that, I don't know. […] We go down to the road, suspended from time, History opens out gradually before us and then closes over us or steps to one side to allow us to pass. Babi. […] She came up from the bottom of time, rarefied down to the essence of her perfection, which was not foreseen by God. It's an instantaneous, fragile perfection, and I can't touch it.[1097]

But Ângela is a destiny he can't avoid either:

> Why am I going to marry you? There must be a reason behind all the reasons, and this reason is that it is. I don't know. Or I don't know if I know, let's see if I can find a reason which suits me. Perhaps you liked me without knowing it. […] Or perhaps you were able to see beyond my love for Bárbara, which was vast and ended up contaminating you by approximation. And I loved her still as I fell in love with you. Or perhaps you thought: this is good enough for me, why do I need anything else? That would fit with your aversion to timewasting and your aesthetic preference for straight lines. […] Or perhaps we both recognised that everything had been decided in eternity and all we had to do was agree to it. Or maybe love can be learnt like a habit, you just have to give it time as you said, citing your favourite Latin poet. […] And I learnt - with a certain difficulty, but I learnt.[1098]

Na tua face unfolds in an utterly non-linear timeframe; the 'face' in question has a moral quality about it which implies the realm of eternity - not in or of time, but outside it - a man looking back on his life as a whole, examining it as a single, warts-and-all unit of moral meaning:

> I work on my painting insofar as I hear the sound of the sea. How many years have I been dragging this thing around with me? Ever since the sea jangled my nerves and I failed to put them back where they were. I've painted a pile of images in preparation for this final combat, will I win one day? Will there be a victory over my finitude?[1099]

[1096] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 74.

[1097] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 77.

[1098] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, pp. 78-79.

[1099] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 87.

His son Luc, meanwhile, would still seek him out and make him 'exist'[1100] from time to time with his questions, but the battle to love Ângela - the chief existential drama - is still on. Seeing one of her X-rays, Daniel realises that he

> has to love her in there too. You don't love only the skin of the fruit; you have to eat the whole thing. I familiarised myself with death like an undertaker. […] What do we love when we love a woman anyway? The skin and a bit below the skin? The rest, which is most of what we love, doesn't exist. […] My dear Ângela, let me say stupid things about Bárbara as long as she never appears, and let me be more sensible and have her take all that away with her. God was cynical offering me only a fictional version of you. Even the soul, which doesn't exist, is only visible in its invisibility. Or the spirit. I need to be careful that it doesn't evaporate. Like the art in a work of art to which no one pays attention, it is only the stone of the statue or the colours of a painting. I'm going to learn that you exist in your X-ray so as not to love only the shell of you. And I'm going to learn everything about you so that you're not just beauty on one side and horror on the other.[1101]

Bárbara keeps reappearing, both facilitating and hindering the business; one painting he reproduces of a group of prostitutes somehow transcends its own apparent subject:

> What moved me above all in this spectacle of depravity was a hidden hand of tenderness. It passed lightly over the whole canvas, transfiguring ugliness into the beauty of being. […] The disaster which had befallen these women left their truth exposed, an ordinary truth which nevertheless was. […] Bárbara poked her head in with them and had a laugh about it all too.[1102]

Is Daniel being kind or unkind to his daughter Luz when he correspondingly admits to himself 'I know she's no great beauty, but my blood, which generated her, doesn't'[1103]? What, precisely, is the existential reward for Luz of such paternal honesty? The doubt lingers in *Na tua face* that Daniel's existential self-absorption and Bárbara-fantasies distract him from the responsibilities of fatherhood as well as those of husbandhood - Luc's suicide and Luz's estrangement certainly add weight to this suspicion - but Ferreira, at a level of narrative remove from the action, is able to ask these questions of his reader as well as his protagonist. What does a conference of autonomous, kindred selves feel like? Daniel's family seems to fail the test in any case: 'Dear old Luz, she always spoke so little. Luc had more to say, but one can say less by choosing to say more I suppose. There was a deep silence in both of them, but the noise this silence made was different.'[1104] Crucially, Luz

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[1100] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 93.

[1101] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, pp. 97-99.

[1102] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 110.

[1103] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 112.

[1104] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 116.

refers to a photo of Daniel's parents as 'your parents': 'She said "*your* parents", she had no sense of genealogy.'[1105] Nevertheless, the family reunion with a grown-up Luz allows Daniel to recover 'the sacred bond of family' for a while (perhaps the problem was simply that 'laughing wasn't a big enough part of the family curriculum,' Daniel admits); it also brings him back to wanting to 'know better why it is that I love [Ângela]' again.[1106]

Against the 'sedentary vocation of being'[1107], which all things share regardless of what they do, Daniel, an aesthetic meritocrat to the end, has no interest either in a 'God which refuses to share His beauty with the ugly and vile'[1108] or an artist who chooses merely to 'explore the lower classes'[1109] like a colonial tourist instead of trying to beautify them without condescension and with a genuine 'hand of tenderness'. Daniel wants to know why he has loved Ângela 'in this strange form of never having loved [her]'[1110]; he won't settle for 'piety', which is 'the invalid form of love'; Ângela has her own questionable, over-Stoic philosophical views - half-right as Daniel admits his own must be - and she doesn't want him present when she presents them at a public conference on her 'Roman poet', but he goes and listens in the back anyway:

> Human passion consists of the madness of wanting the reality of that which doesn't exist. […] I am not preaching against love but against passion. Love is built through the habit of loving. […] Death is the only true problem human beings face. […] But above all, if we want to stand in life in perfect coordination with it, we must know that nothing in Nature is just or unjust. Nothing has any meaning. If there were any justice no animal would kill another to survive. Defenceless children would not die. There would be no natural disasters. The human beings of tomorrow will be free of all illusions and calm in the face of Nature.[1111]

No better or worse than Daniel with Bárbara, Ângela clearly has her own 'adulterous passion'[1112] for her poet, which Luz sees as clearly as Daniel and the reader: she and Luc make excuses, and do not go to hear their mother. Daniel, however, wants to find a space for Ângela's secret disloyalties - and her philosophical imperfections and self-contradictions - in his love for her (and his children and everything else) without pretending that they don't exist. Against this redemptive attitude towards ugliness stands the crude profiteering of Calisto,

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[1105] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 120.

[1106] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, pp. 122, 123.

[1107] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 126.

[1108] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 129.

[1109] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 131.

[1110] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 139.

[1111] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, pp. 144-146.

[1112] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 147.

‘whose friends called him Coca-Cola’, and who comes to Daniel with a money-making scheme:

> The words he used were Americanisms like the ones our politicians use: *time-share*, *low-profile*, *feed-back*, *joint-venture* and others I forget. […] His poetic and economic life was resolved. […] He envisaged a giant publishing house, a vast network of constant movement from writer to book to production to reader, an uninterrupted chain of production and consumption, […] direct, immediate, digestive poetry.[1113]

Embarking on a painting of Luc before the latter’s suicide, Daniel realises that, instead of this Amazonian nightmare, ‘it is time for the whole Earth to be democratic. It is time for us to see that, while He existed, God could not have had less of an aesthetic sensibility than the human beings who don’t exist anymore to have it either.’[1114] It is indifference to ugliness, then, which is characteristic of failed selfhood; one may not be able to transfigure all of the ugliness in the world into beauty on one’s own, but as Ângela and Daniel both half-say, a cultivated or cultivating self - someone who is ‘learning to be human’ - will at least recognise the point of trying.

It is not theism but a certain kind of *pantheism* which fails as a modern doctrine: what we now know to be billions of years of cosmic evolution simply contain too many ‘crimes without reason of Nature as a whole’[1115] for us moderns to be able to see God as omnipotent; either He somehow needs us to help improve things for Him with our autonomous efforts, or He is an unworthy and irrelevant monster. ‘What does this World matter if there are worlds hidden in your eyes?’[1116] Daniel asks Bárbara rhetorically; she is both a banal cosmic product of this history of evolutionary crime and a transcendence of it; it is Daniel’s spiritual responsibility to achieve this transcendence in some meaningful form. The problem is that nothing important in this sphere is easy: ‘Be patient,’ Bárbara tells him; ‘how could you expect me to open the door if you haven’t had to wait long enough? I’m not a prostitute that gives herself away to the first passerby.’[1117]

Daniel, meanwhile, cheats on Ângela in real life; in her ‘cold, precise, perfect’[1118] way, she says unceremoniously and indifferently that they can either separate, sleep in different rooms, or sleep in the same room but not touch each other.[1119] They muddle through for the kids; Daniel is still wrestling with his Bárbaras and paintings; Luc is still finding ways to ‘interrupt me right when my imagination is

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[1113] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, pp. 150-152.

[1114] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 158.

[1115] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 162.

[1116] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 167.

[1117] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 168.

[1118] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 169.

[1119] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 171.

warm'[1120]. If 'the distribution of pain [in the universe] is absolutely irrational'[1121], is Luc really wrong to be winding himself slowly into a spiral of suicidal thoughts? Daniel, meanwhile, has painted a portrait of a disfigured Ângela which, for all its 'monstrosity', achieves 'another beauty, for which we should perhaps come up with another name [than beauty] in order to avoid confusion and piracy'[1122]. Luc can't understand why Daniel finds his mother so ugly, and Luz looks for a long time but doesn't say anything at all, 'a sure sign of an unfavourable opinion'[1123]. Daniel explains his aesthetic choices away thus to his children: 'Your mother was always a thing of wonder. This is just a painting; the rules which govern it have nothing to do with that fact. […] Nothing is ugly or pretty; everything is simply what it is.'[1124]

This incomplete and insincere fatalism - which may or may not have contributed to Luc's decision to commit suicide and Luz's decision to pursue a dark brand of photography - did not help Daniel cope with the apparent loss of his children; rather, he himself had to mature to the point where, instead of viewing his children as obstacles to his own self-realisation, he is able to see them as autonomous selves with spirits of their own:

> We thought he was dead but he often rejoins us at table; Luz disappeared from our horizon, though she reappears off and on too. I remember when I realised she was a grown woman. It wasn't when she left home at the call of her destiny. It was after that somewhere, but I don't remember exactly when this fact first started emitting its weak signal from my spirit.[1125]

Remembering a talk given by Luc's young female friend Emanuela while he was still alive, Daniel admired her attempt to 'talk about the spiritual essence of the universe', but deplored her attempt to bring 'experimental science' to bear on the question[1126]; only Luc's subsequent suicide will bring the two - grieving father and grieving young girlfriend - into true spiritual communion: 'All true togetherness involves a mutual blood transfusion.'[1127] It is Ângela the linguist, however, who understands that 'every language has its own untranslatable soul'[1128]; over the course of his life with her, Daniel learns that 'beauty perhaps exists' beyond the beauty and ugliness of the everyday world of space and time, even if he 'doesn't

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[1120] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 176.

[1121] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 185.

[1122] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 188.

[1123] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 192.

[1124] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 194.

[1125] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 197.

[1126] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, pp. 199-200.

[1127] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, pp. 202-203.

[1128] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 203.

know why'.[1129] As Ângela loses her eyesight in old age, Daniel is able to 'look at her with a tenderness which cut a path from me all the way to her blindness'[1130]. If only, he thinks (without actually writing), if only he could have mustered such metaphysical tenderness with his children when they were growing up; instead, he allowed Luc to 'close himself off with his secret, which only betrayed itself from time to time in a certain crazed look', and allowed Luz to grow up into an artist who, in Luc's frank testimony, carried 'a ton of hatred in her soul'.[1131]

Daniel and the reader understand, however, that he is not singlehandedly responsible either for Luz's difficult path into adulthood or for Luc's dramatic decision on the cusp of it; Ângela, Emanuela, and Luc himself all played major roles in the latter as well, along with myriad other background factors of chaotic and amoral chance in the universe:

> Emanuela wanted to explain something to us, she said. Luc had written her a letter on the day he died or the night before, and which she had only received afterwards, three lines. 'Do you want me to read them to you?' Ângela said no. 'He wanted me to be there and to be the one who spread his ashes.' I asked to see the letter. 'I don't know why I'm doing it, and it doesn't even interest me. Nothing serious in life has an explanation. I'd like you to be there or be the one to…' But Ângela, obstinate and cold, said no, never.[1132]

Instead of seeking a full and final 'explanation' - whatever the psychologists might be able to say about chains of causation - we are required to accept that Luc autonomously chose to take his own life. Daniel wants to understand, of course, but he knows he can't:

> For a long time I looked out to the sea which had taken Luc's ashes into its bosom and closed its waters over him. […] Ângela - Ângela, I called out. She was in Luc's room, packing away his clothes without looking at me. As she was finishing, I walked up to the bedroom window and looked back out to sea. It was immense in my empty gaze, trembling in luminous vibrations all the way out to the foggy horizon.[1133]

In what seems a monstrous twist, this is precisely the moment at which Daniel 'sees Bárbara in rua de S. João': 'Something grew in us amid the ecstasy of existing. […] We were full of immense things in suspense. […] There must have been a great silence in the world, for we could hear ourselves being.'[1134] This seems a strange and acutely disloyal way to grieve for a lost son, but it is Daniel's

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[1129] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 205.

[1130] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 211.

[1131] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, pp. 212-213.

[1132] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, pp. 222-223.

[1133] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, pp. 224-225.

[1134] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, pp. 227-229.

way of 'reestablishing himself at the site of his suffering'[1135] and attempting to reopen a dialogue with a 'Heaven' which, he knows now more than ever, can be neither omnipotent nor omniscient:

> She was the same as always. Untouchable and incorruptible in my memory. […] Truth is in you, maybe you're the one who doesn't know that. Health and victory over the disorder of life [are in you too], Bárbara. A single tender glance would have been enough, but Bárbara disappeared, and I found myself alone on the deserted street.'[1136]

Returning home, Daniel finds himself 'actively thinking about my painting again', but for the first time he 'starts to find it natural that I might never succeed in painting it':

> A giant night enveloped my whole self, and there was no passage out of it in me anywhere in sight. Maybe Bárbara would come back again or yell at me from afar to wait. But in reality I wasn't expecting anything. […] In the vast sky at the top of the hill, the stars opened the dreams of those dreaming them. I didn't really see them, except in the immense unreality that absorbed me and held me suspended. I am before and after everything, without a before or an after. God ought to recognise me in Himself, and extend a hand.[1137]

After 'sleeping like a dog' in this 'deep night'[1138], Daniel finds himself reflecting on his exchange with Luc about Ângela:

> Why do you hate Mum so much? But he didn't say it like that, he only said
> 'Do you really think Mum has such a horrible face?'
> 'It's a painting Luc, it's only a painting.'
> But there's no harm here in thinking about this a little further. First about what tied me to Ângela for an entire life. And then about what Luc said. No, I never hated you, what a terrible thought. Did I love you according to the established code of love? […] At the start, there was a presence in you that wasn't you, and pushed you quite a bit to the side. And then there was your speed or opportunism or facility in taking advantage of the wave, and you didn't think further about it. Then your beauty really emerged in you, but it wasn't beauty as such. It was a certain calm mode of being, at zero degrees. And one day I realised you were indispensable to me, […] the unappreciated armrest on which one rests one's arm.[1139]

[1135] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 219.

[1136] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, pp. 231-232.

[1137] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 233-234.

[1138] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 234.

[1139] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 235-236.

So far, so unromantic. But Daniel is essentially describing the reverse of the cliché: instead of early and blind infatuation followed by alienation, estrangement, and divorce, Daniel describes a path, more like an arranged marriage, from underappreciation of Ângela's true qualities to slow apprehension and eventually a realisation of her overall 'indispensability' - a selfish-sounding word perhaps, but a real one.

At the end, with Ângela approaching death, Daniel is still to be found trying to figure out what their relationship has meant beyond its own convenience: 'As long as you don't fall again and your eyes haven't been switched off, I think it's alright for me to keep thinking about my painting. I bought the canvas long ago, two metres by one, just about big enough.'[1140] Something about Ângela was the opposite of Daniel's fantasy of spiritual communion; she insisted instead on 'keeping her personal items separate, her towels and dishes, in order to defend her individuality as far as she possibly could. […] It was her world, our intimacy was only nocturnal, but she had another, tighter cordon of intimacy which I never penetrated.'[1141] But as the end draws ever closer, this unknown Ângela will finally have something to say:

> We sat down and unexpectedly Ângela put her hand on my chest, then lifted it up towards my face, stroking softly and slowly from my chin to my nose, through my hair and down to the back of my neck. Then she pulled her hand away and stayed sitting beside me in silence. I wanted to ask why she had done that, why it was that she had never found a gesture of tenderness for me in her whole life, but I didn't ask because I didn't want the gesture to be interrupted.[1142]

As the reader struggles to remember a similar gesture of tenderness from Daniel to Ângela, we are plunged into one of Luz's photo exhibitions, where Daniel is confronted with a photograph of the dead body of his 'dear Luc'. 'I want you to be horrified,' Luz tells him. 'There's no horror, horror doesn't exist, isn't that what you say?'[1143] Leaving the 'horror' of the exhibition - worse than Luz's artistic efforts themselves are the pseudo-sophisticated commentaries (written by her bad-influence friend Serpa) which accompany them - Daniel emerges onto the streets of Lisbon, with light ('*luz*') 'still in the air. It was getting into summer, but I savoured the last gasps of spring, in the hope of carrying a small portion of it in my spirit back to Ângela.'[1144]

Luz and Daniel survive Ângela's death estranged from each other; as Luz prepares to have a child and to 'learn to be alone'[1145], Daniel sees Bárbara again, older now, with a handicapped adult son. As she prepares to return to her home in England, Daniel asks if he will ever see her again: 'Behind my madness, I felt the

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[1140] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 238.

[1141] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, pp. 246-247.

[1142] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 252.

[1143] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 259.

[1144] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 262.

[1145] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 278.

absurd impulse to recover a reality that never was. […] We got up [from the café table], and suddenly I saw Bárbara's face in all its youthful glory again. And unexpectedly that was where I stayed, looking at you, the final image of my unrest.'[1146] Bárbara departs with her son, but then disappears, leaving her son behind. Daniel goes to comfort him: 'She'll be back. Don't cry. […] 'Bárbara!' I shouted with all the force I could muster through the seafront fog.'[1147]

Will Daniel love Bárbara's handicapped son more than his own children? Is he the symbol of Daniel's failure to find and marry Bárbara, as he was 'called' to do? Is he some sort of karmic punishment for Daniel's treatment of his own family, or for his decision to 'settle' for Ângela instead of chasing his true love? Is he somehow a chance for redemption? Has Daniel mistreated his children because he felt they were never 'his own' in the way Bárbara's son might be? Is this the author's way of pointing to the social nature of selfhood and salvation, a booklength statement of the fact that one cannot philosophise one's way to selfhood but only achieve it through acts of autonomous sacrifice? Will this final episode somehow allow Daniel to repair his relationship with Luz and be a grandfather to his grandchild? As with a certain heavily existential brand of French cinema (or similar recent Chinese efforts such as *Diqiu zuihou de Yewan* (2018)), it would be futile to look for a definitive thesis here amid all the oniric confusion; all we can say for sure is that Daniel's major shortcomings, as well as his minor successes, have been spiritual rather than merely psychological in nature: having largely failed to establish a mature adult self beyond Bárbara and his 'painting', he struggles as a father to allow his children to establish theirs; and if he succeeds partially as a husband, it is only towards the end, when he learns, after a lifetime with Ângela, to exchange spiritual gifts with her which transcend selfish fantasies of communion with an imagined Bárbara-God.

[1146] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 284.

[1147] Ferreira, *Na tua face*, p. 285.

19. Mou Zongsan's *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*

> *Today the United States is facing a crisis which is not merely structural or political, but which also has an ethico-religious dimension. In order to face a series of unprecedented challenges, many American intellectuals have abandoned faith in institutional reform and turned to individuals' basic convictions and capacity for self-cultivation as the path to the root of the problem. Confucianism is admittedly not more than a footnote in this conversation at present, but I believe that with the rise of new generations of American humanists, Confucianism in one form or another is destined for a great future in the New World.*[1148]
>
> Tu Weiming, 1972

There is an extreme if unintentional arrogance implied in the title of Mou Zongsan's 1974 book *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*: such a choice (i.e. *The Special Value of Chinese Philosophy*) suggests familiarity with the philosophical traditions of the entire world, as well as an extra insight into the Chinese tradition which allows its author to posit a 'unique' contribution of the latter to the universal human conversation. Less dramatically and more charitably, we can say that the book was intended as a statement of faith in the Chinese capacity to correct or augment *Western* philosophy: *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi* offers us a series of quick and indirect snapshots, before the postmodern detour in the West, of the shortcomings of postwar 'Western' spiritual life. If 20th-century Western thought is still a bit too logocentric (Athens) and theocentric (Jerusalem) - even in its most atheistic or existentialist manifestations - then the explicit Chinese philosophical emphasis on 'subjectivity' and 'ethicality'[1149] offers a path between the Scylla of scientistic rationalism on the one hand and the Charybdis of poststructuralism and postmodernism on the other.

Confucius on *Ren*

Mou seeks to explain the Mandate of Heaven in terms of the Confucian virtue of *ren*: 'Only a life which has not been objectified counts as a true life,'[1150] by which he implies that any attempt to understand one's life in abstraction from bonds of fellow-feeling with other human beings and the wider universe is doomed to failure from the outset. There is no stepping outside these constitutive bonds of identity:

[1148] Tu Weiming, 'Tang Junyi de Beiyuan', *Zhongguo Shibao*, 30/8/1972.

[1149] See Mou Zongsan, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi (The Special Value of Chinese Philosophy)*, (Taiwan Xuesheng Shuju, 1974), pp. 13-20.

[1150] Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, p. 42.

> Such [true] life is of course spiritual by definition, not mere animal life in the natural world. It can be compared to the 'life' promised by Jesus when he says 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life'. […] If you want to understand the meaning of the universe as a whole, you have to consider both the visible and invisible parts; likewise, if you want to understand the meaning of human life as a whole, you have to keep in mind both birth *and* death.[1151]

Enlightenment, such as it is, consists in embodying the knowledge that 'the essence of generosity, wisdom and sagehood is never closed, but opens out continually beyond us into mutual accord with a faraway Mandate of Heaven'[1152]. Ethical life, then, is a continual shifting of the horizon of human possibility in creative dialogue with a Heaven which only gradually, and never completely, reveals its Mandate; there is no stasis, and hence no boredom, in *ren*.

What is *ren* exactly? Mou offers his own synthesis of the *Analects*: more than a generic 'perception or sensation' of empathy, *ren* is a certain specific capacity for 'unease' and a corresponding need to complete the 'faraway' and partly invisible will of Heaven in one's own creative and autonomous conduct (Mencius will extend this idea of 'compassion' into an 'inability to bear the suffering of others').[1153] The opposite of *ren*, therefore, is a certain kind of 'woodenheartedness'; a person may use empathy and general 'emotional intelligence' to her own business advantage, for example, but remain utterly deaf to the call of Heaven.[1154] A *junzi*, by contrast, works to 'strengthen' herself in imitation of Heaven and Earth's own ceaseless creativity (visible and invisible), turning feeling into strength in the manner of Heaven itself.[1155] Instead of 'finding' or 'reaching' the heavenly object of one's love, in other words, the 'destiny' of our lives is to become or embody it in our own day-to-day conduct - an ongoing ethical or aesthetic challenge, not an epistemological or metaphysical one. Confucius's pedagogical mission to establish *ren* as the 'inner root' of the 'real self' was an attempt to concretise the otherwise 'eternally aloof' Way of Heaven in dynamic human form, without falling into idolatry of any kind.[1156]

'The Future of Chinese Philosophy'

If the 'Three Teachings' - Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism - represent the core or axis of Chinese philosophy, then we are faced not with a 'scientific' or 'technological' outlook or outlooks on the world, but an 'ethico-religious' tradition in which 'emphasis falls on questions pertaining to human life itself'[1157]. While Max

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[1151] Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, p. 42.

[1152] Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, pp. 42-43.

[1153] See Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, p. 43.

[1154] See Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, p. 43.

[1155] Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, pp. 43-44.

[1156] Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, p. 44.

[1157] Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, p. 111.

Weber and others - including millions of Chinese - have questioned whether such a spiritual focus could ever have given rise to the Industrial Revolution, Mou reminds his readers that this is the wrong question to be asking: 'There remain for humanity dimensions of culture and learning more intimate than science and democracy, namely questions concerning the destiny of human life. […] China needs science and democracy, but not at the expense of these questions of destiny.'[1158] Mou equates this humanistic learning not with experimental psychology (*xinlixue*) but with an introspective 'study of temperament' (*xinxingzhixue*)[1159]; if Christianity and other spiritual traditions offer a certain potential here even in a Chinese context ('every great religion has its own high degree of truthfulness'[1160]), they are unlikely ever to supplant the centuries-long tradition of the Three Teachings 'rubbing together'[1161] and mutually strengthening each other on Chinese soil; what globalisation offers is the chance to integrate teachings and voices from further afield than ever before into national conversations. 'Science and democracy,' however, 'cannot supplant the ethico-religious [dimension of the conversation] in any time or place'; humanity needs science and technology to raise material living standards, but it also needs an ethos to raise spiritual standards.[1162] Mou even goes so far as to say that 'no one can deny this':

> If humanity needs two types of thing at the same time, and if the essences and forms of these two things are different and cannot substitute for each other, then humanity has no rational choice but to pursue the two in parallel. Beyond the freedom of religion and conscience which democracy guarantees, there needs to be a high degree of interpenetration among philosophical wisdom traditions in order to catalyse and promote [the humanities alongside the sciences].[1163]

Mou prefers the word *zongjiao* ('religion') to the more secular-sounding *renwenxue* ('humanities') here[1164], but the intent is clear: Chinese philosophy has a central role to play in fashioning such an international ethos in opposition to the hegemony of scientistic academic thinking on the one hand and megachurch psychobabble on the other:

> The Way of Heaven is vast and obscure; the Mandate of Heaven is hard to intuit; the Meaning of Heaven is hard to know: in the teachings of Confucius and Mencius, this much is clear. But despite such obscurity, we are still called to pursue the Way of Heaven to the best of our ability. Our so-called

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[1158] Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, p. 114, 121.

[1159] Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, p. 114.

[1160] Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, p. 122.

[1161] Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, p. 122.

[1162] Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, p. 123.

[1163] Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, pp. 123-124.

[1164] See Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, p. 125.

> 'Knowledge of Heaven' [*zhitian*], however, is only ever passive; the closest we get in any active sense is when we embody *ren*. *Zhitian* is only ever a faraway echo we enjoy when we are busy with this endless business.[1165]

Our ability to 'embody' the Way of Heaven, in other words, is only ever an indirect and subjective function of our absorption in the ethical engagement of *ren*; it is not a knowledge we can abstract away or distill into messianic or totalising systems of dogma.[1166]

'How Does Confucianism Soften the Idea of "Revelation"?'

The end of *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi* addresses the Confucian solution to the problem of literalist revelation; whereas Christian and other Abrahamic theologians must find metaphors - creative and credible in equal measure - to cope with their post-Darwin crisis of epistemological legitimacy, the 'problem of revelation' (namely the dubious credibility of the 'sources' of any such revelation in the light of modern science and logic) is one which, in the Confucian tradition, never poses itself: Confucius did not claim to be anything other than an ordinary human being with a 'take it or leave it' corpus of work. While elements of Confucianism have doubtless been codified and abused by authoritarian Asian leaders down the centuries, there is nothing inherent in the Confucian teaching itself which requires epistemological submission of this kind. Even if early Confucian texts refer to Confucius as the 'saint following in the footsteps of Heaven', and even if Han Dynasty courtiers (among others) had a nasty habit of deifying him from time to time, Confucius himself never claimed such a mantle, and the main thrust of the Chinese intellectual and spiritual tradition has wasted little time on such vulgar and pointless speculations.[1167]

Nevertheless, Mou makes some straw-man assumptions about *Christianity* which many contemporary Christian theologians would regard as trivial:

> Christianity is a God-revealed religion. God revealed Himself in nature through a series of miracles, the most important of which was Jesus; indeed, this was the point at which Christianity became Christianity. Nevertheless, this Christianity developed as a theocentric creed: Jesus is God, he is not a human being. He is the one embodiment ('incarnation') of God, the one Holy Son. God may be able to take other forms, but it is up to Him to decide who gets incarnated, not human beings. Still, in Christianity, they say that God is only embodied by Jesus. They seem very clearly to know the will of God in this matter; […] as for how they know all this, well, it's hard to say. We won't go into it any further here; we are looking specifically at the question of revelation. We can, of course, view Jesus as a human being (however ordinary or extraordinary) if we want to, but the

[1165] Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, p. 137.

[1166] Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, p. 138.

[1167] See Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, p. 140.

> Christian position is that the identity or status of Jesus as a human being is secondary: his essence is divine, not human, and he must therefore be regarded as such. He is God in human form, able to meet human beings face to face. In this sense, we can of course say that he is human, but his destiny is still divine, not human. […] His fate is willed by God; it is not a result of his efforts of self-cultivation.[1168]

Rather than debating the theological accuracy or sophistication of any of this, it is interesting simply to note the dismissive tone: rather than trying to understand Jesus creatively as an honorary human member of the Confucian pantheon, Mou is setting up a final argument for the 'special value of Chinese philosophy' as an antidote to Abrahamic excess:

> As for the concept of 'revelation', Chinese people don't have one. […] The traditional Chinese spirit, the core of the Confucian tradition is concerned with 'how to embody the Way of Heaven'. The most important factor here is self-cultivation. The question of human nature is the central question in Confucianism. But as we have established, the Confucian and Mencian emphasis on *ren* and *xing* (essence) is really about the essence of 'creativity itself'. […] On such a view, all people can become saintly; there is equal opportunity for everyone.[1169]

Even if Song-Ming Confucians and Daoists placed varying degrees of emphasis on innate qualities at different times, the overall role of Heaven as a purveyor of fixed and revealed truths in Chinese philosophy is, Mou argues, 'relatively relaxed': 'There is certainly nothing approaching Christianity's doctrine of a single incarnation or Holy Son.'[1170] The overall negativity and nervous passivity of a certain prayer-heavy, miracle-dependent Christian life is sublimely overcome by the 'optimism' of 'Chinese people and the Confucian tradition', which

> take a less categorical view of things, and drain away the tension inherent in the [Christian] view of the relationship between man and God. […] The central question becomes how to cultivate one's [creative] capacity for *ren* as a means of embodying the Way of Heaven. All nervous energy is channeled towards this goal, as is all solemn respect for the gifts Heaven has bestowed on us.[1171]

Reading *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi* in 2019

Mou Zongsan's work - and the scholarly literature which has accumulated around it since his death in 1995 - represents a universe of largely untranslated and highly

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[1168] Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, pp. 138-139.

[1169] Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, p. 140.

[1170] Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, p. 141.

[1171] Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, p. 141.

sophisticated writing guarded by forbidding barriers to entry for all but the most committed Sinologists.[1172] The purpose of this chapter - the shortest in the book - was not to register much of an echo in this densely guarded hermetic chamber, but to provide an example of the opportunities and dangers of our time. One could attack Mou from the same angle as critics of Christopher Hitchens have attacked his *God is not Great*: it is too easy to take the worst of a religion (or 'religion' in general) and attack that, instead of patiently seeking to engage with the strongest arguments for the other side. And yet, if most people's relationship with a tradition can be boiled down to a parody of itself, doesn't *someone* have a responsibility to call bullshit? As a member of the exiled '1958 Generation', Mou saw himself in the role of arch defender of 'traditional Chinese culture' against the unidirectional encroachment of 'Western' ideas and values. Christianity, for all its post-Enlightenment twists and struggles, was (and still is) very much a part of that edifice (not least in its evangelical American manifestations); in such a context, was Mou wrong to insist that Chinese culture had a 'special value', especially beyond that which a bargain-basement Abrahamic outlook seemed able to provide? Was he wrong to encourage a generation of students - Tu Weiming chief among them - to travel beyond Cultural China and begin to share that 'special value' with the rest of the world (and the hegemonic United States in particular)? Tu's generation, indeed, has had the privilege, as Mou's largely did not, of seeing far enough into the West to understand that there was more to the 'Western' intellectual and cultural heritage than met the eye under the conditions of 19th-century colonialism (and on into Mou's own youth); the 'Spiritual Humanism' Tu has coined in the last decade is the 'optimistic' product of a lifetime spent promoting the Confucian tradition in dialogue with outstanding representatives of religious and secular traditions of all stripes from all over the world, including North American and European Christians.

Moreover, to insist on the 'special value' of Chinese philosophy in 2019, as China is poised to leapfrog the United States as the world's leading economic power, is a very different gesture than it was from Taipei at the height of the Cultural Revolution. Postcolonial and postmodern currents in the intervening years have, for all their faults and excesses, at least tuned the collective radar among global intellectual élites to detect imperialism by stealth; we may not be far from a time when Western and other intellectuals will be writing proudly defensive books about the 'special value' of their own traditions *vis-à-vis* the new Chinese Belt-and-Road hegemon. Few did more to protect the Confucian tradition from 20th-century oblivion than Mou Zongsan - one can well understand and sympathise with his sprung posture in this and other books and declarations - but the future of the self-cultivation and humanistic learning so prized by Mou and other New Confucians lies not in the thinly veiled cultural identity politics practised in *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, but rather in dialogical engagement of a more demanding, but also more 'optimistic', kind: namely, faith in the best of *foreign* traditions (most of which, by definition, remain unknown and unexplored by us). Others may wax lyrical about Chinese philosophy in 2019; it is no longer the place of great teachers like Mou Zongsan to do so, least of all at the expense of other rich traditions. If 'every great

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[1172] For a recent book-length English introduction to Mou and his contemporaries, see Jana S. Rošker, *The Rebirth of the Moral Self: The Second Generation of Modern Confucians and their Modernization Discourses*, (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2016).

religion has its own high degree of truthfulness', as Mou himself admitted, then we must be prepared to live up to such 'vigorous' humanism by seeking out such truthfulness - with all the critical energy this quest entails - precisely where we *least* expect it, beyond the comfort and glory of our own inherited cultures.

20. Muhammad Iqbal's *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*

> *To circumscribe poetry by a definition will only show the narrowness of the definer.*
>
> Samuel Johnson

Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) interests us here neither for his posthumous legacy as the 'Spiritual Father of Pakistan' nor for his political engagement on the Indian subcontinent during his lifetime (both of which have been lauded by some and cursed by others[1173]). Before he was any kind of symbol or excuse, however, Iqbal was a formidable intellectual: known in his native Farsi as 'the Lahori', his 1915 collection of poems, *Asrar-i-Khudi* (*The Secrets of the Self*), made waves in Persian literary circles; his contributions to legal and philosophical discourse in England earned him a knighthood in 1922; by 1930, he was concerned with *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, a theme which he addressed in a series lectures in Madras, Hyderabad and Aligarh at the behest of the Madras Muslim Association. The work of carving a path of meaningful dialogue between Islam and Western modernity, begun by the likes of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh in the late-19th Century, had not been completed by 1930, and still cannot be said to have been. We return to Iqbal here out of a sense of duty to seek creative solutions to this ongoing challenge, and to see if a certain strand of humanism in his work, overshadowed by his identity as a divisive political symbol, might not be rescued and repolished.

'Knowledge and Religious Experience'

[1173] Readers unfamiliar with Iqbal's vast influence on the 20th-century Indian subcontinent could for once do worse than consulting his well-compiled English Wikipedia entry (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_Iqbal#Political), which offers an overview of the disputes in play:

> Iqbal's views on the Western world were applauded by men including United States Supreme Court Associate Justice William O. Douglas, who said that Iqbal's beliefs had 'universal appeal'. Soviet biographer N. P. Anikoy wrote:
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> > [Iqbal is] great for his passionate condemnation of weak will and passiveness, his angry protest against inequality, discrimination and oppression in all forms i.e., economic, social, political, national, racial, religious, etc., his preaching of optimism, an active attitude towards life and man's high purpose in the world, in a word, he is great for his assertion of the noble ideals and principles of humanism, democracy, peace and friendship among peoples.
>
> Others, including Wilfred Cantwell Smith, stated that with Iqbal's anti-capitalist holdings he was 'anti-intellect', because 'capitalism fosters intellect'. Professor Freeland Abbott objected to Iqbal's views, saying that Iqbal's view of the West was based on the role of imperialism and Iqbal was not immersed enough in Western culture to learn about the various benefits of the modern democracies, economic practices and science. Critics of Abbot's viewpoint note that Iqbal was raised and educated in the European way of life, and spent enough time there to grasp the general concepts of Western civilisation.

> *The modern man, by developing habits of concrete thought – habits which Islam itself fostered at least in the earlier stages of its cultural career – has rendered himself less capable of that experience which he further suspects because of its liability to illusion. The more genuine schools of Sufism have, no doubt, done good work in shaping and directing the evolution of religious experience in Islam; but their latter-day representatives, owing to their ignorance of the modern mind, have become absolutely incapable of receiving any fresh inspiration from modern thought and experience. They are perpetuating methods which were created for generations possessing a cultural outlook differing, in important respects, from our own. […] As knowledge advances and fresh avenues of thought are opened, other views, and probably sounder views than those set forth in these lectures, are possible. Our duty is carefully to watch the progress of human thought, and to maintain an independent critical attitude towards it.*[1174]
>
> Muhammad Iqbal

Iqbal is not beginning his 'reconstruction' from a position of either defensive pride or hidden self-loathing: he is not insisting in advance on any 'special value' of Islam beyond the value it reveals itself to have after contact with modernity, a modernity of which he himself is a product and part. After a comparison of Kant and al-Ghazali (Kant, 'consistently with his principles, could not affirm the possibility of a knowledge of God', while Ghazali's mystical turn 'succeeded in securing for religion the right to exist independently of science'[1175]), Iqbal, author of a Zoroastrian-inflected doctoral thesis entitled *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* (1908), concludes that the two men shared one other important thing in common:

> Both Kant and Ghazālī failed to see that thought, in the very act of knowledge, passes beyond its own finitude. The finitudes of Nature are reciprocally exclusive. Not so the finitudes of thought, which is, in its essential nature, incapable of limitation and cannot remain imprisoned in the narrow circuit of its own individuality. In the wide world beyond itself nothing is alien to it. It is in its progressive participation in the life of the apparently alien that thought demolishes the walls of its finitude and enjoys its potential infinitude.
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> […] During the last five hundred years religious thought in Islam has been practically stationary. There was a time when European thought received inspiration from the world of Islam. The most remarkable

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[1174] Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, http://www.allamaiqbal.com/works/prose/english/reconstruction/, 'Preface'.

[1175] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'Knowledge and Religious Experience'.

> phenomenon of modern history, however, is the enormous rapidity with which the world of Islam is spiritually moving towards the West. There is nothing wrong in this movement, for European culture, on its intellectual side, is only a further development of some of the most important phases of the culture of Islam. Our only fear is that the dazzling exterior of European culture may arrest our movement and we may fail to reach the true inwardness of that culture. During all the centuries of our intellectual stupor Europe has been seriously thinking on the great problems in which the philosophers and scientists of Islam were so keenly interested. Since the Middle Ages, when the schools of Muslim theology were completed, infinite advance has taken place in the domain of human thought and experience.[1176]

One need not accept the details of Iqbal's philosophical argument to appreciate that he is preparing the ground here for a surprise post-Darwin return to Islamic sources: thought, whatever it is, is more than any scientific theory - even the theory of evolution - can describe:

> I propose to undertake a philosophical discussion of some of the basic ideas of Islam, in the hope that this may, at least, be helpful towards a proper understanding of the meaning of Islam as a message to humanity. […] The main purpose of the Qur'an is to awaken in man the higher consciousness of his manifold relations with God and the universe. […] The great point in Christianity is the search for an independent content for spiritual life which, according to the insight of its founder, could be elevated, not by the forces of a world external to the soul of man, but by the revelation of a new world within his soul. Islam fully agrees with this insight and supplements it by the further insight that the illumination of the new world thus revealed is not something foreign to the world of matter but permeates it through and through.
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> Thus the affirmation of spirit sought by Christianity would come not by the renunciation of external forces which are already permeated by the illumination of spirit, but by a proper adjustment of man's relation to these forces in view of the light received from the world within. It is the mysterious touch of the ideal that animates and sustains the real, and through it alone we can discover and affirm the ideal. With Islam the ideal and the real are not two opposing forces which cannot be reconciled. The life of the ideal consists, not in a total breach with the real which would tend to shatter the organic wholeness of life into painful oppositions, but in the perpetual endeavour of the ideal to appropriate the real with a view eventually to absorb it, to convert it into itself and illuminate its whole being.[1177]

[1176] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'Knowledge and Religious Experience'.

[1177] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'Knowledge and Religious Experience'.

There is no hiding, in other words, from science: the psychology, sociology and anthropology of religion are all here to stay. The problem is that *explaining* the phenomenon of human spirituality in terms of the 'real' - genes, hormones, social conditions or whatever - will never be the same thing as *experiencing* such spirituality in its own intrinsic dynamism and spontaneous idealism:

> If ever upon the stupid day-length time-span of any self or saint some *vision* breaks to roll his life and ours into new channels, it can only be because that vision admits into his soul some trooping invasion of the concrete fullness of eternity. […] A purely psychological method, therefore, […] is bound to fail in the case of our newer psychologists as it [failed] in the case of Locke and Hume.[1178]

One at least understands the metaphor here: humanistic 'thought' or 'experience' is always creativity *beyond* or *on top of* science; it has an innate poetic or spiritual quality. As Iqbal says further in 'The Philosophic Test of the Revelations of Religious Experience', 'if the intellect [is] a product of the evolution of life, it is not absolute but relative to the activity of the life which has evolved it; how then […] can science exclude the subjective aspect […] and build on the objective presentation as an absolute?'[1179] This is in no way to deny the Darwinian foundations of modern neuroscience, but simply to point out that, parallel to such hi-tech investigation, genuine spiritual experience - by definition new and authentic to the moment in space-time in which it occurs - will continue. Explaining that experience via the causal pathways of 'science', interesting and useful though such work may be, will never be synonymous with enriching or plumbing the depths of its meaning.

'The Conception of God and the Meaning of Prayer'

Instead of asking how the Qur'an might be squared chapter and verse with contemporary evolution, quantum physics and so on (a clearly hopeless and pointless endeavour), Iqbal wants his reader to consider the possibility that Qur'anic teaching has offered, for more than a thousand years, the option of a certain creative spirit of engagement with science in general:

> We cannot understand the full import of the great cosmic forces which work havoc, and at the same time sustain and amplify life. The teaching of the Qur'an, which believes in the possibility of improvement in the behaviour of man, […] is neither optimism nor pessimism. It is meliorism, which recognizes a growing universe and is animated by the hope of man's eventual victory over evil.
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> […] The Qur'anic method of complete or partial transformation of legends in order to besoul them with new ideas, and thus to adapt them to

[1178] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'Knowledge and Religious Experience'.

[1179] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Philosophic Test of the Revelations of Religious Experience'.

> the advancing spirit of time, is an important point which has nearly always been overlooked both by Muslim and non-Muslim students of Islam. The object of the Qur'an in dealing with these legends is seldom historical; it nearly always aims at giving them a universal moral or philosophical import. And it achieves this object by omitting the names of persons and localities which tend to limit the meaning of a legend by giving it the colour of a specific historical event, and also by deleting details which appear to belong to a different order of feeling. This is not an uncommon method of dealing with legends. It is common in non-religious literature. An instance in point is the legend of Faust, to which the touch of Goethe's genius has given a wholly new meaning.
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> Turning to the Legend of the Fall we find it in a variety of forms in the literatures of the ancient world. It is, indeed, impossible to demarcate the stages of its growth, and to set out clearly the various human motives which must have worked in its slow transformation. But confining ourselves to the Semitic form of the myth, it is highly probable that it arose out of the primitive man's desire to explain to himself the infinite misery of his plight in an uncongenial environment, which abounded in disease and death and obstructed him on all sides in his endeavour to maintain himself.[1180]

This effective reduction of the Qur'an to the status of 'mere literature' may be controversial in the context of 21st-century Salafism, but it is, as Iqbal shows, absolutely necessary: it is the condition of possibility of a genuine equal dialogue between Islam and the world's multiple modernities. The Legend of the Fall becomes almost the exact opposite of what we might think: not a pseudoscientific claim about the historical origins of humanity, but a metaphorical affirmation of the autonomy of the humanities from science:

> Thus we see that the Qur'anic Legend of the Fall has nothing to do with the first appearance of man on this planet. Its purpose is rather to indicate man's rise from a primitive state of instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of a free self, capable of doubt and disobedience. The Fall does not mean any moral depravity; it is man's transition from simple consciousness to the first flash of self-consciousness, a kind of waking from the dream of nature with a throb of personal causality in one's own being. Nor does the Qur'an regard the earth as a torture-hall where an elementally wicked humanity is imprisoned for an original act of sin. Man's first act of disobedience was also his first act of free choice; and that is why, according to the Qur'anic narration, Adam's first transgression was forgiven. Now goodness is not a matter of compulsion; it is the self's free surrender to the moral ideal and arises out of a willing co-operation of free egos. A being whose movements are wholly determined like a machine cannot produce goodness. Freedom is thus a condition of goodness. But to permit the emergence of a finite ego who has the power to choose, after considering the relative values of several courses of action open to him, is really to take

[1180] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Conception of God and the Meaning of Prayer'.

> a great risk; for the freedom to choose good involves also the freedom to choose what is the opposite of good. That God has taken this risk shows His immense faith in man; it is for man now to justify this faith.[1181]

This is neither a scientific claim nor a political threat backed by violence: it is a metaphor which either speaks to us directly, as literature, or else does not. Iqbal simply wants his reader to understand that the Qur'an offers his 'modern man' spiritual surprises if he is ready to engage with it creatively enough:

> In the case of man, in whom individuality deepens into personality, opening up possibilities of wrongdoing, the sense of the tragedy of life becomes much more acute. But the acceptance of selfhood as a form of life involves the acceptance of all the imperfections that flow from the finitude of selfhood. The Qur'an represents man as having accepted at his peril the trust of personality which the heavens, the earth, and the mountains refused to bear. […] Shall we, then, say no or yes to the trust of personality with all its attendant ills? True manhood, according to the Qur'an, consists in '*patience under ills and hardships*'. At the present stage of the evolution of selfhood, however, we cannot understand the full import of the discipline which the driving power of pain brings. Perhaps it hardens the self against a possible dissolution. But in asking the above question we are passing the boundaries of pure thought.[1182]

We cannot philosophise our way into such trust; we must somehow, Iqbal insists, be able to feel our way in: the Qur'an, to the extent that it succeeds as literature, *stimulates* such feeling rather than explaining or describing it. Likewise, 'prayer' - understood in Jamesian terms by Iqbal as dialogue with an imaginary 'ideal spectator' - can be understood in such creative terms: not as a blind and boring form of submission to totalitarian authority, but as an autonomous act of spiritual discipline with a social and political meaning beyond its own private content:

> I [am not] speaking of some occult and special way of knowledge. All that I mean is to fix your attention on a real human experience which has a history behind it and a future before it. Mysticism has, no doubt, revealed fresh regions of the self by making a special study of this experience. Its literature is illuminating; yet its set phraseology shaped by the thought-forms of a worn-out metaphysics has rather a deadening effect on the modern mind. The quest after a nameless nothing, as disclosed in Neo-Platonic mysticism – be it Christian or Muslim – cannot satisfy the modern mind, which, with its habits of concrete thinking, demands a concrete living experience of God.
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> […] The form of prayer ought not to become a matter of dispute. Which side you turn your face is certainly not essential to the spirit of prayer. The Qur'an is perfectly clear on this point. […] Yet we cannot ignore the

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[1181] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Conception of God and the Meaning of Prayer'.

[1182] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Conception of God and the Meaning of Prayer'.

> important consideration that the posture of the body is a real factor in determining the attitude of the mind. The choice of one particular direction in Islamic worship is meant to secure the unity of feeling in the congregation, and its form in general creates and fosters the sense of social equality inasmuch as it tends to destroy the feeling of rank or race superiority in the worshippers. What a tremendous spiritual revolution will take place, practically in no time, if the proud aristocratic Brahmin of South India is daily made to stand shoulder to shoulder with the untouchable! From the unity of the all-inclusive Ego who creates and sustains all egos follows the essential unity of all mankind. The division of mankind into races, nations, and tribes, according to the Qur'an, is for purposes of identification only. The Islamic form of association in prayer, therefore, besides its cognitive value, is further indicative of the aspiration to realize this essential unity of mankind as a fact in life by demolishing all barriers which stand between man and man.[1183]

Even here, Iqbal is calling his reader beyond the outward forms of Islamic tradition and seeking to penetrate its spirit: if 'modern man' is more comfortable with Netflix and UberEats than rock-hard church pews and communal scones as the site of his 'prayer', then that is not in and of itself a bad thing as long as the 'spiritual democracy' which is the very essence of the Islamic tradition is creatively enhanced rather than threatened by such new technologies.

<u>'The Human Ego - His Freedom and Immortality'</u>

While emphasising and defending the poetic sublimity of creativity, Iqbal also wants to insist on its true preconditions - not simply *laissez-faire* cultural relativism, but autonomous self-cultivation, the strenuous fashioning of a transtemporal moral identity:

> The Qur'an in its simple, forceful manner emphasizes the individuality and uniqueness of man, and has, I think, a definite view of his destiny as a unity of life. It is in consequence of this view of man as a unique individuality which makes it impossible for one individual to bear the burden of another, and entitles him only to what is due to his own personal effort, that the Qur'an is led to reject the idea of [vicarious] redemption.[1184]

Strangely, however, despite these impulses in the Qur'an and elsewhere, Muslim culture has not yet made as much of this idea of 'learning for the self' as it could:

> It is surprising to see that the unity of human consciousness which constitutes the centre of human personality never really became a point of interest in the history of Muslim thought. The Mutakallimūn regarded the

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[1183] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Conception of God and the Meaning of Prayer'.

[1184] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Human Ego - His Freedom and Immortality'.

> soul as a finer kind of matter or a mere accident which dies with the body and is re-created on the Day of Judgement. The philosophers of Islam received inspiration from Greek thought. In the case of other schools, it must be remembered that the expansion of Islam brought within its fold peoples belonging to different creed-communities, such as Nestorians, Jews, Zoroastrians, whose intellectual outlook had been formed by the concepts of a culture which had long dominated the whole of middle and western Asia. This culture, on the whole Magian in its origin and development, has a structurally dualistic soul-picture which we find more or less reflected in the theological thought of Islam. Devotional Sufism alone tried to understand the meaning of the unity of inner experience which the Qur'an declares to be one of the three sources of knowledge, the other two being History and Nature. The development of this experience in the religious life of Islam reached its culmination in the well-known words of Hallāj – 'I am the creative truth.' The contemporaries of Hallāj, as well as his successors, interpreted these words pantheistically; but the fragments of Hallāj, collected and published by the French Orientalist, L. Massignon, leave no doubt that the martyr-saint could not have meant to deny the transcendence of God. The true interpretation of his experience, therefore, is not the drop slipping into the sea, but the realization and bold affirmation in an undying phrase of the reality and permanence of the human ego in a profounder personality.[1185]

The 'immense' challenge for the 'modern Muslim', therefore, is to 'rethink the whole system of Islam without completely breaking with the past'[1186]. If pioneers like Shāh Wall Allāh of Delhi and al-Afghani had begun to feel 'the urge of a new spirit'[1187], Iqbal himself wants to go a step or two further:

> The only course open to us is to approach modern knowledge with a respectful but independent attitude and to appreciate the teachings of Islam in the light of that knowledge, even though we may be led to differ from those who have gone before us. This I propose to do in regard to the subject of the present lecture.
>
> […] Indeed Islam recognizes a very important fact of human psychology, i.e. the rise and fall of the power to act freely, and is anxious to retain the power to act freely as a constant and undiminished factor in the life of the ego. The timing of the daily prayer which, according to the Qur'an, restores 'self-possession' to the ego by bringing it into closer touch with the ultimate source of life and freedom, is intended to save the ego from the mechanizing effects of sleep and business. Prayer in Islam is the ego's escape from mechanism to freedom.

[1185] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Human Ego - His Freedom and Immortality'.

[1186] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Human Ego - His Freedom and Immortality'.

[1187] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Human Ego - His Freedom and Immortality'.

> It cannot, however, be denied that the idea of destiny runs throughout the Qur'an. This point is worth considering, more especially because Spengler in his *Decline of the West* seems to think that Islam amounts to a complete negation of the ego. I have already explained to you my view of *Taqdīr* (destiny) as we find it in the Qur'an. […] *Imān* ['faith'] is not merely a passive belief in one or more propositions of a certain kind; it is living assurance begotten of a rare experience. Strong personalities alone are capable of rising to this experience and the higher 'Fatalism' implied in it.[1188]

The sense of responsibility both to self-cultivate and to accept with dignity all fates beyond our control are the twin pillars of Iqbal's new outlook:

> Whatever may be the final fate of man it does not mean the loss of individuality. The Qur'an does not contemplate complete liberation from finitude as the highest state of human bliss. The '*unceasing reward'* of man consists in his gradual growth in self-possession, in uniqueness, and intensity of his activity as an ego. Even the scene of *'Universal Destruction'* immediately preceding the Day of Judgement cannot affect the perfect calm of a full-grown ego: […] This is the ideal of perfect manhood in Islam.[1189]

Iqbal goes on to describe death as 'the first test of the synthetic activity of the ego'[1190]; he spends more time than we might like in speculation on the psychology of near-death experiences, but he eventually makes his deeper point about the modern meaning of 'life after death':

> The ego must continue to struggle until he is able to gather himself up, and win his resurrection. The resurrection, therefore, is not an external event. It is the consummation of a life-process within the ego. […] The nature of the universe is such that it is open to it to maintain in some other way the kind of individuality necessary for the final working out of human action, even after the disintegration of what appears to specify his individuality in his present environment. What that other way is we do not know. Nor do we gain any further insight into the nature of the '*second creation'* by associating it with some kind of body, however subtle it may be. The analogies of the Qur'an only suggest it as a fact; they are not meant to reveal its nature and character.
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> […] However, according to the teachings of the Qur'an the ego's re-emergence brings him a '*sharp sight*' (50:22) whereby he clearly sees his self-built '*fate fastened round his neck*.' Heaven and Hell are states, not localities. Their descriptions in the Qur'an are visual representations of an inner fact, i.e. character. Hell, in the words of the Qur'an, is '*God's kindled*

[1188] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Human Ego - His Freedom and Immortality'.

[1189] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Human Ego - His Freedom and Immortality'.

[1190] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Human Ego - His Freedom and Immortality'.

> *fire which mounts above the hearts'* – the painful realization of one's failure as a man. Heaven is the joy of triumph over the forces of disintegration. There is no such thing as eternal damnation in Islam. The word 'eternity' used in certain verses, relating to Hell, is explained by the Qur'an itself to mean only a period of time (78: 23). Time cannot be wholly irrelevant to the development of personality. Character tends to become permanent; its reshaping must require time. Hell, therefore, as conceived by the Qur'an, is not a pit of everlasting torture inflicted by a revengeful God; it is a corrective experience which may make a hardened ego once more sensitive to the living breeze of Divine Grace. Nor is Heaven a holiday. Life is one and continuous. Man marches always onward to receive ever fresh illuminations from an Infinite Reality [in] which '*every moment appears in a new glory*'. And the recipient of Divine illumination is not merely a passive recipient. Every act of a free ego creates a new situation, and thus offers further opportunities of creative unfolding.[1191]

'The Spirit of Muslim Culture'

Here Iqbal turns his attention directly to the question of the modern status of Qur'anic 'revelation'; the text, as he has already said, can and should be understood as literature, a kind of metafiction about a new global republic of letters, a 6th-century prototype for a modern 'spiritual democracy':

> The Prophet of Islam seems to stand between the ancient and the modern world. In so far as the source of his revelation is concerned he belongs to the ancient world; in so far as the spirit of his revelation is concerned he belongs to the modern world. In him life discovers other sources of knowledge suitable to its new direction. […] In Islam prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition. This involves the keen perception that life cannot for ever be kept in leading strings; that, in order to achieve full self-consciousness, man must finally be thrown back on his own resources. The abolition of priesthood and hereditary kingship in Islam, the constant appeal to reason and experience in the Qur'an, and the emphasis that it lays on Nature and History as sources of human knowledge, are all different aspects of the same idea of finality. […] Indeed the Qur'an regards both *Anfus* (self) and *Āfāq* (world) as sources of knowledge. […] The idea of finality, therefore, should not be taken to suggest that the ultimate fate of life is complete displacement of emotion by reason. Such a thing is neither possible nor desirable. The intellectual value of the idea is that it tends to create an independent critical attitude towards mystic experience by generating the belief that all personal authority, claiming a supernatural origin, has come to an end in the history of man. This kind of belief is a psychological force which inhibits the growth of such

[1191] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Human Ego - His Freedom and Immortality'.

> authority. The function of the idea is to open up fresh vistas of knowledge in the domain of man's inner experience.[1192]

Far from prescriptive literalism, Iqbal's Islam - arguably the first such example in our long and muddy post-Pleistocene history (though defenders of Chinese, Indian, Greco-Roman and other traditions may beg to differ) - is in fact a humanism with a built-in 'critical attitude' to itself, a spirituality fit for all that the 'psychology of spirituality' might find to throw at it; indeed, it created the 'human sciences' out of itself:

> Islam has created and fostered the spirit of a critical observation of man's outer experience by divesting the forces of Nature of that Divine character with which earlier cultures had clothed them. Mystic experience, then, however unusual and abnormal, must now be regarded by a Muslim as a perfectly natural experience, open to critical scrutiny like other aspects of human experience. This is clear from the Prophet's own attitude towards Ibn Sayyād's psychic experiences. The function of Sufism in Islam has been to systematize mystic experience; though it must be admitted that Ibn Khaldūn was the only Muslim who approached it in a thoroughly scientific spirit.
>
> […] Science is the most momentous contribution of Arab civilization to the modern world, but its fruits were slow in ripening. Not until long after Moorish culture had sunk back into darkness did the giant to which it had given birth rise in his might.[1193]

Far from the American arc of separation of church and state culminating in a triumph of sophistic 'fake news' on the one hand and theory-laden academese on the other, Iqbal's 'spiritual democracy' is governed by 'facts' and 'faith in facts', even and especially in the sphere of spirituality: public confidence in science, indeed, is an important sign of collective strength of character:

> The first important point to note about the spirit of Muslim culture then is that, for purposes of knowledge, it fixes its gaze on the concrete, the finite. It is further clear that the birth of the method of observation and experiment in Islam was due not to a compromise with Greek thought but to a prolonged intellectual warfare with it. In fact, the influence of the Greeks who, as Briffault says, were interested chiefly in theory, not in fact, tended rather to obscure the Muslims' vision of the Qur'an, and for at least two centuries kept the practical Arab temperament from asserting itself and coming to its own.
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> […] All lines of Muslim thought converge on a dynamic conception of the universe. This view is further reinforced by Ibn Maskawaih's theory of life as an evolutionary movement, and Ibn Khaldūn's view of history. History or, in the language of the Qur'an, '*the days of God*', is the third source of human knowledge according to the Qur'an. […] The whole spirit of the *Prolegomena* of Ibn Khaldūn appears to have been mainly due to the inspiration which the author must have received from the Qur'an. Even in

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[1192] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Spirit of Muslim Culture'.

[1193] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Spirit of Muslim Culture'.

> his judgements of character he is, in no small degree, indebted to the Qur'an.
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> […] However, the interest of the Qur'an in history, regarded as a source of human knowledge, extends farther than mere indications of historical generalizations. It has given us one of the most fundamental principles of historical criticism. Since accuracy in recording facts which constitute the material of history is an indispensable condition of history as a science, and an accurate knowledge of facts ultimately depends on those who report them, the very first principle of historical criticism is that the reporter's personal character is an important factor in judging his testimony. The Qur'an says: *'O believers! if any bad man comes to you with a report, clear it up at once.'* (49: 6)[1194]

One need not accept the two-dimensional opposition of Greek and Muslim contributions to human intellectual history offered here to grasp Iqbal's deeper message to Muslims and the world at large: the Qur'an is not the inimitable word of God, as the doctrine of *i'jaz* would have ordinary believers and hostile foreign moderns alike believe; it is an early literary statement of the very human freedom which the Renaissance and Enlightenment would carry to fuller fruition, but which must be carried further still by the pooled efforts of a globalised humanity in serious and creative dialogue with itself.

'The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam'

Such globalisation and dialogue are only possible, however, on a solid and specific 'psychological' foundation of character:

> As a cultural movement Islam rejects the old static view of the universe, and reaches a dynamic view. As an emotional system of unification it recognizes the worth of the individual as such, and rejects blood-relationship as a basis of human unity. […] The search for a purely psychological foundation of human unity becomes possible only with the perception that all human life is spiritual in its origin. Such a perception is creative of fresh loyalties without any ceremonials to keep them alive, and makes it possible for man to emancipate himself [from narrow tribalism].[1195]

Instead of seeking a psychotherapeutic prescription for unity through medical or social science, however, Iqbal tells us - after some unnecessarily messianic stuff on the decline of Roman Christianity and the emergence of Islam - that the 'new culture' will demand the autonomous spiritual effort of individuals, for such freedom of (and/or *from*) 'religion' in Iqbal's spiritual democracy

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[1194] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Spirit of Muslim Culture'.

[1195] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam'.

> demands loyalty to God, not to thrones. And since God is the ultimate spiritual basis of all life, loyalty to God virtually amounts to man's loyalty to his own ideal nature. The ultimate spiritual basis of all life, as conceived by Islam, is eternal and reveals itself in variety and change. A society based on such a conception of Reality must reconcile, in its life, the categories of permanence and change. It must possess eternal principles to regulate its collective life, for the eternal gives us a foothold in the world of perpetual change. But eternal principles when they are understood to exclude all possibilities of change which, according to the Qur'an, is one of the greatest 'signs' of God, tend to immobilize what is essentially mobile in its nature. The failure of Europe in political and social sciences illustrates the former principle, the immobility of Islam during the last five hundred years illustrates the latter. What then is the principle of movement in the structure of Islam? This is known as *Ijtihād*.
>
> The word literally means to exert. […] The idea, I believe, has its origin in a well-known verse of the Qur'an – *'And to those who exert We show Our path*.'[1196]

Science is primarily an *effect* (not a cause) of such a culture of individual spiritual 'exertion'; nevertheless, in the face of an external threat, societies will always be tempted to embrace the totalitarian option at the expense of this liberation of the individual, as the Muslim world did after the Mongol Siege of Baghdad in 1258:

> For fear of further disintegration, which is only natural in such a period of political decay, the conservative thinkers of Islam focused all their efforts on the one point of preserving a uniform social life for the people by a jealous exclusion of all innovations in the law of Sharī'ah as expounded by the early doctors of Islam. Their leading idea was social order, and there is no doubt that they were partly right, because organization does to a certain extent counteract the forces of decay. But they did not see, and our modern Ulema do not see, that the ultimate fate of a people does not depend so much on organization as on the worth and power of individual men. In an over-organized society the individual is altogether crushed out of existence. He gains the whole wealth of social thought around him and loses his own soul. Thus a false reverence for past history and its artificial resurrection constitute no remedy for a people's decay. […] The only effective power, therefore, that counteracts the forces of decay in a people is the rearing of self-concentrated individuals. Such individuals alone reveal the depth of life. They disclose new standards in the light of which we begin to see that our environment is not wholly inviolable and requires revision. The tendency to over-organization by a false reverence of the past, as manifested in the legists of Islam in the thirteenth century and later, was contrary to the inner impulse of Islam.[1197]

[1196] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam'.

[1197] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam'.

Iqbal heaps praise on post-Ottoman Turkey for its efforts at reform in this direction, but he recognises that the Muslim world as a whole has a long way to go to reach the ideal which the Islamic tradition itself promises:

> […] Modern culture based as it is on national egoism is [according to the Grand Vizier of Turkey] only another form of barbarism. It is the result of an over-developed industrialism through which men satisfy their primitive instincts and inclinations. […] The only alternative open to us, then, is to tear off from Islam the hard crust which has immobilized an essentially dynamic outlook on life, and to rediscover the original verities of freedom, equality, and solidarity with a view to rebuild our moral, social, and political ideals out of their original simplicity and universality. Such are the views of the Grand Vizier of Turkey. You will see that following a line of thought more in tune with the spirit of Islam, he reaches practically the same conclusion as the Nationalist Party, that is to say, the freedom of *Ijtihād* with a view to rebuild the laws of Sharī'ah in the light of modern thought and experience.
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> […] The truth is that among the Muslim nations of today, Turkey alone has shaken off its dogmatic slumber, and attained to self-consciousness. She alone has claimed her right of intellectual freedom; she alone has passed from the ideal to the real – a transition which entails keen intellectual and moral struggle. To her the growing complexities of a mobile and broadening life are sure to bring new situations suggesting new points of view, and necessitating fresh interpretations of principles which are only of an academic interest to a people who have never experienced the joy of spiritual expansion. It is, I think, the English thinker Hobbes who makes this acute observation that to have a succession of identical thoughts and feelings is to have no thoughts and feelings at all. Such is the lot of most Muslim countries today. They are mechanically repeating old values, whereas the Turk is on the way to creating new values. He has passed through great experiences which have revealed his deeper self to him. In him life has begun to move, change, and amplify, giving birth to new desires, bringing new difficulties and suggesting new interpretations.[1198]

Whatever the true state of Turkey in 1930, Iqbal offers a prophecy of 21st-century struggles towards a World Ethos when he writes:

> Humanity needs three things today - a spiritual interpretation of the universe, spiritual emancipation of the individual, and basic principles of a universal import directing the evolution of human society on a spiritual basis. Modern Europe has, no doubt, built idealistic systems on these lines, but experience shows that truth revealed through pure reason is incapable of bringing that fire of living conviction which personal revelation alone can bring. This is the reason why pure thought has so little influenced men, while religion has always elevated individuals, and transformed whole societies.

[1198] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam'.

The idealism of Europe never became a living factor in her life, and the result is a perverted ego seeking itself through mutually intolerant democracies whose sole function is to exploit the poor in the interest of the rich. Believe me, Europe today is the greatest hindrance in the way of man's ethical advancement. The Muslim, on the other hand, is in possession of these ultimate ideas on the basis of a revelation, which, speaking from the inmost depths of life, internalizes its own apparent externality. […] In view of the basic idea of Islam that there can be no further revelation binding on man, we ought to be spiritually one of the most emancipated peoples on earth. Early Muslims emerging out of the spiritual slavery of pre-Islamic Asia were not in a position to realize the true significance of this basic idea. Let the Muslim of today appreciate his position, reconstruct his social life in the light of ultimate principles, and evolve, out of the hitherto partially revealed purpose of Islam, that spiritual democracy which is the ultimate aim of Islam.[1199]

'Is Religion Possible?'

The 'ulama*, by whom I mean the experts in transmitted learning, claimed authority for their knowledge by upholding the authenticity of the transmission and the truthfulness of those who provided the knowledge—that is, God, Muhammad, and the pious forebears. They asked all Muslims to accept this knowledge as it was received. The basic duty of the Muslim believer was taqlīd, that is, 'imitation', or submission to the authority of the transmitted knowledge. In contrast, the intellectual tradition appealed to the relatively small number of people who had intellectual aptitudes. The quest for knowledge was defined not in terms of* taqlīd *or 'imitation' but in terms of* taḥqīq*, 'verification' and 'realization'.*

An important key to understanding the different standpoints of modern science and the Islamic intellectual tradition lies in these two concepts. Unless we understand that knowledge attained by verification and realization is not of the same sort as that received by imitation, we will not be able to understand what the Muslim intellectuals were trying to do and what modern scientists and scholars are trying to do. We will then continue to falsify the position of the Muslim philosophers by making them precursors of modern science, as if they were trying to discover what modern scientists try to discover, and as if they accepted the findings of their predecessors on the basis of imitation, as modern scientists do. […] Taḥqīq *is to understand and actualise truth, reality and rightness within oneself, to 'realize' it and to make it actual for oneself and in oneself.*

[1199] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam'.

> *[…] I do not mean to suggest by these remarks that I will now interpret the Islamic tradition in Chinese categories. I cite Tu Weiming to acknowledge a certain influence on my own conceptualization of things and to point out that there is nothing unusual about the Islamic worldview. One can even argue that the anthropocosmic vision I discuss here is the Islamic version of a perspective that is normative for the human race. If there is an incongruity, it is Western natural science and following in its wake, the other disciplines of the modern academy. The real question is not why Confucianism and Islam share a common vision, but why the West has broken from the perennial pattern.*[1200]
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> William C. Chittick

The journey from totalitarian desert tribalism to the 'Spiritual Humanism' of the liberated modern self is described by Iqbal as a three-step process:

> In the first period religious life appears as a form of discipline which the individual or a whole people must accept as an unconditional command without any rational understanding of the ultimate meaning and purpose of that command. This attitude may be of great consequence in the social and political history of a people, but is not of much consequence in so far as the individual's inner growth and expansion are concerned. Perfect submission to discipline is followed by a rational understanding of the discipline and the ultimate source of its authority. In this period religious life seeks its foundation in a kind of metaphysics– a logically consistent view of the world with God as a part of that view. In the third period metaphysics is displaced by psychology, and religious life develops the ambition to come into direct contact with the Ultimate Reality. It is here that religion becomes a matter of personal assimilation of life and power; and the individual achieves a free personality, not by releasing himself from the fetters of the law, but by discovering the ultimate source of the law within the depths of his own consciousness.
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> […] Religion in this sense is known by the unfortunate name of Mysticism, which is supposed to be a life-denying, fact-avoiding attitude of mind directly opposed to the radically empirical outlook of our times. Yet higher religion, which is only a search for a larger life, is essentially experience, and recognized the necessity of experience as its foundation long before science learnt to do so.[1201]

'Freedom of religion' may extend - within the limits imposed by self-preservation - to tolerance of tribal and totalitarian outlooks, but its positive purpose is to enable a

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[1200] See William C. Chittick, 'The Anthropocosmic Vision in Islamic Thought', in Ted Peters, Muzaffar Iqbal and Syed Nomanul Haq (eds.), *God, Life and the Cosmos: Christian and Islamic Perspectives*, (Ashgate, 2002).

[1201] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 'Is Religion Possible?'.

‘higher religious life’ for all precisely by allowing the individual the right to exercise her own spiritual autonomy on her own terms: ‘The ultimate purpose of religious life is to […] move in a direction far more important to the destiny of the ego than the moral health of the social fabric which forms his present environment.’[1202]

Iqbal’s hopes for ‘psychology’ may look quaint and self-contradictory to us now - and there is plenty in my elisions which reflects the fads and prejudices of his time - but the core of his hopeful message of ‘learning for the self’ survives intact. If he was overly idealistic about ‘Islam’ (and dismissive or seemingly ignorant of other traditions), it was only because, like any colonised intellectual, he felt he had so much unrealised possibility to defend and transmit within his own. Having successfully done so, he places his 21st-century reader - ‘Muslim’ or otherwise - before a broad horizon of self-discovery.

[1202] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, ‘Is Religion Possible?’.

21. Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad*

Octavio Paz (1914-1998), one-time Mexican Ambassador to India, has been mentioned already in Chapter 6 by his friend and fellow Nobel Prizewinner Mario Vargas Llosa; his *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las trampas de la fe* (1982) would have made an excellent choice for a chapter of its own, and we have reflected that by placing Sor Juana on the cover as an example of the determination and dignity with which true 'learning for the self' must always be pursued. We have decided, however, to return to Paz's earlier *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950), in part because it deals with a theme also famously addressed by Gabriel García Márquez in *Cien Años de Soledad* (another unlucky omission): namely, the structural loneliness of Latin American life, and the difficulty of authentic self-cultivation in the face of so many contradictory historical and social forces. Paz's quest for a modern Mexican 'identity', however, like Márquez's literary labour in Colombia, has value far beyond its country of origin: one learns for - and *about* - oneself by learning from Paz what it might mean to be Mexican. If rationalism ultimately believes in reducing everything to 'one and the same thing', as Antonio Machado says in Paz's chosen epigraph, then 'poetic faith' is required to cope with the 'incurable otherness which the individual suffers'.[1203]

<u>'El Pachugo y Otros Extremos'</u>

If 'essays of national psychology' almost always have 'an illusory character' - nations are only ever composed of discrete and unique individuals - there is nevertheless s sense in which the Mexico of 1950 can be described as an 'adolescent' country:

> We have all, at some point, had our existence revealed to us as something specific, untransferable and precious. Such revelations almost always come in adolescence; the discovery of ourselves manifests itself as a simultaneous awareness of our solitude; between the world and us there rises an untouchable, transparent wall of conscience. It's true that we are born alone, but children and adults can transcend their solitude and bury themselves in games or work. The teenager, by contrast, caught between childhood and adulthood, is momentarily dumbstruck by the world's infinite wealth.[1204]

Like a teenager, Paz's Mexico is unsure of its ability to add anything unique to this global stock:

> I used to think that my sense of the uniqueness of my country, which I share with many, was superficial and dangerous. Instead of asking ourselves who

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[1203] Octavio Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad (The Labyrinth of Solitude)*, (Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1981(1950)).

[1204] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 1.

> we were, wouldn't it have been better to create something, to add something to a reality which does not concede herself to the person on the edge, but to the one willing to throw herself in? What might have distinguished us from other peoples was not the eternally questionable uniqueness of our character - the fruit, to some extent, of shifting circumstances - but the originality of what we created. I came to think that a work of art or concrete action would do more to define Mexicanness - not only by expressing it, but by recreating it in the process of expression - than any number of descriptions. My own identity issues, as with those of my compatriots, seemed like pretexts for avoiding contact with reality, of which we were afraid; all those speculations about the supposed 'character' of Mexicans looked like clever subterfuges to hide our creative impotence. Like Samuel Ramos, I believed our sense of inferiority pushed us towards a bias in favour of analysis [over creativity]; the scarcity of our creative efforts could be explained less in terms of a flowering of critical faculties over artistic ones than as instinctive distrust in our own abilities. […] Still, we Mexicans are going through a reflexive phase; it is natural that after the explosive moment of the Revolution we should retreat into our shells and navel-gaze for a while. The questions we are asking of ourselves today might well be incomprehensible in fifty years.[1205]

Rather than simply analysing it, Paz is seeking to *create* something out of this fear: *El Laberinto de la soledad* is a work of literature, not social science. Indeed, he is not really *describing* Mexico at all:

> I must confess that many of the reflections that make up this book were born outside Mexico, during a two-year stay in the United States. I remember that the more I got involved in American life in an effort to understand and find meaning in it, the more I found myself looking in the mirror. This image of myself, set against the shiny backdrop of the United States, was perhaps the most important and profound answer that the country offered to my questions of it.[1206]

After observing first-hand the lonely limbo of zoot-suit-wearing Californian *pachucos* - no longer Mexican but not accepted as American either - Paz is forced to conclude that there is equal solitude in the illusion of American superiority as in that of Mexican inferiority: the fake smile of a desperate American housewife is able to show Paz 'how completely intimacy can be devastated by the victory of principles over instincts'.[1207] If the opposite Mexican propensity for one-way 'sentimental effusion' paradoxically results in the same 'painful, defensive feeling of privacy' which prevents its owner from seeking spiritual 'compatriots'[1208], then it is because it is equally indicative of a 'common inability to reconcile ourselves with the flow of

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[1205] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, pp. 1-2.

[1206] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, pp. 1-2.

[1207] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 8.

[1208] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 5.

life'[1209]; conversely, an experience of the Spanish Civil War in 1937 offered him something closer to the reality of true, cultivated human selfhood:

> I had a vision of a different person, possessed of a different type of solitude: neither closed off from the world [out of fear of inferiority] nor coldly mechanical [in pursuit of dominance over it], but open to transcendence. There is no doubt that the proximity of death and the brotherhood of arms produced, as they do in all times and places, an extraordinary atmosphere capable of breaking the ring of solitude that surrounds each of us. But in those faces - obtuse and obstinate, brutal and rough and real like those passed down to us by the great Spanish painters - there was something like a despair transfigured into hope, something very concrete but at the same time utterly universal. I have never seen such faces since.
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> […] I thought afterwards - and I continue to think now - that 'another humanity' was coming to light in those men. The Spanish Dream of that time - not Spanish as such, but universal and concrete, a dream of flesh, blood and wide eyes - was broken and tarred soon enough, and the faces I saw have no doubt returned to being what they were before they had been taken over by that jubilant security of purpose (in life, death, or what?): the faces of humble and ordinary folk. But the memory doesn't abandon me. He who has seen Hope does not forget it; he looks for it under all skies and among all peoples. And he dreams of seeing it again somewhere one day, maybe even among his own.[1210]

'La Inteligencia Mexicana'

After several chapters spent tracing the course of Mexican psychohistory from conqest to colonialism, indepedence and revolution, Paz concludes that it would be absurd to reduce Mexico, or any other country for that matter, to its past:

> Often culture gets ahead of history or predicts it. Sometimes it goes in the other direction and betrays it, as one observes at certain moments in the Díaz dictatorship. Poetry, on the other hand, by virtue of its very nature and the nature of words, always tends to abolish history, not because it disdains it, but because it transcends it. To reduce poetry to its historical context would be the same as reducing the words of a poet to their logical or grammatical connotations. Poetry escapes from language and history even though both are necessary food for it. The same could likewise be said for painting, music, the novel, the theatre, and the other arts.[1211]

In the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, the Mexican intelligentsia sought to 'transcend' history in this way: it refused to subsume itself under the banner of any

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[1209] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 8.

[1210] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, pp. 8-9.

[1211] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 63.

existing ideological narrative, and searched instead for an authentic link between past, present and future.[1212] A series of charismatic individual leaders emerged to embody different creative aspects of this revolution against the 'liberalism' and 'positivism' of the Díaz dictatorship; in education, for example, there was José Vasconcelos (1882-1959):

> His goal - […] to extend primary education [to all] and to improve secondary and higher education - aimed to base education on certain implicit principles in our tradition which positivism had forgotten or ignored.
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> There was an organic element to this education movement; it wasn't the work of a single extraordinary person, though Vasconcelos in a variety of ways certainly *was* that. […] Poets, painters, prose writers, teachers, architects and musicians all joined in - all, or virtually all, of the Mexican 'intelligentsia'. It was a social endeavour, but it required a guiding spirit to enflame it. A philosopher and a man of action, Vasconcelos possessed this unity of vision which held the various strands together in a coherent whole, and if he sometimes forgot the details, he also refused to let himself get lost in them. His contribution - subjected to numerous necessary and even brusque corrections - was a founding one; he was no technocrat. But he was able to envision education as a form of active participation. […] Mexico, lost in the charade of dictatorship, suddenly discovered itself with amazed and smitten eyes: 'The prodigal sons of a country we can't even define, let's start to observe it: Castilian and Morisco with Aztec stripes.'
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> […] A soldier in the battle against positivism, Vasconcelos knew that education always implies an image and idea of life as a whole. This explained his efforts to ground the Mexican school system in something more concrete than Article III of the Constitution, which dictated secularism in education. The secular had never been neutral in Mexico; its feigned indifference to ultimate questions of meaning no longer fooled anyone. Neither Catholic nor Jacobin, Vasconcelos didn't want to be blandly neutral either; he thus founded education on 'tradition'. […] This tradition, to the extent that it still survived and had creative life left in it, would allow us to rediscover a universal tradition in which our own could be inserted, extended, and justified.
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> Such a turn to tradition entailed facing the fact that we were part of the universalist tradition of Spain. […] There are two Spains: one closed to the world, and an open, heterodox Spain which broke out of its prison to breathe the free air of the spirit. The latter is ours. […] The philosophy of the 'cosmic race' (the new American people which would dissolve all racial oppositions and all conflicts between East and West) was nothing if not the natural consequence and logical extension of Spanish universalism, which was itself a product of the Renaissance. Vasconcelos's ideas had nothing to do with the caste-centred traditionalism of certain Mexican conservatives, since for him, as for the founders of America, the continent presented itself as a future full of new possibilities: 'Spanish America is novelty *par excellence*, not only in the territorial sense, but also spiritually.'

[1212] See Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 63.

> Vasconcelos's traditionalism was not stuck in the past; it would find its justification in the future.
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> […] This rediscovery of tradition, however, was insufficient to feed our voracious appetite as a reborn nation, because it did not really contain the universal elements we needed in order to build a new society beyond Catholicism and liberalism, to which it was now impossible to return. At the same time, however, the Revolution had no real ideas of its own. […] Vasconcelos partially resolved this by offering his philosophy of the *raza iberoamericana*: the 'Love, Order and Progress' of the positivists was replaced by a new slogan: 'The Spirit Will Speak Through My Race'.[1213]

By 1950, the shortcomings of Vasconcelos's philosophy were painfully apparent: 'Vasconcelos's work possesses the poetic coherence common to all great philosophical systems, but not the rigour; it is an isolated monument with no true devotees. […] It is not hard to discover surviving elements, fertile portions, revelations and predictions here and there, but it cannot be described as the basis of our being or culture.'[1214] In the meantime, socialism had rushed to fill the void: 'The need to give the people something more than liberal secularism produced the reform of Article III: "Education offered by the State will be socialist, and will combat fanaticism and prejudice by creating among the youth a rational and exact concept of the Universe and social life."'[1215] Such neo-positivism in left-wing disguise, however, was even more doomed to failure: 'If revolutions are not made with words, ideas are not implanted by decree.'[1216] By the onset of the Cold War, Mexican writers and artists were in search of an 'organic solution which would not sacrifice the particularities of the Mexican situation to some global universalism, as had happened with the liberal turn, and which would also not reduce our participation [in the world] to the passive, ecstatic faith of the blind follower or copy artist. For the first time Mexicans were faced with the challenge of inventing their own lives and histories from head to toe.'[1217] Already by 1950, however, Paz had witnessed a series of 'compromises' which at best had allowed the country to 'defend the gains' of the Revolution, but which 'it would be dangerous to consider definitive'[1218] because they simultaneously abolished the distance between criticism and power:

> Once the military phase of the Revolution was over, many young intellectuals - either too young or otherwise unable to take part in the armed struggle - began working for the revolutionary governments. Intellectuals thus became the advisors, official or otherwise, of the illiterate generals, the peasant union leaders, and the *caudillos* in power. The task [of nation-building] was immense; everything had to be improvised. Poets studied

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[1213] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, pp. 63-64.

[1214] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 64.

[1215] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 65.

[1216] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 65.

[1217] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 65.

[1218] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 65.

> economics, lawyers sociology, novelists international law, pedagogy or agronomy. […] The 'intelligentsia' was used for concrete and immediate ends: law reform, government planning, confidential meetings, educational responsibilities, […] agrarian projects etc. Diplomatic and foreign trade missions, as well as more central branches of the public administration, opened their doors to this middle-class 'intelligentsia'; thanks also to the new professional schools and student stints abroad, there was soon a solid group of technocrats and experts. This participation in the day-to-day running of the government made possible a certain continuity with the work of the early revolutionaries; the new managerial class defended their legacy in a multitude of ways. But these technocrats were also in a very awkward predicament: worried about losing their jobs on the one hand and giving away too much ideological ground on the other, they had made compromise an artform and a way of life. Their work had been admirable in many respects, but they had lost their independence from power; their criticism was correspondingly diluted by prudence or other Machiavellian concerns. The Mexican 'intelligentsia' as a whole has not been able to wield the true arms of the intellectual: criticism, close examination, judgment. The result has been that a courtly atmosphere of patronage - a natural product of every revolution which becomes a government - now reigns over our entire public life.[1219]

Paz wants to show just how toxic such a culture of reward for towing the line can be, not only in terms of economic and institutional development, but above all for the spiritual health of a nation; still, he also wants to celebrate the individuals prepared to buck the trend and to recognise that true 'learning for the self' can only happen in Mexico if the country can 'break with French intellectual geometry'[1220] and find its own authentic path:

> One Spaniard to whom we owe a debt of gratitude is José Gaos. […] For the first time since Independence, the Mexican 'intelligentsia' no longer needs to seek its learning beyond the classroom. The new masters do not offer a readymade philosophy to the young, but rather the means and horizons to create one of their own. This is, in as many words, the mission of teaching.
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> Another new element of stimulus has been Alfonso Reyes. His work, which we are only now starting to see in its true dimensions, is an invitation to rigour and coherence. […] Reyes is a man for whom literature is something almost more than a chance calling or destiny: it seems to have elements of a full-blown religion. […] The writer's first duty, he tells us, lies in loyalty to language. […] To use words at all means to clarify and purify them, make them servants of our free thought, not masks or approximations of it. Writing implies a profession of faith and an attitude which transcends rhetoric and grammar; the roots of words are inextricably tied to the roots of our ethical lives. […] All style is something more than a means of

[1219] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, pp. 65-66.

[1220] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 67.

> expression: it is a mode of thought, and as such, an implicit or explicit judgment on the reality which surrounds us. […] Thanks to language, the modern writer - cut off from other paths of communication with his people and his time - participates in the life of the City.[1221]

Such 'loyalty to language', however, naturally entails loyalty to a 'tradition' which is not all good; just as Mexico must, like all other colonised nations, 'seek its national spirit'[1222] by wrestling creatively with the language - Spanish - of its colonial past, Reyes invents in his work 'a universal language and form capable of containing all our unexpressed conflicts without drowning them or falling apart. […] His work is not a didactic formula, but a stimulus.'[1223]

The ultimate and ongoing challenge of intellectual life, for Paz, is how to overcome 'the conflict between the insufficiency of our own tradition and our demand for universality'[1224]; as early as 1950, he is beginning to sense the emergence of such a universal ethos far beyond the confines of Mexico:

> The revolution was a discovery of ourselves and a return to our origins, at least initially; then it was a quest for a synthesis, aborted various times; unable to assimilate our tradition and offer us a new form of salvation, it ended in compromise.
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> […] The revolutionary movement showed that all the ideas and conceptions which had justified our existence in the past were either dead or corrosive of our spirit. […] But despite our national peculiarities, […] Mexico's situation is no longer any different from that of any other country. […] Mexican decisions affect everyone, and *vice versa*. […] The contemporary [Cold War] crisis is not, as conservatives would have it, a struggle between two cultures, but a split at the heart of our civilisation, a single civilisation which has no rivals, and whose future is synonymous with that of the whole world. […] Any attempt to resolve our Mexican conflicts must have universal validity, or it is condemned to sterility in advance.
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> The Mexican Revolution pushed us beyond ourselves and into the face of History, and showed us our need to invent our own future and our own institutions. The revolution has died without resolving our contradictions. After the Second World War, we realise that this self-creation demanded of us by reality is the same as that demanded of everyone else. We live, like the rest of the planet, at a decisive and mortal moment, orphans of the past and with a future of our own to invent. History is now a common project, our labyrinth, the labyrinth of all people.[1225]

[1221] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, pp. 67-68.

[1222] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 68.

[1223] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 69.

[1224] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 70.

[1225] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, pp. 70-72.

Poetic language, then, is pure responsibility: we inherit the language of the ancestors, purify it in the crucible of our own solitude, and pass it down improved in art for our descendants to purify in their turn. These ‘ancestors’ and ‘descendants’, however, are now - as Paz recognised in 1950 - absolutely global; every recorded utterance is, in principle, available for us to ‘inherit’, ‘purify’ and pass down. In this chaos of responsibility - whose utterances to purify? - Paz returns to the common denominator of solitude itself:

> Solitude - feeling and knowing that we are alone, cut off from the world and foreign to ourselves - is not an exclusively Mexican phenomenon. Everyone, at some point, feels alone; and more than this: everyone *is* alone. To live at all is to separate ourselves from what we were and head towards what we are going to be, a foreign future always. […] Human nature - if we can speak about the nature of a creature which has invented himself [as a moral entity] precisely by saying ‘no’ to nature - consists in a longing to realise oneself in another. […] All our efforts culminate in a desire to abolish solitude. Feelings of solitude are thus significant in two ways: on the one hand, they give us the sense that we exist as discrete selves in the first place; on the other, they fuel the desire to get beyond ourselves. Solitude, the very condition of our conscious lives, appears in this light as a test [of creativity] and a purging [of meaninglessness], at the end of which the innate anguish and instability of our moral lives will disappear. Plenitude and reunion, or in other words repose and bliss, harmony with the world, await us at the end of the labyrinth of solitude.[1226]

And yet the real ‘test of creativity’, Paz argues, is to get beyond lazy wish-thinking entirely, to understand that there is no meaningful ‘repose’ to be desired from the moral life properly understood: ‘We are not asking for happiness or rest, only for an instant - one single instant - of full life, in which all the petty oppositions vanish and life and death, time and eternity, pact. Somehow we know that life and death are only two contrasting movements of a single reality.’[1227] Love is a strong candidate to provide such a gateway, but *machismo* doesn’t do anyone any favours:

> In our world love is an almost inaccessible experience. Everything stands in opposition to it: social customs, class distinctions, laws, […] even the contents of individual characters themselves. […] By turning our ‘love’ into an object, submitting it to all the deformations that our interests, our vanity, our anguish and even our feelings of affection themselves dictate, we turn it into an instrument, a means for obtaining knowledge or pleasure, for improving our chances of survival. […] In this sense, our erotic relations are poisoned from the beginning, rotten at the root.
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> […] The same thing happens in reverse to the person ‘loved’ in this way. She is never allowed to chart her own free course; she remains

[1226] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 82.

[1227] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 83.

> trapped between what she is and the image of utility projected onto her. […] Love is not a natural act. It is something human, humanistic even, a creative act, something we do ourselves, not something given in nature. It is something we have made ourselves, that we continue to make every day, and that we can unmake at any moment. […] Love is choice, free choice perhaps, of our own destiny, a sudden discovery of the most secret and inevitable part of our being.[1228]

Marriage thus becomes, for Paz, both the enemy and the friend of Spiritual Humanism: on the one hand, a marriage contracted and prolonged for 'convenience'[1229] is antithetical to the very idea of 'love'; on the other, marriage spiritually understood offers unparalleled humanistic opportunity:

> Whenever love between two people is reached, the outer bonds of convention are shattered, and something dangerous to the *status quo* is created: two solitudes create a world unto themselves, break with the expectations of everyone else, relegate external rhythms to the background, and declare themselves self-sufficient. It is no coincidence, therefore, that polite society persecutes love and poetry with equal vigour. […] Freedom of passion? The question of marriage and divorce is not about how easy it should be to establish or annul marriages, but allowing people to choose freely. […] Modern society [suppresses] the dialectic of solitude that makes love possible. […] Methods of mass production are applied to ethics, art and feelings; access routes are thereby blocked to the deepest experience of life, to reality as a pacted whole. New forces abolish solitude by decree, and as such abolish love, a clandestine and heroic form of communion. Defending love has always been a subversive and dangerous business, but now it looks truly revolutionary. […] Our societies routinely thwart opportunities for genuine erotic communion.[1230]

Paz is targeting both sides in the Cold War here; whatever their relative advantages and disadvantages as resource allocation mechanisms, neither Soviet-style communism (blind and unfree sacrifice to the collective) nor American-style capitalism (choosing a partner from a Tinder profile) can rescue us from the 'labyrinth of solitude' on its own:

> The literature of modern peoples […] is densely populated with adolescents, solitary figures in search of communion: a ring, a sword, a Vision. […] Maturity is beyond such solitude. A [mature] person [with a stable love in her life…] buries herself in her vocation, in the creation of works, ideas and institutions. Her individual conscience joins others: time acquires meaning as history, a living relation with a past and a future [beyond her own life]. In reality, our uniqueness as individuals - born of our fatal insertion into life at a

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[1228] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 83.

[1229] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 84.

[1230] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, pp. 84-85.

> given place and time - […] is not abolished, but in a certain sense redeemed. Our particular existence thus enters the flow of history and becomes, in T.S. Eliot's phrase, 'a pattern of timeless moments'. [… But] modern man never gives himself completely to anything he does. A part of himself, the most profound part, remains separate and alert. […] Work, the alleged goddess of modernity, has ceased to be creative.[1231]

Paz critiques modern industrial society from a position of spiritualised Marxism: individual workers are largely alienated from their jobs - as well as their families and communities - because they lack the inner freedom to attach themselves to a cause beyond their own material advancement: work, like personal relations, is calculated for profit to the perennially adolescent, 'separate and alert' self; it is not the spontaneous effect of a sense of vocation or covenantal destiny. All sense of belonging to history (and the corresponding responsibility to transcend, purify and pass down the best of that history as art) is lost. Love and poetry are the antidotes to this 'sterility': 'A true *fiesta* is something more than a date or an anniversary: it does not *celebrate* an event, but rather recreates it. […] "More time is not more eternity," as Juan Ramón Jiménez reminds us.'[1232]

[1231] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 86.

[1232] Paz, *El Laberinto de la soledad*, p. 88.

Mishima was dreaming of imperial restoration, a rewinding not only of the 1960s but also of Bretton Woods, the whole postwar geopolitical order, and, possibly, political modernity tout court*. Many contemporary readers of* Sun and Steel *harbor analogous ambitions. A minor work in the context of world literature, it is a major one in the bizarro universe of white-supremacist arts and letters. […]* Sun and Steel *includes virtually no concrete autobiographical details, but can nevertheless be read as an elliptical* bildungsroman *in which an artsy wimp transforms himself into a jacked-up warrior. Or, depending on your political views, it can be read as an austerely creepy horror story in which an intelligent and thoughtful young man wrestles with the existential temptations of fascism and loses.*

[…] Mishima takes up weight training, running, and kendo *(Japanese fencing). […] Meanwhile, he is pursuing an impossible holy grail: a sensorium without a brain. 'Oh, the fierce longing simply to see, without words!' […] Representation in any form, including language, is a 'dubious' diversion from sensory experience. As for expression—the representation of emotions, individual consciousness, interiority—it's 'a crime of the imagination'. Originally, Mishima decides, words were not vehicles of expression or individuality. Authored literature is degenerate art: 'The epic poems of ancient times are, perhaps, an exception, but every literary work with its author's name standing at its head is no more than a beautiful "perversion of words."'*

[…] Mishima's weight training 'restored the classical balance that the body had begun to lose, reinstating it in its natural form, the form that it should have had all along.' Vitruvian man is primordial man; a male body in its originary state will have the same architectonic beauty as the Athenian ideal. Like primitive language, this prelapsarian physique is generic rather than individuated:

> *I had always felt that such signs of physical individuality as a bulging belly (sign of spiritual sloth) or a flat chest with protruding ribs (sign of an unduly nervous sensibility) were excessively ugly. […] To me, these could only seem acts of shameless indecency, as though the owner were exposing his spiritual pudenda on the outside of his body. They represented one type of narcissism that I could never forgive.*

Narcissism with a penis is fine, as Mishima's relentless self-obsession attests. Every one of the beautiful bodies he imagines or admires is a mirror reflecting his own 'powerful, tragic frame and sculpturesque muscles'.

[…] Finally, when Mishima enlists for a brief stint in the Japanese military, he discovers the toxic holism of the fascist 'we', achieving

> *mind meld with his comrades during an exhausting run. 'Self-awareness by now was as remote as [a] distant rumor. […] I belonged to them, they belonged to me; the two formed an unmistakable "us". To belong—what more intense form of existence could there be?' […] Mishima at last appreciates that 'the kind of words I dealt in'—i.e., literature, authored words—'constantly rejected the significance of the group'.*[1233]
>
> Elizabeth Schambelan

We began in our Introduction by situating Spiritual Humanism in a 21st-century context which cannot be divorced from the great calamities and spiritual dramas of the century which preceded it. Japanese fascism and the whole *kamikaze* war disaster woud surely seem to qualify in the top bracket of such tragedies, even if they haven't properly been mentioned yet; after considering how best to tackle the whole 'Spiritual Humanism and Japan' question without so much as a hint of token box-ticking, Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) beat out strong competition - Soseki, Tanizaki, Kawabata, Mishima and so on, even Murakami and other contemporary voices - for reasons, intrinsic to the work itself, which wil become apparent as we proceed. Some may object that Ishiguro (1954-), who left Japan for England at the age of five, is not Japanese enough (nor indeed old enough) to tell this story or 'represent' the Japanese experience at all, but luckily this is not *that* kind of anthology (and Ishiguro himself would also be highly reluctant to accept such a mantle: 'People with mixed cultural backgrounds [like me] and mixed racial backgrounds […] will become more common in the latter part of the [21st] century: that's the way the world is going'[1234]). As the theme itself dictates, and for all that we wanted to show the universality of the theme by covering as

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[1233] Elizabeth Schambelan, 'In the Fascist Weight Room', https://www.bookforum.com/inprint/025_02/19688, Summer 2018 (accessed 20/3/2019).

[1234] For a lay summary of Ishiguro's relaxed attitude to his own 'cultural identity' (and cultural identity in general) adequate for our purposes (and from which this quote was drawn), please see - what possible shame in reproducing it further here? - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazuo_Ishiguro (accessed 20/3/2019):

> Ishiguro set his first two novels in Japan; however, in several interviews, he clarified that he has little familiarity with Japanese writing and that his works bear little resemblance to Japanese fiction. In an interview in 1989, when discussing his Japanese heritage and its influence on his upbringing, he stated, 'I'm not entirely like English people because I've been brought up by Japanese parents in a Japanese-speaking home. My parents […] felt responsible for keeping me in touch with Japanese values. I do have a distinct background. I think differently, my perspectives are slightly different.'
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> […] In a 1990 interview, Ishiguro said, 'If I wrote under a pseudonym and got somebody else to pose for my jacket photographs, I'm sure nobody would think of saying, "This guy reminds me of that Japanese writer."' Although some Japanese writers have had a distant influence on his writing - Junichiro Tanizaki is the one he most frequently cites - Ishiguro has said that Japanese films, especially those of Yasujiro Ozu and Mikio Naruse, have been a more significant influence.

many corners of the globe as we could, we have, in the end, chosen individual human voices, not symbols of any national or regional identity.

'October, 1948'

Masuji Ono's status as an artist tainted by association with the Japanese war machine had hit rock bottom by late 1948; and yet, as he tells his reader in a narrator's voice striving very hard to sound reliable, this was not always so. Indeed, in 1933,

> when my circumstances seemed to improve with each month, my wife had begun to press me to find a new house. With her usual foresight, she had argued the importance of our having a house in keeping with our status - not out of vanity, but for the sake of our children's marriage prospects. I saw the sense in this. […] It was one of my pupils who first brought it to my attention that Akira Sugimura's house, a year after his death, was to be sold off. That I should buy such a house seemed absurd, and I put the suggestion down to the exaggerated respect my pupils always had for me. But I made enquiries all the same, and gained an unexpected response.[1235]

On the one hand, Ono has won the seeming respect of a coterie of art students for his dedication to his work; on the other, he seems to conceive of marriage - for his daughters if not for himself - as an unavoidable bourgeois necessity. He wins the 'auction of prestige' which the Sugimura family conducts to find a suitable heir for the house; if the family's decision to honour their father's 'respect for artists' (and therefore not to receive 'anything beyond the [very low] quoted price') was an 'eccentric procedure', Ono, the material and 'moral' beneficiary, 'saw nothing objectionable about it [indeed why would he?]; it was, after all, much the same as being involved in a marriage negotiation.'[1236] And yet even Ono can see that this 'procedure', for all its 'eccentricity' and obvious advantage for him as an impecunious artist, is a spiritual step up on the traditional model:

> How much more honourable is such a contest, in which one's moral conduct and achievement are brought as witnesses rather than the size of one's purse. I can still recall the deep satisfaction I felt when I learnt the Sugimuras - after the most thorough investigation - had deemed me the most worthy of the house they so prized. […] All of us who lived in it came to find it most conducive to relaxation and calm.[1237]

This is a narrator who seems likably capable of revealing his self-serving motives; he is also happy to record conversations with his daughters which portray him as a

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[1235] Kazuo Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2013(1986)), pp. 7-8.

[1236] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 9.

[1237] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 10.

former domestic 'tyrant' on the path of postwar reform ('He even cooks meals from time to time. You wouldn't have believed it, would you?'[1238]). How could such an open and self-critical man have fallen prey to Japanese war propaganda? Even when considering marriage proposals for his daughters, Ono was, by his own admission, 'very lax in considering the matter of status, it simply not being my instinct to concern myself with such things. Indeed, I have never at any point been very aware of my own social standing, and even now, I am often surprised afresh when some event, or something someone may say, reminds me of the rather high esteem in which I am held.'[1239] And yet something in the very nature of this confession reveals an eminently prickable vanity: Ono clearly enjoyed his high status, and is now struggling with the realisation that the postwar generation loathes him and his kind for their active collaboration with fascism. But perhaps Ono, and Ishiguro himself, is trying to understand how such a phenomenon caught hold not just of the masses, but of artistic and moral élites: in remembering an earlier exercise of influence, Ono is reduced to hoping that his innate 'strength of character', the very character which allegedly leaves him so insensitive to shifts in his social status in the first place, will save him from his current, wrongful, and hopefully short-lived ignimony:

> This visit - I must admit it - left me with a certain feeling of achievement. It was one of those moments, in the midst of a busy career allowing little chance for stopping and taking stock, which illuminate suddenly just how far one has come. For true enough, I had almost unthinkingly started a young man on a good career. A few years earlier, such a thing would have been inconceivable and yet I had brought myself to such a position almost without realising it.
>
> 'Many things have changed since the old days, Shintaro. […] I'm retired now, I don't have so many connections.'
>
> But then for all I know, Shintaro may not be so wrong in his assumptions. It may be that if I chose to put it to the test, I would again be surprised by the extend of my influence. As I say, I have never had a keen awareness of my own standing.[1240]

For a man unconcerned with status, Ono certainly spends a lot of time thinking about it. His daughters Noriko and Setsuko are also worried about the effect on the former's marriage prospects; Ono is extremely irritated by their subtle (but ultimately not-so-subtle) insinuations, but in the end, and to his credit, puts his daughter's interests first by visiting old friends to beg them to report kindly on the family to prospective suitors. Back in the good old days, Ono had enjoyed the best of both worlds - the moral high ground *and* an adoring fanbase led by Kuroda, his favourite student:

[1238] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 13.

[1239] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 19.

[1240] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 21.

> I remember the likes of Kuroda laughing at how grateful the brothers had been over 'a mere white-collar appointment'; but then they all listened solemnly as I recounted my view on how influence and status can creep up on someone who works busily, not pursuing these ends in themselves, but for the satisfaction of performing his tasks to the best of his ability. At this point - no doubt it was Kuroda - leaned forward and said:
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> 'I have suspected for some time that Sensei was unaware of the high regard in which he is held by people in this city. Indeed, as the instance he has just related amply illustrates, his reputation has now spread beyond the world of art, to all walks of life. But how typical of Sensei's modest nature that he is unaware of this. How typical that he himself should be the most surprised by the esteem accorded to him. But to all of us here it comes as no great surprise. In fact, it may be said that respected enormously as he is by the public at large, it is we here at this table who alone know the extent to which that respect still falls short. But I personally have no doubt. His reputation will become all the greater, and in years to come, our proudest honour will be to tell others that we were once the pupils of Masuji Ono.'
>
> Now there is nothing remarkable in all this; it had become something of a habit that at some point in the evening, when we had all drunk a little, my protégés would take to making speeches of a loyal nature to me. And Kuroda in particular, being looked on as a sort of spokesman for them, gave a fair proportion of these. Of course, I usually ignored them, but on this particular occasion, as when Shintaro and his brother had stood bowing and giggling in my entryway, I experienced a warm glow of satisfaction.[1241]

What is this? Praiseworthy honesty? Legitimate self-righteousness? Ugly unwitting confession? Whatever it is, Ono is at least capable of talking about much more than himself: some 'spirit' in prewar Tokyo seduced him, seemingly rightfully; he was proud to be a part of it, even and especially in the 'pleasure district' he helped to create: 'For all the competition that must have existed between those establishments, a neighbourly spirit reigned, and it was quite natural that on asking after Shintaro at one such bar that night, I should be advised by the hostess, without a trace of resentment, to try for him at the "new place".'[1242]

Meanwhile, Ono is trying to establish a bond with his young grandson Ichiro, who prefers American cowboys to Japanese heroes 'like Lord Yoshitsune'[1243]. Curious that Grandad 'used to be a famous artist' but somehow has never shown him any of his pictures, Ichiro doesn't seem to believe Ono's claims of a natural retirement. Ichiro's father has told his son that men like Grandad have had to stop working because 'Japan lost the war', and that American heroes are 'better models for children now'[1244]. Ono refuses to admit this version of events to his grandson, and probably even to himself; he is still partially tied up in a narrative that Japanese militarism was a liberating force, a kind of extension of his liberation from his own

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[1241] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, pp. 24-25.

[1242] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 26.

[1243] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 30.

[1244] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 36.

father, who refused to support his ambitions to become an artist instead of taking over the family business. As Ono confessed to his mother as he left home,

> I would never be proud of myself. When I said I was ambitious, I meant I wished to rise above such a life. […] Once, I was terrified of father's business meetings. But for some time now, they've simply bored me. In fact, they disgust me. What are these meetings I'm so privileged to attend? The counting of loose change. The fingering of coins, hour after hour. I would never forgive myself if my life came to be like that. […] All he's kindled is my ambition.[1245]

Somehow, this longing for individual freedom - and the courage to take it and actually become an artist - would culminate in subservience to a nationalistic regime which sent countless thousands of mainly young men to death or (like Suichi) worse:

> On account of what he must have suffered out in Manchuria, I have in the past tried to adopt a tolerant attitude towards certain aspects of his behaviour; I have not taken personally, for instance, the frequent signs of bitterness he has displayed towards my generation. But then I always assumed such feelings fade with time. However, so far as Suichi is concerned, they seem to be actually growing more trenchant and unreasonable.[1246]

It is precisely Ono's inability to see the new generation's point of view that threatens to hinder both Noriko's marriage prospects and his relationship with his son-in-law:

> 'Miyake was very self-conscious about my having seen his workplace. Possibly it struck him afresh that there was too much of a gulf between our families. After all, it's a point they've made too often for it to be just formality.'
>
> But Setsuko, it would seem, was unconvinced by that theory. And it seems she must have gone home to her husband to speculate over the failure of her sister's proposal. […] So then I am obliged to think back yet again to that encounter with Miyake, to turn it over from yet another perspective.
>
> […] Our [company] President clearly felt responsible for certain undertakings we were involved in during the war. Two senior men were already dismissed by the Americans, but our President obviously felt it was not enough. His act was an apology on behalf of us all to the families of those killed in the war.'
>
> 'Why, really,' I said, 'that seems rather extreme. The world seems to have gone mad. Every day there seems to be a report of someone killing himself in apology. Tell me, Mr. Miyake, don't you find it all a great waste? After all, if your country is at war, you do all you can in support, there's no shame in that. What need is there to apologise by death?'

[1245] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, pp. 47-48.

[1246] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, pp. 50-51.

> ‘No doubt you’re right, sir. But to be frank, there’s much relief around the company. We feel now we can forget our past transgressions and look to the future. It was a great thing our President did.’
>
> ‘But a great waste, too. Some of our best men are giving their lives in this way.’
>
> ‘Indeed, sir, it is a pity. Sometimes I think there are many who should be giving their lives in apology who are too cowardly to face up to their responsibilities. It is then left to the likes of our President to carry out the noble gestures. There are plenty of men already back in positions they held during the war. Some of them are no better than war criminals. They should be the ones apologising.’
>
> ‘I see your point,’ I said. ‘But those who fought and worked loyally for our country during the war cannot be called war criminals. I fear that’s an expression used too freely these days.’
>
> ‘But these are the men who led the country astray, sir. Surely, it’s only right they should acknowledge their responsibility. It’s a cowardice that these men refuse to admit to their mistakes. And when those mistakes were made on behalf of the whole country, why then it must be the greatest cowardice of all.’[1247]

Is Ono one of the ‘men who led the country astray’? Many of Noriko’s potential suitors will think so; at the very least, they will not want a father-in-law unable to understand why, like Miyake and Suichi, they are ‘angry’:

> ‘Half of my high school graduation year have died courageous deaths. They were all for stupid causes, though they were never to know that. […] Those who sent the likes of Kenji out there to die these brave deaths, where are they today? They’re carrying on with their lives, much the same as ever. Many are more successful than before, behaving so well in front of the Americans, the very ones who led us to disaster.’
>
> […] I had been drained by the ceremony, otherwise I might have challenged some of his assumptions. […] But in fact the mood I found him in that evening proved to be typical of his general mood these days; the transformation from the polite, self-effacing young man who married Setsuko two years before the war had been quite remarkable. Of course, it is tragic that so many of his generation died as they did, but why must he harbour such bitterness for his elders? There is a hardness, almost a maliciousness to Suichi’s views now which I find worrying - even more so since they seem to be influencing Setsuko.
>
> But such a transformation is by no means unique to my son-in-law. These days I see it all around me; something has changed in the character of the younger generation in a way I do not fully understand, and certain aspects of this change are undeniably disturbing.[1248]

[1247] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, pp. 55-56.

[1248] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, pp. 57-58.

Ishiguro invites us to see the truth on both sides of this generational ledger: something in Ono's original commitment to his vocation, and to his role in the development of a certain 'spirit' in the Tokyo night scene, feel correct whatever subsequently transpired. Moreover, much of the anti-fascist energy whirling around Tokyo in 1948 is the same pro-fascist energy from a decade earlier - harnessed under a different aegis. The bullying of a once-lauded, mentally handicapped local resident for continuing to sing the old war songs amply demonstrates Ono's point:

> People would say, 'The Hirayama boy may not have it all there, but he's got the right attitude. He's Japanese.' I often saw people stop to give him money, or else buy him something to eat, and on those occasions the idiot's face would light up into a smile. No doubt, the Hirayama boy became fixated on those patriotic songs because of the attention and popularity they earned him.
>
> Nobody minded idiots in those days. What has come over people that they feel inclined to beat him up? They may not like his songs and speeches, but in all likelihood they are the same people who once patted his head and encouraged him until those few snatches embedded themselves in his brain.[1249]

Ono himself saw something more than empty slogans in prewar Japan; he was proud to be part of something beautiful beyond himself:

> I believe I have already mentioned that I played a small part in the Migi-Hidari's coming into existence. Of course, not being a man of wealth, there was little I could do financially. But by that time my reputation in this city had grown to a certain extent; as I recall, I was not yet serving on the arts committee of the State Department, but I had many personal links there and was already being consulted frequently on matters of policy. So then, my petition to the authorities on Yamagata's behalf was not without weight.
>
> 'It is the owner's intention,' I explained, 'that the proposed establishment be a celebration of the new patriotic spirit emerging in Japan today. The décor would reflect the new spirit, and any patron incompatible with that spirit would be firmly encouraged to leave. Furthermore, it is the owner's intention that the establishment be a place where this city's artists and writers whose works most reflect the new spirit can gather and drink together. With respect to this last point, I have myself secured the support of various of my colleagues, among them the painter, Masayuki Harada; the playwright, Misumi; the journalists, Shigeo Otsuji and Eiji Nastuki - all of them, as you will know, producers of work unflinchingly loyal to his Imperial Majesty the Emperor.'
>
> […] The authorities responded not simply with acquiescence, but with an enthusiasm that surprised me. It was, I suppose, another of those instances when one is struck by the realisation that one is held in rather higher esteem than one supposed. But then I was never one to concern myself with matters of esteem, and this was not why the advent of the Migi-

[1249] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, pp. 60-61.

> Hidari brought me so much personal satisfaction; rather, I was proud to see borne out something I had maintained for some time - namely that the new spirit of Japan was not incompatible with enjoying oneself; that is to say, there was no reason why pleasure-seeking had to go hand-in-hand with decadence.[1250]

Ono, however, is somehow oblivious to the fact that the Migi-Hidari's 'enormous illuminated banner suspended from the ridgepole bearing the new name of the premises against a background of army boots marching in formation'[1251] directly contradicted the values of individual freedom of expression and self-cultivation that he himself sought to defend and promote in the 'new Japan' in the first place. Somehow, however, he draws a straight narrative line back from the Migi-Hidari to his first job as a paid artist in 1913, where his sense of vocation beyond salary would only sharpen:

> I should perhaps explain that there was no chance of our completing our schedule without working in the evenings. The Takeda firm prided itself on its ability to provide a high number of paintings at very short notice; indeed, Master Takeda gave us to understand that if we failed to fulfil our deadline in time for the ship leaving harbour, we would quickly lose future commissions to rival firms. The result was that we would work the most arduous hours, late into the night, and still feel guilty the next day because we were behind schedule. Often, as the deadline date approached, it would not be unusual for us all to be living on just two or three hours of sleep each night, and painting around the clock. At times, if several commissions came in one after the next, we would be going from day to day dizzy with exhaustion. But for all that, I cannot recall our ever failing to complete a commission on time, and, I suppose, that gives some indication of the hold Master Takeda had over us.[1252]

Ono soon realises this is not what he rebelled against his father for; the plight of a bullied colleague nicknamed 'the Tortoise' brings out his true instincts:

> 'That's enough, can't you see you're talking to someone with artistic integrity? If an artist refuses to sacrifice quality for the sake of speed, then that's something we should all respect. You've become fools if you can't see that.'
>
> Of course, this is all a matter of many years ago now and I cannot vouch that those were my exact words that morning. But I spoke in some such way on the Tortoise's behalf, of that I am quite certain; for I can distinctly recall the gratitude and relief on the Tortoise's face as he turned to me, and the astonished stares of all the others present. I myself commanded considerable respect among my colleagues - my own output

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[1250] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, pp. 63-64.

[1251] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 64.

[1252] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 66.

> being unchallengeable in terms either of quality of quantity - and I believe my intervention put an end to the Tortoise's ordeal at least for the rest of that morning.
>
> You may perhaps think I am taking too much credit in relating this small episode; after all, the point I was making in defence of the Tortoise seems a very obvious one - one you may think would occur instantly to anyone with any respect for serious art. But it is necessary to remember the climate of those days at Master Takeda's - the feeling amongst us that we were all battling together against time to preserve the hard-earned reputation of the firm. We were also quite aware that the essential point about the sort of things we were commissioned to paint - geishas, cherry trees, swimming carps, temples - was that they look 'Japanese' to the foreigners to whom they were shipped out, and all finer points of style were quite likely to go unnoticed. So I do not think I am claiming undue credit for my younger self if I suggest my actions that day were a manifestation of a quality I came to be much respected for in later years - the ability to think and judge for myself, even if it meant going against the sway of those around me. The fact remains, certainly, that I was the only one to come to the Tortoise's defence that morning.[1253]

This episode helps Ono to realise that he must follow his vocational 'ambition' elsewhere, under the tutelage of a 'real artist', Seiji Moriyama; he encourages the Tortoise to join him:

> 'But Ono-san, what are you saying?' [the Tortoise] said in a lowered voice. 'Master Takeda took me on through the recommendation of a most respected acquaintance of my father. And really, he has shown me great tolerance, despite all my problems. How can I be so disloyal as to leave after only a few months?' Then suddenly, the Tortoise seemed to see the import of his words, and added hurriedly: 'But of course, Ono-san, I don't imply *you* are in any way disloyal. Circumstances are different in your case. I wouldn't presume…' […] He faded off into embarrassed giggling. Then with an effort, he pulled himself together to ask: 'Are you serious about leaving Master Takeda, Ono-san?'
>
> 'In my opinion,' I said, 'Master Takeda doesn't deserve the loyalty of the likes of you and me. Loyalty has to be earned. There's too much made of loyalty. All too often men talk of loyalty and follow blindly. I for one have no wish to live my life like that.'[1254]

Ono is honest enough to admit that these 'may not have been the precise words I used that afternoon at the Tamagawa temple', but he thinks it 'can be assumed those words I have just attributed to myself do represent accurately enough my

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[1253] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, pp. 68-69.

[1254] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 72.

attitude and resolve at that point in my life'[1255]; in any case, this 'spirit' is what he wants - or says he wants - to pass on to his disciples:

> One place, incidentally, where I was obliged to tell and retell stories of those days at the Takeda firm was around that table at the Migi-Hidari; my pupils seemed to share a fascination for hearing about this early part of my career - perhaps because they were naturally interested to learn what their teacher was doing at their age. In any case, the topic of my days with Master Takeda would come up frequently during the course of those evenings.
>
> 'It wasn't such a bad experience,' I remember telling them once. 'It taught me some important things.'
>
> 'Forgive me, Sensei,' - I believe it was Kuroda who leaned across the table to say this - 'but I find it hard to believe a place like the one you describe could teach an artist anything useful whatsoever.'
>
> 'Yes, Sensei,' said another voice, 'do tell us what a place like that could have possibly taught you. It sounds more like a firm producing cardboard boxes.'
>
> This was the way things would go at the Migi-Hidari. I could be having a conversation with someone, the rest of them talking amongst themselves, and as soon as an interesting question had been asked of me, they would all break off their own conversations and I would have a circle of faces awaiting my reply. It was as though they never talked amongst themselves without having an ear open for another piece of knowledge I might impart. This is not to say that they were uncritical; quite the contrary, they were a brilliant set of young men and one would never dare say anything without first having thought about it.
>
> 'Being at Takeda's,' I told them, 'taught me an important lesson early in my life. That while it was right to look up to teachers, it was always important to question their authority. The Takeda experience taught me never to follow the crowd blindly, but to consider carefully the direction in which I was being pushed. And if there's one thing I've tried to encourage you all to do, it's been to rise above the sway of things. To rise above the undesirable and decadent influences that have swamped us and have done so much to weaken the fibre of our nation these past ten, fifteen years.' No doubt I was a little drunk and sounded rather grandiose, but that was the way those sessions around that corner table went.
>
> 'Indeed, Sensei,' someone said, 'we must all remember that. We must all endeavour to rise above the sway of things.'[1256]

Ishiguro is suggesting here that the disciples themselves have played their own crucial role in Japan's collapse by turning the well-meaning advice of Ono's generation into empty group identity slogans instead of embodying them in their own individual behaviour. Likewise Ono, in his fatal vanity, was happier to have the warm, scarcely 'critical' (with the exception of the subsequently tortured Kuroda)

[1255] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 72.

[1256] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, pp. 72-73.

adulation of his young fans, who ignored the actual content of his life experience, than to notice the whole country going to hell in a handbasket:

> 'And I think we here around this table,' I went on, 'have a right to be proud of ourselves. The grotesque and the frivolous have been prevalent all around us. But now at last a finer, more manly spirit is emerging in Japan and you here are part of it. In fact, it's my wish that you should go on to become recognised as nothing less than the spearhead of the new spirit. Indeed' - and by this point, I would be addressing not just those around the table, but all those listening nearby - 'this establishment of ours where we all gather is a testimony to the new emerging spirit and all of us have a right to be proud.'
>
> Frequently, as the drinking got merrier, outsiders would come crowding round our table to join in our arguments and speeches, or simply to listen and soak in the atmosphere. On the whole, my pupils were ready enough to give strangers a hearing, though of course, if we were imposed on by a bore, or by someone with disagreeable views, they would be quick to squeeze him out. But for all the shouting and speechmaking that went on into the night, real quarrels were rare at the Migi-Hidari, all of us who frequented that place being united by the same essential spirit.[1257]

The Migi-Hidari, then, was a 1930s equivalent of a well-policed Facebook group, or indeed any corporate hierarchy: the illusion of free debate among all accepted members, and ruthless exclusion for everyone else. Ono and his fawning disciples symbolised the intergenerational complicity which made Japan's war disaster possible:

> I have somewhere in this house a painting by Kuroda, that most gifted of my pupils, depicting one such evening at the Migi-Hidari. It is entitled: 'The Patriotic Spirit', a title that may lead you to expect a work depicting soldiers on the march or some such thing. Of course, it was Kuroda's point that a patriotic spirit began somewhere further back, in the routine of our daily lives, in such things as where we drank and who we mixed with. It was his tribute - for he believed in such things then - to the spirit of the Migi-Hidari. […] Beneath the banners, guests are gathered around tables in conversation, while in the foreground a waitress in a kimono hurries with a tray of drinks. It is a fine painting, capturing very accurately the boisterous, yet somehow proud and respectable atmosphere of the Migi-Hidari. And whenever I happen to look at it today, it still brings me a certain satisfaction to recall that I - with whatever influence my reputation had gained in the city - was able to do my small part in bringing such a place into being.[1258]

Ono has only seen Kuroda once since the war:

[1257] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, pp. 73-74.

[1258] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, pp. 74-75.

> Kuroda's face, which had been quite round before the war, had hollowed out around the cheekbones, and what looked like heavy lines had appeared towards the chin and the throat. And I thought to myself as he stood there: 'He's not young any more.'
>
> He moved his head very slightly. I was not sure if it was the beginning of a bow, or if he was just adjusting his head to get out of the splash of rainwater from his broken umbrella. Then he turned and began to walk off in the other direction. But it was not my intention to dwell on Kuroda here. Indeed, he would not be on my mind at all had his name not turned up during [discussions about Noriko's marriage situation].[1259]

Instead of apologising or otherwise embracing his partial responsibility for the postwar plight of Kuroda and the millions like him, Ono has chosen the 'out of sight, out of mind' path. These days, he seems to prefer burying himself in marriage negotiations on behalf of his daughter's material interests, which hinge on the superficial question of the family's perceived 'status', than to live up to his own vocational and spiritual creed as an artist. Even his reunion with his old friend and fascist enabler, the self-declared 'true lover of art'[1260] Chishu Matsuda, ends in mutual, recognition-hungry head-nodding:

> 'Ono, there are things we should be proud of. Never mind what people today are all saying. Before long, a few more years, and the likes of us will be able to hold our heads high about what we tried to do. I simply hope I live as long as that. It's my wish to see my life's efforts vindicated.'
>
> 'Of course. I feel quite the same.'[1261]

'April, 1949'

The second entry in Ono's diary of his coming to terms with the war, written at a six-month remove from the first, illustrates significant progress, especially at his advanced age: he is still capable of learning for himself, and is on the way to understanding that he had fallen prey - in both his life and his work as an artist - to an easy rhetoric of 'spiritual nationalism' at the expense of a deeper, wider and more demanding humanism.

Over the intervening winter, Ono had fallen out with his last remaining drinking buddy, Shintaro, the least critical and most mediocre of his disciples; he sees Shintaro's petty request to 'disassociate you from my 'influence'[1262] in a letter to a local job interview board as particularly reprehensible in light of his own willingness to fall on his sword over Noriko's marriage negotiations:

[1259] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 78.

[1260] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 89.

[1261] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 94.

[1262] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 103.

It may perhaps appear as if I was unnecessarily hard on Shintaro that day. But then if one bears in mind what had been taking place in the weeks immediately prior to that visit of his, it is surely understandable why I should have felt so unsympathetic towards his efforts to shirk his responsibilities.

[…] Perhaps I was mistaken about this, but I thought Dr. Saito was watching me rather like a teacher waiting for a pupil to go on with a lesson he has learnt by heart.

[…] 'There are some who would say it is people like myself who are responsible for the terrible things that happened to this nation of ours. As far as I am concerned, I freely admit I made many mistakes. I admit that much of what I did was ultimately harmful to our nation, that mine was part of an influence that resulted in untold suffering for our own people. I admit this. You see, Dr Saito, I admit this quite readily.'

Dr Saito leaned forward, a puzzled expression on his face.

'Forgive me, Mr Ono,' he said. 'You're saying you are unhappy with the work you did? With your paintings?'

'My paintings. My teachings. As you see, Dr Saito, I admit this quite readily. All i can say is that at the time I acted in good faith. I believed in all sincerity that I was achieving good for my fellow countrymen. But as you see, I am not now afraid to admit that I was mistaken.'

[…] I would not wish to claim that the whole engagement had hung in the balance until that point, but it is certainly my feeling that that was when the *miai* turned from being an awkward, potentially disastrous one into a successful evening. […] Of course, I do not wish to pretend certain moments of that evening were not painful for me; nor do I claim that I would so easily have made the sort of declaration concerning the past had circumstances not impressed upon me the prudence of doing so. Having said this, I must say I find it hard to understand how any man who values his self-respect would wish for long to avoid responsibility for his past deeds; it may not always be an easy thing, but there is certainly a satisfaction and dignity to be gained in coming to terms with the mistakes one has made in the course of one's life. In any case, there is surely no great shame in mistakes made in the best of faith. It is surely a thing far more shameful to be unable or unwilling to acknowledge them.

Consider Shintaro, for instance - who appears, incidentally, to have secured the teaching post he was so coveting. Shintaro would in my view be a happier man today if he had the courage to accept what he did in the past. It is, I suppose, possible that the cold reaction he received from me that afternoon just after New Year may have persuaded him to change tack in dealing with his committee over the matter of his China crisis posters. But my guess is that Shintaro persisted with his small hypocrisies in pursuit of his goal. Indeed, I have come to believe now that there has always been a cunning, underhand side to Shintaro's nature, which I had not really noticed in the past. […] I rather suspect Shintaro was never quite the unworldly sort he would have us believe. That's just his way of gaining an advantage over people and getting things to go his way. People like Shintaro, if they don't want to do something, they pretend they're helplessly lost about it and they're forgiven everything. […] Think how cleverly he avoided the war.

> While others were losing so much, Shintaro just went on working in that little studio of his as though nothing was happening.[1263]

Ono's perspective is still one-sidedly Japanese - not a word of sympathy for Chinese or other foreign suffering at Japanese hands is uttered in any of these diaries - but he has at least understood, by April 1949, that something about the 'good old days' was fatally flawed, and he is a step closer to understanding what that was: not only his own willingness to succumb to flattery, but also - just as crucially - the mediocrity of too many of his young disciples and others better placed than he to understand the true flow of events but unwilling to risk their own futures on any actual criticism of the older generation. Looking back on his days holding court at the Migi-Hidari, Ono can now see, for all his own sincerity and that of some of his braver interlocutors, the overall atmosphere had lacked a wider honesty: 'Like many things now, it is perhaps as well that that little world has passed away and will not be returning.'[1264]

'November 1949'

> *Mori-san made a sound as though he were laughing to himself. Then he said: 'As you point out yourself, Ono, these are troubled times. All the more so for a young artist, practically unknown and without resources. If you were less talented, I would fear for your future after leaving me. But you are a clever fellow. No doubt you have made arrangements.'*
>
> *'As a matter of fact, I have made no arrangements whatsoever. The villa has been my home for so long, I never seriously contemplated it ceasing to be so.'*
>
> *'Is that so. Well, as I say, Ono, if you were less talented, there would be cause for worry. But you are a clever man.' I saw Mori-san's silhouette turn to face me. 'You will no doubt succeed in finding work illustrating magazines and comic books. Perhaps you will even manage to join a firm like the one you were employed by when you first came to me. Of course, it will mean the end of your development as a serious artist, but then no doubt you've taken all this into account.'*
>
> *These may sound unnecessarily vindictive words for a teacher to use for a pupil whose admiration he knows he still commands. But then again, when a master painter has given so much in time and resources to a certain pupil, when furthermore he has allowed that pupil's name to be associated in public with his own, it is perhaps understandable, if not entirely excusable, that the teacher lose for a moment his sense of proportion and act in ways he may later regret. And though the manoeuvrings over the possession of the paintings*

[1263] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, pp. 104, 123-125.

[1264] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 127.

> *will no doubt appear petty, it is surely understandable if a teacher who has actually supplied most of the paints and materials should forget in such a moment that his pupil has any right whatever over his own work.*
>
> *For all that, it is clear that such arrogance and possessiveness on the part of a teacher - however renowned he may be - is to be regretted.*[1265]

Ono begins his next diary entry by reflecting on the legacy of the man whose house he won at 'character auction'. Unlike Shintaro and other 'Tortoises', who ultimately disappoint with their craven yay-saying, Akira Sugimura was willing to take big risks with his failed Kawabe Park 'cultural centres' project:

> I may have said before that my dealings with Sugimura's family after his death - on the occasion of my buying the last of his houses - were not of the kind to make me particularly disposed to the man's memory. Nevertheless, whenever I find myself wandering around Kawabe Park these days, I start to think of Sugimura and his schemes, and I confess I am beginning to feel a certain admiration for the man. For indeed, a man who aspires to rise above the mediocre, to be something more than ordinary, surely deserves admiration, even if in the end he fails and loses a fortune on account of his ambitions. It is my belief, furthermore, that Sugimura would have known this. If one has failed only where others have not had the courage or will to try, there is a consolation - indeed, a deep satisfaction - to be gained from this observation when looking back over one's life.[1266]

This is not to excuse the individual from responsibility for the *content* of her ambition - Ono is uneasily quick to dismiss Japanese militarism as an idea which seemed fair and right at the time - but it does highlight the importance of a certain type of autonomous self-cultivation, a freedom from material consequences and the opinions of others, which is equally necessary for meaningful work. We acquire this adult autonomy, however, through education, or in other words through the influence of parents and teachers; we find our vocational 'selves' in creative opposition to them, as Ono did with his mentor Seiji Moriyama:

> Of course, it is not only when we are children that we are open to these small inheritances; a teacher or mentor whom one admires greatly in early adulthood will leave his mark, and indeed, long after one has come to re-evaluate, perhaps even reject, the bulk of that man's teachings, certain traits will tend to survive, like some shadow of that influence, to remain with one throughout one's life. I am aware, for instance, that certain of my mannerisms - the way I poise my hand when I am explaining something, certain inflexions in my voice when I am trying to convey irony or impatience, even whole phrases I am fond of using that people have come

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[1265] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, pp. 180-181.

[1266] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 134.

> to think of as my own - I am aware these are all traits I originally acquired from Mori-san, my former teacher. And perhaps I will not be flattering myself unduly were I to suppose many of my own pupils will in turn have gained such small inheritances from me. I would hope, furthermore, that in spite of any reassessments they may have come to make concerning those years under my supervision, most of them will have remained grateful for much of what they learnt. Certainly, for my own part, whatever the obvious shortcomings of my former teacher, Seiji Moriyama, or 'Mori-san' as we always called him, whatever occurred between us in the end, I would always acknowledge that those seven years I spent living at his family villa out in the hilly countryside of the Wakaba prefecture were some of the most crucial to my career.[1267]

The story of Ono's 'graduation' from Moriyama's tutelage becomes, for Ishiguro, a metaphor for Japan's postwar transcendence of fascism: if only more Japanese had been able to cultivate Ono's attitude to authority, the country would have been able to resist the dictatorship's evils in the first place. On the one hand, Moriyama was willing to allow his students to debate his work openly in his presence, without taking sides:

> As I recount this I am aware that Mori-san's behaviour may strike you as somewhat arrogant. But it is perhaps easier to understand the aloofness he displayed on such occasions if one has oneself been in a position in which one is constantly looked up to and admired. For it is by no means desirable that one be always instructing and pronouncing to one's pupils; there are many situations where it is preferable to remain silent so as to allow them the chance to debate and ponder. As I say, anyone who has been in a position of large influence will appreciate this.[1268]

And yet this 'free debate' in Mori-san's circle is actually very strictly policed by his 'leading pupil', Sasaki:

> Although as I have said, some arguments could go on a long time, once Sasaki finally made up his mind on a matter, that would usually mark the end of the dispute. Similarly, if Sasaki were to suggest a person's painting was in any way 'disloyal' to our teacher, this would almost always lead to immediate capitulation on the part of the offender - who would then abandon the painting, or in some cases, burn it along with the refuse.[1269]

The crucial paradox here is that the best students - Sasaki, and after him, Ono himself - tend to end up being the most critical of their masters:

[1267] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, pp. 136-137.

[1268] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 139.

[1269] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 140.

> One supposes all groups of pupils tend to have a leader figure - someone whose abilities the teacher has singled out as an example for the others to follow. And it is this leading pupil, by virtue of his having the strongest grasp of his teacher's ideas, who will tend to function, as did Sasaki, as the main interpreter of those ideas to the less able or less experienced pupils. But by the same token, it is this same leading pupil who is most likely to see shortcomings in the teacher's work, or else develop views of his own divergent from those of his teacher. In theory, of course, a good teacher should accept this tendency - indeed, welcome it as a sign that he has brought his pupil to a point of maturity. In practice, however, the emotions involved can be quite complicated. Sometimes, when one has nurtured a gifted pupil long and hard, it is difficult to see any such maturing of talent as anything other than treachery, and some regrettable situations are apt to arise.[1270]

Sasaki's eventual 'maturity' - or betrayal, as Mori-san saw it - is understood by Ono as a more or less healthy natural phenomenon, one which he himself would struggle to produce in his own mentoring role. Ono's failure to bring even his best student - Kuroda - to such maturity was hence even greater than Moriyama's, and deep down Ono knows this; this is why he asks his reader to show mercy for his mentor if not for himself:

> You may gather from such recollections that our devotion to our teacher and to his principles was fierce and total. And it is easy with hindsight - once the shortcomings of an influence have become obvious - to be critical of a teacher who fosters such a climate. But then again, anyone who has held ambitions on a grand scale, anyone who has been in a position to achieve something large and has felt the need to impart his ideas as thoroughly as possible, will have some sympathy for the way Mori-san conducted things. For though it may seem a little foolish now in the light of what became of his career, it was Mori-san's wish at that time to do nothing less than change fundamentally the identity of painting as practised in our city. It was with no less a goal in mind that he devoted so much of his time and wealth to the nurturing of pupils, and it is perhaps important to remember this when making judgments concerning my former teacher.[1271]

Mori-san's wish to celebrate the transient but real beauty of the 'floating world' - 'the night-time world of pleasure, entertainment and drink which formed the backdrop for all our paintings'[1272] - would come to be seen as 'decadent' by Ono after his fascist friend Matsuda takes him to visit Tokyo's hidden slums; his 'realist turn' was seen by Mori-san as a betrayal analogous to that of Sasaki. But before their relationship collapses completely, Mori-san and Ono are able to share the following exchange:

[1270] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, pp. 141-142.

[1271] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 144.

[1272] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 145.

> ‘The finest, most fragile beauty an artist can hope to capture drifts within these pleasure houses after dark. And on nights like these, Ono, some of that beauty drifts into our own quarters here. But as for those pictures up there, they don’t even hint at these transitory, illusory qualities. They’re deeply flawed, Ono. […] I was very young when I prepared those prints. I suspect the reason I couldn’t celebrate the floating world was that I couldn’t bring myself to believe in its worth. Young men are often guilt-ridden about pleasure, and I suppose I was no different. I suppose I thought that to pass away one’s time in such places, to spend one’s skills celebrating things so intangible and transient, I suppose I thought it all rather wasteful, all rather decadent. It’s hard to appreciate the beauty of a world when one doubts its very validity.’
>
> I thought about this, then said: ‘Indeed, Sensei, I admit what you say may well apply in respect to my own work.’
>
> […] Mori-san appeared not to hear me. ‘But I’ve long since lost all such doubts, Ono,’ he continued. ‘When I am an old man, when I look back over my life and see that I have devoted it to the task of capturing the unique beauty of that world, I believe I will be well satisfied. And no man will make me believe I’ve wasted my time.’
>
> It is possible, of course, that Mori-san did not use those exact words. Indeed, on reflection, such phrases sound rather more like the sort of thing I myself would declare to my own pupils after we had been drinking a little at the Migi-Hidari. ‘As the new generation of Japanese artists, you have a great responsibility towards the culture of this nation. I am proud to have the likes of you as my pupils. And while I may deserve only the smallest praise for my own paintings, when I come to look back over my life and remember I have nurtured and assisted the careers of all of you here, why then no man will make me believe I have wasted my time.’[1273]

Just as Moriyama lives to have his own vision of beauty eclipsed, so too does Ono survive the war to see the death of that Migi-Hidari world; what survives, in some realm of eternity, is the purity of the attempt itself: Ono broke with Mori-san, endured the risk of poverty and the thinly veiled threats of his former mentor, and made the best of the hand he was dealt. Returning to Mori-san’s villa in 1938 after receiving the prestigious Shigeta Foundation Award, Ono decides not to bother gloating, and enjoys a moment overlooking the villa, eating oranges by himself:

> Happy as I was that night [at the awards ceremony], the feeling of deep triumph which the award should have brought was curiously missing. In fact, I was not to experience such a feeling until a few days later, when I was out in the hilly countryside of the Wakaba province. […] And it was as I sat there, looking down at the villa, enjoying the taste of those fresh oranges, that that deep sense of triumph and satisfaction began to rise within me. It is hard to describe the feeling, for it was quite different from the sort of elation one feels from smaller triumphs - and, as I say, quite different from anything

[1273] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, pp. 150-151.

> I had experienced during the celebrations at the Migi-Hidari. It was a profound sense of conviction that one's efforts have been justified; that the hard work undertaken, the doubts overcome, have all been worthwhile; that one has achieved something of real value and distinction. I did not go any further towards the villa that day - it seemed quite pointless. I simply continued to sit there for an hour or so, in deep contentment, eating my oranges.
>
> It is not, I fancy, a feeling many people will come to experience. The likes of the Tortoise - the likes of Shintaro - they may plod on, competent and inoffensive, but their kind will never know the sort of happiness I felt that day. For their kind do not know what it is to risk everything in the endeavour to rise above the mediocre.
>
> Matsuda, though, was a different case. Although he and I often quarrelled, our approaches to life were identical, and I am confident he would have been able to look back on one or two such moments. Indeed, I am sure he was thinking along these lines when he said to me that last time we spoke, a gentle smile on his face: 'We at least acted on what we believed and did our utmost.' For however one may come in later years to reassess one's achievements, it is always a consolation to know that one's life contained a moment or two of real satisfaction such as I experienced that day up on that high mountain path.[1274]

The problem that Ono and Matsuda shared was not a lack of self-cultivating bravery, but - as the two finally admitted to each other just before Matsuda's death - a disastrous and ultimately murderous lack of international humanist perspective: their merely 'ordinary' capacity to understand the world around them led them to misdiagnose the causes of those Tokyo slums which had caused them so much indignation in the 1920s. The solution to such 'decadence' at home was not expansionist empire abroad, but once Ono realised the ruthless nature of the regime he had so heartily supported with his work (the same regime that sent Kuroda off to be tortured for his own 'unpatriotic' innovations), there was nothing he could do to save his best pupil.[1275]

<u>'June, 1950'</u>

> *'No doubt you'll remember, Ono, how I used to call you naïve. How I used to tease you for your narrow artist's perspective. You used to get so angry with me. Well, it seems in the end neither of us had a broad enough view.*
>
> *'I suppose that's right. But if we'd seen things a little more clearly, then the likes of you and me, Matsuda - who knows? - we may have done some real good. We had much energy and courage*

[1274] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 204.

[1275] See Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 183.

once. Indeed, we must have had plenty of both to conduct the New Japan campaign, you remember?

'Indeed. There were some powerful forces set against us then. We might easily have lost our nerve. I suppose we must have been very determined, Ono.'

'But then I for one never saw things too clearly. A narrow artist's perspective, as you say. Why, even now, I find it hard to think of the world extending much beyond this city.'

'These days,' Matsuda said, 'I find it hard to think of the world extending much beyond my garden. So perhaps you're the one with the wider perspective now, Ono.'

We laughed together once more, then Matsuda took a sip from his teacup.

'But there's no need to blame ourselves unduly,' he said. 'We at least acted on what we believed and did our utmost. It's just that in the end we turned out to be ordinary men. Ordinary men with no special gifts of insight. It was simply our misfortune to have been ordinary men during such times.'[1276]

Among its other virtues, *An Artist of the Floating World* is a meditation on the meaning of loyalty: there is, as Ishiguro shows us from a variety of interesting angles, no loyalty whatsoever in becoming an uncritical member of any group, secretly enjoying the psychological and material benefits of membership; while anyone can fake loyalty for personal advantage, only an autonomous self can truly grant it. Crucially, the title of the novel refers to Ono's master, Seiji Moriyama, not Ono himself; Ono's decision to break with his master's decadent 'floating world' of geishas and teahouses and depict the rough edges of Tokyo life, even if Mori-san is unwilling or unable to see it, is in fact to be understood as a continuation of his master's legacy as autonomously judged best by his 'leading pupil', a more 'loyal' creative turn than any amount of aping and copying. Ono is subsequently responsible for allowing this 'realist turn' in his art to be instrumentalised for propaganda purposes, and for not understanding the bigger picture in which Japanese fascist aggression played out; but even *he* admits that his greatest pleasure came not from the awards and honours bestowed on him by the regime, but from his own private sense of having carved out a bold legacy of achievement for himself on the shoulders of his great but limited teacher. If prewar Japan had had more Onos and fewer Shintaros in it, the whole fiasco of the war may have been avoided, or indeed it may not; Ishiguro simultaneously reminds us that the 1930s were a time in which, for most people, one's country, and even one's city, constituted the borders of the known world. The deeper question for Ishiguro's reader therefore becomes how to extend something as intimate as 'loyalty' to anything *beyond* a nation; even if the 'spiritual nationalism' of Japan's wartime propaganda quite quickly gave way, in the postwar period, to a more inclusive (or at least export-driven) humanism, it is unclear whether modern, hi-tech Japan has truly increased its capacity for such loyalty. Mishima and his followers offered an

[1276] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, pp. 199-200.

ugly, anti-literary spasm of a totalitarian solution in the 1960s, but Ishiguro, in his embrace of literary form, affirms the power of words to conjure feelings of loyalty across borders of space and time. By June 1950, Ono has at least lived to see the beginning of a certain transformation in his native Tokyo, but it will be up to future generations of his readers everywhere to show their 'loyalty' to him precisely by pushing beyond his nationalist outlook:

> I smiled to myself as I watched these young office workers from my bench. Of course, at times, when I remember those brightly-lit bars and all those people gathered beneath the lamps, laughing a little more boisterously perhaps than those young men yesterday, but with the same good-heartedness, I feel a certain nostalgia for the past and the district as it used to be. But to see how our city has been rebuilt, how things have recovered so rapidly over these years, fills me with genuine gladness. Our nation, it seems, whatever mistakes it may have made in the past, has now another chance to make a better go of things. One can only wish these young people well.[1277]

Whether the reader of Ono's diaries comes to feel a certain vague sense of loyalty and responsibility towards him or not, Ono has certainly succeeded in implanting it in his eight-year-old grandson Ichiro:

> 'Oji's not to worry he couldn't make Mother give me *sake*.'
>
> 'You seem to be growing up very fast, Ichiro,' I said, laughing. 'You'll be a fine man when you're grown. Perhaps you really will be head of Nippon Electronics. Or something just as grand.'[1278]

And it would be remiss, in this context, not to cite Ishiguro's own dedication of the novel, which reads simply: 'For My Parents'.

[1277] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 206.

[1278] Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, p. 189.

23. Marilynne Robinson's *What Are We Doing Here?*

> *Then how to recover the animating spirit of humanism? […] There is an unworldliness in the experience, and in what it yields, that requires a larger understanding than our terse vocabularies of behaviour and reward can capture. I have had students tell me that they had never heard the word* beautiful *applied to a piece of prose until they came to us at the workshop. Literature had been made a kind of data to illustrate, supposedly, some graceless theory that stood apart from it, and that would be shed in a year or two by something post- or neo- and in any case as gracelessly irrelevant to a work of language as whatever it displaced. I think this phenomenon is an effect of the utilitarian hostility to the humanities and to art, an attempt to repackage them, to give them some appearance of respectability. And yet the beautiful persists, and so do eloquence and depth of thought, and they belong to all of us because they are the most pregnant evidence we have of what is possible in us. […] Self-interestedness is not a trait well thought of in traditional moral systems, however demotic. That it is presented to us as uniquely and inevitably our governing motive puts an end to all the old struggles of the soul, and moots old considerations like honour or loyalty or compassion. I do not wish to imply that people are no longer moved by such considerations. But I am impressed by the authority of an idea of self and others that strips everyone of individuality and of seriousness, and of the possibility of actions that are original and free. What will Western liberalism finally mean if there really is no more to respect in citizen and stranger than this?*[1279]
>
> Marilynne Robinson

Marilynne Robinson (1943-) is an arch defender of the legacy of Puritanism in American culture, but also a fierce critic of the contemporary humanities as typically practised in American universities. Her 2018 essay collection *What Are We Doing Here?* ties these two seemingly opposing threads together: there is a culture of 'learning for the self' in the Puritan tradition which has been lost amid 20th- and 21st-century 'neoliberal' reforms in humanities education. We explore Robinson's solution to this impasse as outlined in three essays: the eponymous 'What Are We Doing Here?' (2015), 'Mind, Conscience, Soul' (2017) and 'Integrity and the Modern Intellectual Tradition' (2017).

<u>'What Are We Doing Here?'</u>

[1279] Marilynne Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here? Essays*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2018), pp. 33, 259.

Robinson's attack on 'neoliberalism' is vague, but total:

> Our great universities, with their vast resources, their exhaustive libraries, look like a humanist's dream. Certainly, with the collecting and archiving that have taken place in them over the centuries, they could tell us much that we need to know. But there is pressure on them now to change fundamentally, to equip our young to be what the Fabians used to call 'brain workers'. They are to be skilled labour in the new economy, intellectually nimble enough to meet its needs, which we know will change constantly and unpredictably. I may simply have described the robots that will be better suited to this kind of existence, and with whom our optimised workers will no doubt be forced to compete, poor complex and distractible creatures that they will be still.[1280]

She tries briefly to run a utilitarian argument for the type of 'learning for the self' which 'neoliberal reforms' so sweepingly marginalise:

> Why teach the humanities? Why study them? American universities are literally shaped around them and have been since their founding, yet the question is put in the bluntest form: What are they good for? If, for purposes of discussion, we date the beginning of the humanist movement to 1500, then historically speaking, the West has flourished materially as well as culturally in the period of their influence.[1281]

With their 'genius for impoverishment', however, neoliberal acolytes are unable to see the long-term benefits of such humanistic education - whether material or merely 'cultural' - because they are stuck in an ugly 20th-century paradigm of nationalism and international relations realism:

> A great irony is at work in our historical moment. We are being encouraged to abandon our most distinctive heritage - in the name of self-preservation. The logic seems to go like this: To be as strong as we need to be we must have a highly efficient economy. Society must be disciplined, stripped down, to achieve this efficiency and make us all better foot soldiers. The alternative is decadence, the eclipse of our civilisation by one [i.e. China] with more fire in its belly.[1282]

At times, however, Robinson seems more interested in the fate of the humanities as a (Western) 'body of learning' - and winning the argument with neoliberalism on Western soil, in Western terms - than in an open conversation with the world:

> What is at stake now, in this rather inchoate cluster of anxieties that animates so many of us, is the body of learning and thought we call the

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[1280] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, pp. 20-21.

[1281] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, p. 21.

[1282] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, p. 22.

> humanities. Their transformative emergence has historically specifiable origins in the English and European Renaissance, greatly expedited by the emergence of the printing press. At the time and for centuries afterward it amounted to very much more than the spread of knowledge, because it was understood as a powerful testimony to human capacities, human grandeur, the divine in the human.[1283]

In the end, however, and for all her focus on the Western tradition, Robinson wants to hedge her bets between intrinsic and extrinsic justifications of the humanities:

> Tocqueville sees something like inspiration sweeping through the West as knowledge spreads and science advances. Crucially, there is no mention of competition, no implication of a hierarchy of abilities or gifts. Every excellence, every achievement enhances the general wealth of possibility for yet more excellence. And it is interesting to note that for Tocqueville there is no simple notion of utility. This awakening of minds and spirits is a sunlight that falls across the whole landscape of civilisation. The questions being put to us now - What good are the humanities? Why are they at the centre of our education? - might, for all history can tell us, be answered decisively by this vision of the effects of learning, which did take hold and flourish as the study of ancient poetry, philosophy and language, Scripture and theology, and of history itself by means of the printing press and the rise of vernacular languages, long before science and technology even began to come abreast of them. [… Keats too expressed] that old humanist privilege, of being 'ravished' by a book, and of finding that it has a suggestive power far beyond its subject, a potency the affected mind itself might be years in realising. I talked once with a cabdriver who had spent years in prison. He said he had no idea that the world was something he could be interested in. And then he read a book.
>
> In the history of the West, for all its achievements, there is also a persisting impatience with the energy and originality of the mind. It can make us very poor servants of purposes that are not our own. A Benthamite panopticon would have radically reduced the varieties of experience that help to individuate us, in theory producing happiness in factory workers by preventing their having a glimpse of the fact that there could be more to life. Censorship, lists of prohibited books, restrictions on travel, limits on rights of assembly all accomplish by more practicable means some part of the same exclusions, precluding the stimulus of new thought, new things to wonder about. The contemporary assault on the humanities has something of the same objective and would employ similar methods. Workers, a category that seems to subsume us all except the idlest rich, should learn what they need to learn to be competitive in the new economy. All the rest is waste and distraction.[1284]

[1283] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, pp. 23-24.

[1284] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, pp. 25-27.

The twin justifications of 'nurturing the technical mind' and general learning for the self - for *everyone* - are invoked in parallel by Robinson as she seeks to overcome 'neo-Benthamite' social engineers who insist that 'the ideal worker will not have a head full of poetry'[1285]:

> What are we doing here, we professors of English? Our project is often dismissed as elitist. […] There is justified alarm about the bizarre concentrations of wealth that have occurred globally, and the tiny fraction of the wealthiest who have wildly disproportionate influence over the lives of the rest of us. They are called the elite, and so are those of us who encourage the kind of thinking that probably does make certain of the young less than ideal recruits to their armies of the employed. If there is a point where the two meanings overlap, it would be in the fact that the teaching we do is what in America we have always called liberal education, education appropriate to free people. […] Now, in a country richer than any [of our ancestors] could have imagined, we are endlessly told we must cede that humane freedom to a very uncertain promise of employability. […] If I seem to have conceded an important point in saying that the humanities do not prepare ideal helots, economically speaking, I do not at all mean to imply that they are less than ideal for preparing capable citizens, imaginative and innovative contributors to a full and generous, and largely unmonetisable, national life.[1286]

Just when the reader thinks Robinson has forgotten about the entire world outside the United States and the Western canon, however, she recovers (stereotypes notwithstanding) her humanist credentials:

> Neo-Benthamism stands or falls with our unquestioning subservience to the notion of competition. […] Do the pressures created in the larger world deprive us and the world of gifts the Chinese and Russians would bring to it? We know these cultures have been rich and brilliant in ways no longer visible to us, at least. If we do have this effect, is there one good thing about it, for us or for them? If the vastness of the Russian imagination, the elegance of the Chinese eye and hand, were present to us to admire without invidious comparison, of them to us or us to them, wouldn't the world be richer for us all?[1287]

But even here, Robinson wants to give this (as yet hypothetical) 'global humanism' a spiritual twist:

> If the rise of humanism was a sunrise, then in this present time we are seeing an eclipse. I take it to be a merely transient gloom, because the work of those old scholars and translators and printers, the poets and

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[1285] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, p. 29.

[1286] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, pp. 30-31.

[1287] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, p. 31.

> philosophers they recovered and the poets and philosophers who came after them, the habit of literacy and the profound interest in the actual world and the present time, have all taken hold, more profoundly than we know. We have not lost them. We have only forgotten what they mean. We have forgotten to understand them for what they are, a spectacular demonstration of the capacities of the human mind, always renewed in our own experience, igniting possibilities no one could have foreseen. Tocqueville may be no more than conventional in speaking of them as 'gifts which heaven shares out by chance'. And it may be that the convention of ascribing our gifts to a divine source, a convention that comes down from the earliest humanists, gave him and them a language able to capture something our truncated philosophies cannot accommodate.[1288]

'Mind, Conscience, Soul'

Before forging ahead to any 'World Ethos', Robinson is intent on putting at least one lost voice from America's Puritan past firmly on the discussion table: 'I am deeply indebted to Jonathan Edwards. Reading him in college […] made me aware of a much more plausible ontology than anything compatible with the ugly determinisms on offer then and now in courses in philosophy and psychology.'[1289] Whereas contemporary theories of human nature tend to drown in background assumptions 'that we are the creatures of our race or genes or the traumas we have suffered or the shape of our brains', Edwards taught Robinson 'how to understand that something much richer and stranger is going on than any of these schemes can begin to suggest. [… Edwards's] conception of Being as emergent opened Emerson, Dickinson, Melville and Whitman to me, and William James as well. He helped me wonder constructively about what Puritanism actually was.'[1290] There are many other worthy Puritan thinkers too, such as Thomas Shepard ('the Anglo-American founder of Harvard') and William Greenhill ('In good books you have men's labour and God's truth')[1291]; what they and Edwards shared was above all a willingness to explore

> individual human nature in its capacities as moral agent, in Edwards's terms, and as soul. Their vision of humankind was directly related to their thinking about the kind of political society that would be suited to its flourishing. It is a given of their thought that the soul can be, and is meant to be, ravished and transformed by an experience - something more than an insight or a vision - of the divine. […] The soul was made ready for this experience by the conscience, a human faculty…[1292]

[1288] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, pp. 31-32.

[1289] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, p. 183.

[1290] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, p. 184.

[1291] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, p. 191.

[1292] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, pp. 191-192.

If history has tended to condemn Puritanism as a dull, traditionalist creed, Robinson wants to achieve a similar restoration for her Puritan forebears to the one Tu Weiming, Mou Zongsan, Tang Junyi and others have sought for the Confucian heritage (and Muhammad Iqbal et al. for Islam):

> What history ignores is the extraordinarily fine-grained and humane attentiveness to perception and experience that follows from the high-Puritan conception of the soul - we must grant them the word - as suited to the reception of ultimate truth and ultimate beauty. […] The great old writers of Edwards's tradition placed a most sacred and delicate mystery at the centre of human inwardness. Perhaps this fact and its consequences elude us now because our [bottom-up] approach to the study of the psyche could scarcely be more different from theirs. In fact it can no longer be assumed that the words *psyche* or *soul* or *mind* can be taken to correspond to anything real. Whether this matters […] depends on the importance a value-laden vision of human nature has in sustaining a democratic society, even a humane society. [… In any event, it] would be impossible, in an environment without distortion, to make the case that Puritanism was harsh or cold or rigid.[1293]

Far from scared, bonneted rule-following or relentless, morbid churchgoing, Edwards's Puritanism in fact represents a liberation of the individual from the pressures of tribal groupthink:

> His intentions are, as he says, to address the question that most concerns both mankind as a whole and every individual person, the nature of true religion. Factionalism is for him both the degeneration of religion within the individual sensibility, and the collective effect of this degeneration on groups of individuals, for example, in the tendency of people to conform their behaviour to the behaviour of those around them. […] This high Puritanism does not offer any final assurances. [Edwards and his ilk] did not believe in salvation by works, but they did believe that the effective will to lead a generous life was an indication that one was [on a righteous path. […] Granting the impossibility of judgment in individual cases, including one's own, Edwards does believe hypocrisy [and] self-deception […] are active in any [religious] revival, tending to destroy the revival and discredit religion. The only response is to make each person an honest and competent judge of the integrity, the graciousness, of her own experience, of his own soul.[1294]

Although Puritanism is 'commonly thought of as averse to beauty because [it] rejected iconography, ornamentation, and personal display'[1295], aesthetic experience is in fact fundamental to the Puritan view of personal development:

[1293] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, pp. 193-194.

[1294] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, pp. 195-196.

[1295] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, p. 197.

> This experience gives the person who receives it a 'spiritual knowledge' that 'primarily consists in a taste or relish of the amiableness and beauty of that which is truly good and holy'. […] Edwards's purpose is to protect a tradition of Protestant inwardness that, on the strength of the exalted human capacity it recruits to a direct perception of this most sacred beauty, can claim to participate in essential cosmic reality. This is the definitive experience, over against which all other religious experience is exposed as false or feigned or misguided. It is based in a discipline of self-scrutiny that would shield it from every pressure, including the tendency toward enthusiasm and degeneracy Edwards sees around him.[1296]

The challenge for Robinson is how to make her beloved Edwards and friends accessible to a global, not necessarily Christian audience in the second decade of the 21st Century. The Puritan emphasis on 'conscience' is offered as a key to unlock this door to the non-Christian world:

> We do indeed differ in the character of our [aesthetic] experience, person to person and moment to moment. Our modern anthropologies have no language to account for complexity and mutability, nor for conscience or aesthetic sense as experience. […] The centre of Puritan individualism was conscience, so sacred that it was the foundation of their definition of freedom. [… English Puritan John] Flavel [for example] says, 'View the conscience and thoughts with their self-reflective abilities, wherein the soul retires into itself, and sits concealed from all eyes but his that made it, judging his own actions, and censuring its estate; viewing its face in its own glass, and correcting the indecencies it discovers there: things of greatest moment and importance are silently transacted in its council-chamber between the soul and God; so remote from the knowledge of all creatures, that neither angels, devils, nor men can know' what is transacted there.[1297]

One can indeed, if one wishes, separate the Puritan emphasis on conscience from Christian dogma altogether:

> Even while the fallibility of the conscience is granted [in Puritan thought], its sanctity as a mediator between the mind and God is so great that one sins in doubting or disregarding it. To bring such seriousness to the negotiation of one's moral and ethical life might interfere with good times as currently defined. But on the one hand it invites the highest degree of interest in and respect for the singular experience of oneself and one's circumstances, and on the other it can somewhat supplant the fear of hell as an inducement to seeking a relationship with God. Shepard says, 'It is not a slavish fear of

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[1296] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, pp. 198-199.

[1297] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, pp. 200-201.

> hell' that converts people who 'abhor to live like slaves in Bridewell, to do all for fear of the whip'. [… A] troubled conscience is one's own.[1298]

If 'mind, self, and soul' are, 'despite their great potency as ideas, […] now regarded as mere constructs'[1299] in the modern West and beyond, they are nevertheless required for what Robinson critic James Ley identifies as 'the secular principle of freedom of conscience — a principle [Robinson] rightly recognises as a necessary precondition of any democracy worthy of the name, and which, by definition, must allow for the possibility that a person might examine their conscience in good faith and find no trace whatsoever of the oceanic [aesthetic] feeling she takes to be decisive'.[1300] Negative, nihilism-friendly 'freedom *from* aesthetic experience' may be a formal precondition for the potentially 'higher' freedoms of authentic spiritual life, but the reverse, Robinson argues, is also true:

> If concepts with religious history such as soul and conscience can be sufficiently redescribed in other language, this in no way diminishes their reality. If they might be redescribed and are not, then we should wonder why they are not, how their exclusion from the vocabulary of self-declared humanism is rationalised, and what the effects of the exclusion might be. If they cannot be redescribed in a non-religious language, then we need to consider what is threatened or lost when religious language is lost. For the Puritans, conscience as a concept put the mind or soul in relation to God. It made the self an object of scrupulous contemplation. And it created a sanctity around the individual that assured important liberties. […] To quote Flavel, 'The soul of the poorest child is of equal dignity with the soul of Adam.' All men are created equal. Nothing about these statements is self-evident. […] They have only their own beauty and the beauty of their influence to affirm them.[1301]

'Integrity and the Modern Intellectual Tradition'

Here Robinson's humanism comes to resemble a spiritual addendum to the staunchly secular, bestselling version proposed by Steven Pinker in *Enlightenment Now* (2018). Like Pinker, Robinson is deeply concerned with intellectual honesty: she admits that there will always be those on the 'religious' side who 'will forever insist that the Bible *is* in fact a collection of utterly veracious just-so stories, reinforcing the arguments of their supposed adversaries'[1302]; she would be unlikely to quibble, moreover, at Pinker's data and conclusions on the anomalous

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[1298] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, pp. 201-202.

[1299] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, p. 203.

[1300] James Ley, 'Attack of the Numinous', https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/what-are-we-doing-here/, 2/10/2018 (accessed 26/3/2019).

[1301] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, p. 204.

[1302] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, p. 257.

prevalence of literalism in the contemporary Islamic world[1303] or his denunciation of morally relativistic power politics everywhere.[1304] She would even endorse his overall conclusion at the end of the book:

> The scope of language has been augmented by the written, printed, and electronic word. Our circle of sympathy has been expanded by history, journalism, and the narrative arts. And our puny rational faculties have been multiplied by the norms and institutions of reason: intellectual curiosity, open debate, skepticism of authority and dogma, and the burden of proof to verify ideas by confronting them against reality. […] The story belongs not to any tribe but to all of humanity.[1305]

Still, there is a nagging arrogance in Pinker's outlook which Robinson's work corrects:

> Scientific method proved powerful, empiricism allayed philosophical worries about subjectivity until they were in effect forgotten, and the assumption became general that science could and sometime would explain everything, including the mind itself. So over time the mind was desacralised and the world as well, […] and science, brilliant as it was, took on the character of dispeller of myth and agent of disillusionment.
>
> […] It is a pity that Europeans took to tramping around in the non-European world when they did, corrupting every kind of evidence while imposing their assumptions on the lives and languages of the people they found there. Notably, in their response to indigenous religions, they interpreted what passed through the dense filter of their incomprehension as primitivity, which primitivity was then widely asserted and assumed to be the basis and essence of all religion. […] If we have now arrived at a point where the mind and the self are frequently said not to exist, according to contemporary theory following God out of the universe of credible things - then it is clearly an understatement to say a tremendous inversion [of the Renaissance] has taken place. The exalted mind of early science has given way to a flattening of experience that, on no actual grounds, is called modern and also scientific - this while science has made tiny earth a seraphic eye that turns every way, looking always farther and deeper into the strange, surging cosmos.[1306]

Robinson is legitimately grateful for all of Pinker's 'progress' (the improving child mortality and literacy rates and so on[1307]), but there has been a parallel loss - not a

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[1303] See Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress*, (Penguin Random House UK, 2018), p. 440.

[1304] Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, pp. 443-447.

[1305] Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, p. 453.

[1306] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, pp. 256, 257-259.

[1307] See Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, p. 260.

net loss necessarily, but a real, spiritual one - in modernity: 'The modern period has been shadowed by gloom, nostalgia, disillusionment, anomie, deracination, loss of faith, dehumanisation, atomisation, secularisation, and assorted other afflictions of the same general kind.'[1308] At least for a time during and after the Renaissance, a certain form of 'dialogue with Heaven' was still possible:

> It looks to me, from my reading in the period, as though the Reformation in England, which radically isolated the individual in the fact of asserting his or her immediate relation with God, found consciousness - that is, experience - a very rich field of theological exploration. Their exploration took the form of a parsing of the mind according to its functions and capacities, with the understanding that it is, and is made to be, the intermediary between God and the soul, granted, of course, that anyone might choose to reject this awareness of God's intimate awareness of him, and might turn away from the knowledge of God implicitly proffered to him.[1309]

Whereas Pinker's humanism is designed for 'any sentient creature with the power of reason and the urge to persist in its being'[1310], Robinson wants more in her version than 'a constricted empiricism, the building upward from the seemingly known or presumptively knowable, its expectations based on limited technology and on the old idea that science is a process of deromanticisation, demystification. To speak as the theists did of lavishness, elegance, artfulness is to introduce language capable of acknowledging that there is more to the world than its intricate economies of survival.'[1311] 'Theistic morality', dismissed as 'baleful' by Pinker[1312], at least allowed the idea of a self to survive and flourish; the very type of modern science praised and practised by Pinker, Robinson fears, is inadvertently destroying 'the complex psychology intrinsic to the self theistically understood'[1313]:

> The old song says, 'It is well with my soul.' No song says, 'It is well with my superego.' […] It is interesting to consider what we have received in exchange for the theistic worldview of our ancestors. […] Why is it so difficult to find the language to approach this subject? Well, [modern] psychologies imply or say outright that there is no mind.
>
> […] For a very long time it has been assumed that intellectual integrity in the modern period demanded the rejection of religion. As corollary there is the assumption that we must adopt the worldview of the modern period. This subtle coercion, to embrace certain ideas on other grounds than their merits, might explain their survival despite their being, from a human point of view, desiccated things, deeply unsatisfactory. […] The modern as a

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[1308] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, p. 260.

[1309] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, pp. 261-262.

[1310] Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, p. 453.

[1311] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, p. 264.

[1312] Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, p. 439.

[1313] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, p. 266.

> concept [is] first of all a worldview. The methods of the science that sponsors it presuppose its validity - the soul will never reveal itself to an fMRI, and poetry, prayers, painting and architecture are inadmissible as evidence.[1314]

The right battlecry for humanism in the 21st Century may well end up being Pinker's 'Enlightenment Now!' (he dedicates the book to 'Harry Pinker (1928-2015), *optimist*' and 'Solomon Lopez (2017-) *and the 22nd century*'[1315]), but such progress will only be possible, Robinson argues, if the Renaissance roots of the Enlightenment, as well as the intellectual roots of the Renaissance itself, are not severed. It is by watering these roots with 'integrity' - which surely includes a willingness to take seriously entire spiritual traditions which may have played no direct historical role in the emergence of Western humanism at all - that a truly *modern* 'intellectual tradition', capable of respect for a transcultural, humanistic concept of self as well as technological and institutional progress, may finally in our century be born.

[1314] Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, pp. 267, 269-270.

[1315] Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, p. vii.

24. Milan Kundera's *L'Art du roman*

Which is worth more, a crowd of thousands,
or your own genuine solitude?
Freedom, or power over an entire nation?

Rumi

Milan Kundera (1929-) admits in the Foreword to *L'Art du Roman* (1986) that he has 'no theoretical ambitions whatsoever'[1316]; in a series of seven essays, he wants to *embody* the art of novel-writing instead of merely cataloguing it. Between rescuing Cervantes from his enemies at the beginning and receiving the 'warmly and dearly European'[1317] Jerusalem Prize at the end ('a fullstop to my reflection on the novel and on Europe'[1318]), Kundera is intent on securing a global future - well, a European one anyway - for an artform which many in the mid-20th Century had been willing to pronounce dead.

'L'Héritage décrié de Cervantes'

Driven by Husserl and Heidegger, 20th-century phenomenology may have succeeded in diagnosing a modern spiritual crisis rooted in 'the unilateral character of the European sciences which [have] reduced the world to a simple object of technical and mathematical exploration'[1319], but in seeking its own turgid theoretical solutions to the problem, Kundera argues, such philosophy utterly neglected the legacy of the European novel:

> Indeed, for me, the founder of modernity is not only Descartes but Cervantes as well. Perhaps it is above all Cervantes that the two phenomenologists have failed to consider in their condemnation of modernity. What I mean to suggest is that, if it is true that philosophy and the sciences have forgotten about the being of human beings, it seems clear that, with Cervantes, a great European artform was created which is nothing other than an exploration of this forgotten territory [of the self]. […] All the big existential themes that Heidegger analyses in *Being and Time*, on the grounds that modern European philosophy up to that point had failed to address them, have been brought to light in four centuries of novel-writing.[1320]

[1316] Milan Kundera, *L'Art du roman (The Art of the Novel)*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), p. 9.

[1317] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 11.

[1318] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 11.

[1319] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, pp. 17-18.

[1320] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, pp. 18-19.

It is not the case that the 'passion for knowledge' which Husserl regarded as 'the essence of European spirituality' had 'got the better' of modern Europeans; on the contrary, the novel promises an embodied humanistic knowledge of its own, the common heritage of all those who read it:

> I understand and share the obstinacy with which Hermann Broch repeated that the sole *raison d'être* of a novel is to discover that which a novel alone can discover. A novel which does not uncover a hitherto unknown portion of existence is immoral. Knowledge is the only justification for a novel.
>
> And I would add this: the novel is the creation of Europe; its discoveries, though made in different languages, belong to Europe as a whole. […] It is only in this supranational context that the value of an individual novel (i.e. the import of what it claims to have discovered) can be fully seen and understood.[1321]

It is no great stretch for the 2019 reader to understand Kundera's 'Europe' here either as a polite metaphor for an ideally global republic of letters or as an outdated, Eurocentric arrogance. But if, one way or the other, we grant Kundera his 'European' idyll - already a big enough cosmopilitan dream for a Czech-born writer exiled in France before the fall of the Iron Curtain - and also grant him his privileged view of the rich heritage of the *European* novel in particular (whatever our views on the existence or otherwise of 'novels' in other literary traditions), then much of universal import can indeed be discovered in his exploration of Cervantes's legacy. The wide-open backdrop of 'delicious leisure'[1322] in *Don Quijote* may have given way to the rapidly bureaucratising world of Balzac and the tiny, imprisoned universes of Emma Bovary and Joseph K., but this seemingly one-way shift in background scenery is not decisive: like a concentration camp inmate, Kafka 'discovers' that there is freedom and meaning in the most apparently unfree of situations. Is *The Trial* the logical end of the history of the novel, the end of the form's ability to produce 'knowledge'? Kundera refuses to think so:

> The novel is incompatible with the totalitarian universe. […] Totalitarian Truth can never be reconciled with what I would call the *spirit of the novel*.
>
> But doesn't Soviet Russia publish thousands of novels which sell millions of copies? Yes, but these novels […] uncover no new pocket of existence; they confirm only what others have already said. Moreover, that is their purpose, their glory, their function in that society. [Such books] no longer take part in the *succession of discoveries* that I call the history of the novel.
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> […] The spirit of the novel is the spirit of continuity: each work is a creative response to the works which precede it, and encompasses the entire collective experience of the genre.[1323]

[1321] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 20.

[1322] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 23.

[1323] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, pp. 29-30, 34.

Instead of seeking fickle external approval for his work as a novelist, Kundera contents himself with expressing loyalty, 'as ridiculous as it is sincere', to the 'neglected' and 'defamed' heritage of Cervantes[1324], where he finds warm refuge in 'imaginary selves called characters'[1325].

'Entretien sur l'art du roman'

Kundera begins this interview with Christian Salmon by insisting that his novels 'are not psychological'[1326] in any scientific sense. Nevertheless,

> all novels in all times turn on the enigma of the self. As soon as you create an imaginary being, you are automatically confronted with the question: What is the self, and how can one get hold of it? This is the fundamental question on which the novel [as a form] is based; one can distinguish styles and periods of novel based on different answers to it. […] Boccaccio tells us simple action stories, but behind all the hilarity, there is a clear conviction: it is by action that an individual escapes from the repetitive universe of the everyday where everyone resembles everyone else: it is by action that he distinguishes himself from others and becomes an individual as such. […] Four centuries later, Diderot is more sceptical: his Jacques le Fataliste […] continually fails to recognise himself in his actions. A chasm opens between his actions and his self. […] This paradoxical character of action is one of the great discoveries of the novel. But if the self is not graspable in its actions, how *can* we grasp it? […] Richardson set the novel off on the path of exploration of the interior life of the individual. The great heirs of this tradition include the likes of Goethe and his *Werther*, [Benjamin] Constant, then Stendhal and the writers of his century. The apotheosis of this movement, it seems to me, comes with Proust and Joyce. Joyce analyses something even more ungraspable than Proust's 'lost time', namely the present moment. […] Every instant represents its own universe, irredeemably lost to the following instant. […] Under the enormous Joycean lens which breaks the soul down into atoms, we are all alike.[1327]

Beyond autonomous picaresque 'actions' and romantic explorations of the 'interior life' of the individual, the postmodern novel also provides a third avenue for revealing selves:

> For Proust, the interior universe of the individual constituted a miracle, an infinity that never ceased to amaze. Kafka's astonishment is different. He does not ask what interior motives drive his protagonists' behaviour. He poses a radically different question: what human possibilities are left for an

[1324] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 36.

[1325] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 21.

[1326] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 39.

[1327] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, pp. 39-41.

> individual when external determining factors have become so crushingly heavy that internal drivers no longer weigh anything?[1328]

Kundera, a central European heir to the novel's antitotalitarian turn, doesn't 'wish to deprive [his] characters of an interior life'[1329], but he also wishes to face the facts of his century:

> That life is a predicament has always been clear: we are born without asking, enclosed in a body we don't choose, and destined to die. But the wide open space of the world always provided room for us to put it out of our minds. A soldier could desert his army and begin a new life in a neighbouring country. In our century, suddenly, the world is closing in on us. The decisive event in this transformation of the world was the war of 1914, called (for the first time in history) a World War. This wasn't true; it involved Europe, and not even all of Europe. But the use of the phrase 'World War' eloquently expressed the sense of horror before the fact that, from now on, nothing which happens on the planet will be merely local business, that all catastrophes will strike the whole world and, therefore, that we are more and more determined by factors external to our own selves, by situations from which no individual can escape and which, increasingly, make us resemble each other more and more.[1330]

Instead of philosophising, however, Kundera wants to novelise his way out of this spiritual predicament: 'Philosophy develops its thought in an abstract space, without characters, without situations. […] The novel knew about the unconscious before Freud, class struggle before Marx, and phenomenology […] before the phenomenologists. How many wonderful "phenomenological descriptions" there are in Proust which no phenomenologist has ever read!'[1331] Bringing 'imaginary beings'[1332] to life does not preclude authorial philosophising as such, but it does require a singular focus on this being's 'existential drama', subtly different in each individual case; in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, for example, Tereza's breasts are described in 'indispensable' detail by Kundera because 'her body is a major theme for her. Her husband Tomas, however, is a different case; I say nothing of his childhood, his parents, his family. His body and face remain completely unknown to us because the essence of his existential problem is rooted in other themes. This absence of information does not make him any less "alive".'[1333] The

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[1328] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 43.

[1329] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 44.

[1330] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, pp. 43-44.

[1331] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, pp. 46, 50.

[1332] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 51.

[1333] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, pp. 52-53.

novel also, however, by describing a *possible* world of an imaginary being or beings, turns 'history itself' into an 'existential situation'[1334] for the reader:

> I can understand *Don Quijote* without knowing the history of Spain, but I can't understand it without having an idea, however vague, of the historical arc of Europe, from the age of chivalry and courtly love through the Middle Ages and down to modern times. […] It was while writing *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, inspired as I was by characters who all withdraw from the world to a certain extent, that I began to reflect on the destiny of Descartes's famous formula, 'master and possessor of Nature'. After achieving miracles in science and technology, this 'master and possessor' suddenly realises that he doesn't possess anything, and that he is master neither of nature […] nor of History […] nor of himself (guided as he is by irrational forces within him). But if God has gone and man is no longer master, who *is* master? The planet spins in a void with no master. There it is, the unbearable lightness of being. […] Existence is not what has happened; existence is the field of human possibilities, all that human beings are capable of becoming. […] In Kafka, this is all clear: his world does not resemble any known reality; it is an *extreme unrealised possibility* of the human world. It is true that this possibility unfolds behind the curtain of our real world and seems to prefigure our future; this is why one speaks of a prophetic dimension in Kafka. But even if his novels contained nothing prophetic, they would not lose any of their value, because they grasp a possibility of existence. […] Whether this possibility turns into reality or not is beside the point. […] If an author sees a historical situation as an unprecedented and revelatory possibility of the human world, she would like to describe it as it is. But this fidelity to historical reality is always secondary to the value of a novel. The novelist is neither historian nor prophet; she is an explorer of existence.[1335]

<u>'Notes inspirées par *Les somnambules*'</u>

Hermann Broch's 1931 trilogy *Die Schlafwandler* offers three possible responses to 'History' understood in a modern European sense as 'a process of degradation of values'[1336]: the 'Pasenow option' doubles down on 'uniform, to the last button, as if it were the final vestige of transcendence able to protect him from the cold of the future, where there will be nothing left to respect'[1337]; the 'Esch option' turns on the 'fanaticism of a Godless epoch', where 'anything can be turned into a value' and 'all the passions which have wrought havoc in the bloody History of our century are contained, unmasked, diagnosed, and brought into brutal light'; and the 'Huguenau

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[1334] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 56.

[1335] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, pp. 58, 59-60, 61-63.

[1336] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 70.

[1337] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 71.

option' offers 'seeming ease' and 'deliverance' from moral imperatives.[1338] And yet beyond this, Broch achieves something more than a 'philosophy of History'[1339]; he anticipates 'future possibilities for the novel': 'In Broch, the individual character is not conceived as an inimitable and transitory unit, a miraculous instant destined to disappear, but as a solid bridge erected beyond time, […] where past and present meet.'[1340] If Carlos Fuentes goes a step further in *Terra Nostra* by presenting History as 'nothing more than the story of a few universal characters (a Faust, a Don Juan, a Don Quijote) […] who have traversed the centuries of Europe together'[1341], Broch's trilogy meets a 'criterion of maturity' defined by 'the ability to resist symbols'[1342]:

> One must read *Die Schlafwandler* carefully, slowly, pausing over actions as illogical as they are comprehensible, until a hidden, subterranean *order* emerges on which the decisions [of the individual characters] are based: these characters are incapable of facing reality as a concrete thing.
>
> […] Broch is interested in pursuing 'that which only the novel can uncover'. But he knows that the conventional form (based on the story of a single main protagonist and satisfied with a simple telling of her story) limits the novel and reduces its experiential options. He also knows that the novel has an extraordinary capacity for integration: while poetry and philosophy are unable to integrate the novel, the novel can achieve the reverse without losing its identity, characterised (as Rabelais and Cervantes already knew) by its ability to embrace other genres and absorb philosophical and scientific knowledge. On Broch's definition, the word 'polyhistoric' therefore means to mobilise all available intellectual resources and poetic forms to bring to light 'that which only the novel can uncover': namely, what it means to be human.
>
> […] Mainstream modernism may have proscribed the notion of totality, but Broch uses it freely in at least one important sense: in a period of extreme division of labour and rampant specialisation, the novel is one of the last places where the individual human being can maintain a relationship with life as a whole. […] In Broch's eyes, the contemporary novel continues the same quest in which all great novelists since Cervantes have participated.[1343]

<u>'Entretien sur l'art de la composition'</u>

[1338] See Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, pp. 70-75.

[1339] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 76.

[1340] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 76.

[1341] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 77.

[1342] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 85.

[1343] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, pp. 83, 86, 89.

> *If I had written seven separate novels, I wouldn't have been able to grasp 'the complexity of existence in the modern world' in a single book. The art of ellipsis therefore seemed to me a necessity. It demands that one go right to the heart of things. […] Instead of transitions, brutal juxtapositions [were called for]; instead of variations, repetition. […] Until the age of 25, I was much more attracted to music than literature; […] only the notes which added something essential would have the right to exist [in my novels]. My goal is to free the novel of the automatism of its technical clichés and formal habits, to make it dense.*[1344]

Here Kundera once again stresses that a novel, though made of imaginary selves and situations, is really always a real exploration; the challenge of 'polyphonic novel-writing' - 'more poetry than technique' - is to achieve the surrealist meeting of a sewing machine and an umbrella 'on the table of the same theme'[1345]:

> The form of the novel is one of almost limitless freedom. The novel has not taken full advantage of this liberty so far in its history. It has left myriad formal possibilities unexploited. [… But] as soon as a novel abandons its theme to develop its plot, it becomes flat. The theme, however, can be pursued on its own, outside the main plot, with a digression. […] There is a fundamental difference between the way philosophers and novelists think. […] Once a [philosophical] meditation is inside the body of a novel, it changes its essence: it ceases to be a declaration, and becomes hypothetical.[1346]

It is therefore a novel's unique *theme* - always of a more or less transhistorical character ('every novel is a meditation on existence seen through the lens of imaginary characters'[1347]) - that permits entry into realms of individual selfhood 'which the novel alone can uncover'. Far from being crushed by history or abstract philosophy, the individual reader is liberated to find meaning and spiritual nourishment thanks to the common thread of the 'theme' tying her to a deeper reality.

<u>'Quelque part là-derrière'</u>

Kundera begins his fifth essay with the words of compatriot Jan Skacel:

> Poets don't invent poems
> The poem is there somewhere behind the world

[1344] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, pp. 94-95, 115.

[1345] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p, 99.

[1346] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, pp. 101-102, 107.

[1347] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 106.

> It has been there for a very long time
> The poet only discovers it.[1348]

A poet's summary of Borges's short story *The Library of Babel*, Skacel's words frame Kundera's attempt to recover meaning in a bureaucratic, Cold War era where *everything* has already been recorded by hypothetical monkeys typing on hypothetical typewriters: 'Even the so-called democratic world has witnessed this process of depersonalisation and bureaucratisation; the entire planet has become the stage on which this process is being played out. Kafka's novels are an oniric and imaginary hyperbole of it, while the totalitarian states are material and prosaic manifestations.'[1349] If anything a poet or artist can say has already been said in one dimension or other, then somehow the best metaphor for artistic 'creativity' is no longer anything *ex nihilo*; such 'creativity' is rather a responsible act of 'translation' or 'transferral' of something existing 'behind the world' to specific selves encountering the work 'in the world'; therein alone lies its 'meaning'. In Kafka's case, however, the 'meaning' or 'theme' to be 'transferred' is precisely the sanctity of a certain form of privileged solitude which allows selfhood to flourish in the first place:

> It is often said that Kafka's novels express the passionate desire for community and human contact; it seems as if K.'s deracinated self has only one goal: to overcome the curse of his loneliness. But this explanation is not only a cliché or oversimplification; it sees things the wrong way wound. […] It is not the curse of solitude but rather *violated solitude* which obsesses Kafka. […] Those who lyrically preach for the abolition of secrets and the transparency of private life have no idea what they wish to unleash. The starting point of totalitarianism is the same as the start of *The Trial*: we will come and surprise you in bed.[1350]

The opposite of the free and responsible 'artist', then, is the totalitarian 'functionary', who is literally reduced to the status of a monkey on a typewriter, forced to type content of which she has no understanding:

> In the bureaucratic world of the functionary, first and foremost, there is no initiative, no invention, no freedom of action; there are only rules and orders: *it is the world of obeying*.
>
> Second, the functionary is only responsible for a small part of the great administrative action whose goal and horizon she never sees; *it is the world where all gestures are mechanical* and where people have no idea of the meaning of what they are doing.
>
> […] Basically, a totalitarian state is one giant administration; given that all work has been nationalised, people of all trades become functionaries. A factory worker is no longer a factory worker, a judge no longer a judge, a

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[1348] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 125.

[1349] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 134.

[1350] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, pp. 138-139.

> businessman no longer a businessman, a priest no longer a priest; they are all blind cogs of the state.[1351]

Kafka's genius consisted in seeing beyond this horizon of unfreedom, 'transforming profoundly antipoetic subject matter - the hyperbureaucratised society - into great novelistic poetry'[1352]. In other words, he found an audience of living selves with his work, and succeeded in communicating something to them from 'behind the world' of words - a solidarity? - which 'no sociological or political reflection could ever say'[1353]:

> The enormous social, political, and 'prophetic' import of Kafka's novels resides precisely in their 'non-engagement', their total autonomy from political programs, ideological concepts, and futurological prognoses.
>
> If, instead of seeking the 'poem' hidden 'somewhere behind the world', the poet 'engages' in serving a truth known in advance (and which offers itself to her in the everyday world), she renounces the true mission of poetry. It matters little whether a preconceived truth is called revolution or dissidence, Christianity or atheism, or is more or less just; any poet in the service of a truth other than that still to be *discovered* (a business of *wonder*) is not a real poet.[1354]

'Soixante et onze mots'

After watching his novel *La Plaisanterie* (1967) butchered in translation ('the shock of it […] has stayed with me forever'[1355]), Kundera accepted friend Pierre Nora's challenge of writing a 'personal dictionary' in order to facilitate the 'transfer' of his novelistic 'discoveries' to foreign readerships. Several entries pertain to our discussion of Spiritual Humanism, starting with the third:

> BEAUTY (and knowledge). Those who follow Broch in saying that knowledge is the only reason for a novel are somewhat betrayed by the metallic aura of the word 'knowledge', the [humanistic] meaning of which has been corrupted by association with the sciences. We must therefore add: all the aspects of existence which a novel uncovers, it uncovers as beauty. […] Beauty, the last possible victory of the individual who has no more hope. Beauty in art: a light thrown suddenly on something never perceived before. Time does not dull this light which radiates from the great

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[1351] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, pp. 140-142.

[1352] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 141.

[1353] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 145.

[1354] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 145.

[1355] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 149.

> novels [of the past], because each generation is born without memory of their discoveries.[1356]

Correspondingly, the self cannot realise itself in a vacuum; a sense of belonging is required, at least *somewhere*:

> HOME. *Domov* in Czech, *das Heim* in German, *chez-soi* in French: the place where I have my roots, to which I belong. The topographical limits are only determined by decree of the heart: it could be a single room, a landscape, a country, the universe.[1357]

It is in this spiritual sanctuary that art's 'discoveries' can reach us, whether in tragic or comic form:

> COMEDY. […] The true comic geniuses are not those who make us laugh the most, but those who uncover *hidden zones of comedy*.[1358]

Such spontaneous and unplanned spiritual growth via contact with beauty makes the idea of a deterministic 'destiny', as distinct from an open-ended 'vocation', absurd:

> DESTINY. There comes a point where a fixed image of our lives separates from life itself, becomes independent, and starts to dominate us. […] My middle-aged hedonist in *La vie est ailleurs* holds to an 'idyll of non-destiny'. […] This middle-aged man, by the way, is the closest to me of all my characters.[1359]

Kundera is not embracing hedonism as such here, but rather insisting that a true 'vocation' (my word, not his) is in no danger of degenerating into wish-fulfilling dogma; it remains open to contact with fresh and transforming 'beauty'. A person with a fixed sense of 'destiny' will, instead, slowly turn into a tyrannical, pamphlet-writing 'graphomaniac':

> GRAPHOMANIA. […] Not the desire to create a new form but to impose one's self on others. The most grotesque manifestation of the will to power.[1360]

[1356] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, pp. 151-152.

[1357] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 154.

[1358] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 155.

[1359] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, pp. 156-157.

[1360] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 161.

Likewise, the distinction between a 'theme' - *explored* in a work of art - and a preconceived 'idea' - defined in advance - is sacred to Kundera, who laments that he is living through 'an age obsessed with ideas and indifferent to works of art'[1361]:

> KITSCH. The need to look in an embellishing mirror and recognise oneself with moved satisfaction.[1362]

A cultivated self will prefer new discoveries of beauty to such spiritual stasis. These discoveries may even be possible amid natural disasters:

> OCTAVIO. I was in the middle of compiling this dictionary when a terrible earthquake struck central Mexico, where Octavio Paz and his wife Marie-Jo live. Nine days with no news. Finally, on 27 September, the phone rings. Octavio. I open a bottle of wine to his health. And I make his name, so dear, so dear, the 47th of my 71 entries.[1363]

'Discours de Jérusalem: Le roman et l'Europe'

Brutal occupation politics politely aside, Kundera received the 1985 Jerusalem Prize '*avec une grande émotion*', at least for the *ideal* that Israel may yet come to represent: 'If the most important prize that Israel awards is for international literature, this seems to me to be the work of a long tradition, not chance. Indeed, great individual Jews, raised far from their ancestral homelands and elevated beyond nationalist passions, have shown exceptional feeling for a supranational Europe, a Europe conceived not as a territory but as a culture.'[1364] And yet this 'European' culture has also failed disastrously to export and universalise itself: 'The wisdom of the novel is different from that of philosophy. The novel was born not from a theoretical spirit but from the spirit of humour. One of the great failures of Europe is never to have understood the most European art of all, the novel - neither its spirit, nor its immense discoveries, nor the autonomy of its history.'[1365] Instead of making a free and open 'cultural Europe' out of the whole world on the basis of the artform (and the Rabelaisian humour which best represented it), European imperialism contented itself with self-regarding kitsch instead; despite the 'heroic effort of the modern novel to oppose this wave'[1366], we were, as early as 1985, on the path to becoming a postcolonial, global 'kitsch society':

> The word kitsch designates the attitude of the person who wants to please the greatest number at any price. In order to please, one must confirm what

[1361] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 161.

[1362] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 164.

[1363] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 174.

[1364] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 191.

[1365] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, pp. 194-195.

[1366] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 198.

> everyone wants to hear and be at the service of received ideas. Kitsch is the translation of received ideas into the language of beauty and emotion. […] Given the imperative necessity of winning the attention of the greatest number, the aesthetic of the media is inevitably kitsch; and as these forms of media embrace and infiltrate our entire lives, kitsch will become the aesthetics and ethics of our daily existence.
>
> […] We know that the world where the individual self is respected […] is fragile and perishable. One sees the armies of the humourless gathering on the horizon as we speak.[1367]

The antidote to such a development, therefore, would seem to be a protected environment where the 'novel' - understood in the broadest historical sense as humanistic 'discovery' (and embracing a limitless range of artistic and poetic forms) - can be pursued beyond the ravages of the market, where students can find spiritual nourishment and teachers can help them 'uncover' it without the direct taint of commercial exchange. Such an arrangement would require vocational commitment on the part of students and teachers as well as those authors, like Kundera, unwilling to consider what the market wants:

> If European culture seems to me to be threatened today, if what is most precious about it - namely its respect for the individual self, original thought and the individual right to an inviolable private life [of discovery] - is threatened from without and within, then this precious essence of the European spirit is preserved in the history of the novel, in the wisdom of the novel. It is to this wisdom that I wished to pay homage.[1368]

Kundera, it is true, wantonly overeuropeanises this canon of 'learning for the self' to the point of patent disregard for other civilisations[1369], but his 'Europe' can also be understood constructively as a post-imperial metaphor - we can surely find better ones in 2019 - for a World Ethos whose contemporary 'themes' we have yet fully to grasp, let alone explore.

[1367] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, pp. 198-199.

[1368] Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, pp. 199-200.

[1369] See, for example, Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, p. 179.

Afterword: A World Ethos?

Any first-rate novel or story must have in it the strength of a dozen fairly good stories that have been sacrificed to it.[1370]

Willa Cather

Critics - if I am lucky enough to have any - will say that this is a work of juxtaposition rather than scholarship, and they will be right about that. But there is, if I have shown nothing else here, creativity and meaning in juxtaposition; rather than spelling out the thousands of little ways in which these 24 chapters reflect, refract, intensify and otherwise mingle with each other, I have preferred to leave most of that pleasurable business to the reader.

Do we need a formula, -ism or point-by-point manifesto for a 'World Ethos', or can we make do with the pleasures of such juxtapositional creativity? If 'Spiritual Humanism' proves a useful organising principle for the reform of global humanities education - away from dry philology and interdisciplinary scientism and towards the actual self-cultivation of young people via critical contact with cultural products - then I am all for using it. If the business community finds competitive advantage in such self-cultivated graduates, then that is no reason to oppose curriculum reform in this direction, even if corporate enthusiasm is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for instituting such reform in the first place. The character of humanistic education is a *political* decision *par excellence*, at every level of human society from the family to the United Nations; in a world of ongoing political fragmentation and rivalry, we are unlikely ever to witness the emergence of a global republic of letters with a single global humanities curriculum. But none of the authors covered in this book would want a closed canon anyway; the ethos of Spiritual Humanism defies permanent bureaucratisation, and so much the better for it. This fact does not, however, diminish our responsibilities as parents, teachers or managers for the 'spiritual care' of those in our charge; we cannot hope to fulfil these responsibilities in a non-sinister way without some degree of familiarity with the 'best that has been thought and said in the world'. If this book has helped you at all in the direction of such familiarity, then it was worth the cost - to others as well as myself - of compiling it.

Many, many names came close to receiving mentions (and even entire chapters) which they would have thoroughly deserved; countries, languages and entire global regions will justly feel underrepresented. Thankfully, however, the task of defining Spiritual Humanism as a World Ethos is a project which is both endless and meaningful; the canon is wide open for further expansion. Experts on the 24 works explored here will point to a serious lack of depth, non-existent coverage of the secondary literature, frequently liberal translations, and a general absence of specific scholarly purpose, and yet this has all been perfectly deliberate: I wanted to

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[1370] Cather herself was one of the unluckiest also-rans in this anthology ('first-rate' or otherwise). For a justly generous overview of her legacy, see Bradley Birzer, '*My Ántonia* at 100', https://www.theamericanconservative.com/birzer/my-antonia-at-100/, 29/8/2018 (accessed 20/3/2019).

emphasise that the humanities need not be done like the sciences, and that creative wealth can lie in bringing the right things together in the right way; if a scientific metaphor is absolutely required, perhaps that of the chemist's laboratory would suit better than the dusty library shelf where graduate students in the humanities too often end up finding themselves. Spiritual Humanism, if it is to reach the status of a World Ethos, will have to normalise such experimentation, not in the dull, grant-hungry sense of 'interdisciplinarity', but precisely as an antidote to the ivory-tower academese which, even in Comparative Literature and World Literature departments, is still the norm (or at least the ideal of rigour). Biographers and specialists will always have their place, but there is only tragedy in experts from different worlds never meeting, never realising that they are working with similarly rich and important material. Few are deliberately educated to play this public library liaison role, but after 15 years of what could best be described as academic tourism, I have found myself called to it.

On a cold and blowy morning in late January 2011, I was sitting outside an *'ahwa* near the Library of Alexandria, an Arabic newspaper in one hand and a sickly-sweet Turkish coffee in the other. An older man leaned over to tell me that the beauty of the Arabic language lay in the sheer variety of its adjectives to describe a revolutionary morning like this; English, by comparison, had only 'cold'. I protested: perhaps he just hadn't learnt any others yet? I certainly hadn't heard all the Arabic ones he rolled off.

If the humanities were like the sciences, there would be no problem with small groups of specialists meeting at conferences, speaking languages the rest of us struggle to understand, and producing 'research' destined only for fellow specialists; humanity at large profits from such arcane technical exchanges. There may be philological corners of the humanities where this specialist model is still both applicable and necessary, and where proud traditions of scholarship have emerged over centuries which no one could possibly wish to upend. But the nagging sense of lost possibility and spurned responsibility remains: it matters deeply in the 21st Century that most people in the world still secretly think (or behave as if they think) that their own language or culture or (worst of all) race is the best, the richest, the deepest of them all, as if anyone were in a position remotely to begin to evaluate such matters. This book is really a test to specialists on one or more of these 24 authors: how many of the rest had you heard of, and if not, why not? Humanities education everywhere can be done better; it may just need a loose guiding principle or ethos to bring the right kinds of material together. Following Tu Weiming, I have put forward Spiritual Humanism as a candidate here.

Is such an anthology 'research' in any academic sense, or is it - good, bad or ugly - a kind of art of its own, perhaps even a 'novel' on Milan Kundera's broad definition? In any case, the institutional support provided by the Karl Schlecht Foundation for *From Global Ethic* was withdrawn for this sequel project on the grounds that it was not fit for purpose: no tired businessman would ever be persuaded to read to the end of it. I can still say without blushing, however, that Karl Schlecht understood one important thing which seems intuitively true and important regardless of what the science - from social psychology to empirical case studies of management - actually says: great organisations are made of great individual selves, strong characters with a sense of vocation which prevents rent-seeking

behaviour and courtly backstabbing from poisoning the spirit of the collective endeavour. The primary task which Schlecht set his foundation was to promote the education of such autonomous selves; he turned to Tu Weiming and Hans Küng as bearers of certain Eastern and Western 'recipes' for it, though without fully grasping that selves cannot quite be manufactured on a production line like his concrete pumps can: as soon as you turn Spiritual Humanism into a formula, you have killed the very flower you are trying to water. And yet Schlecht correctly recognised that school and university curricula are still somehow vital to the development of individual character; if the business world needs self-cultivated individuals, then is it wrong to think that schools and universities might take their responsibilities for character education seriously instead of simply asking 'the market' (which of course now includes fee-paying students themselves) what sort of curricula they think they want? Like me with my Egyptian interlocutor, students by definition, regardless of age and through no fault of their own, are in no position to know their own best interests in this matter. This is what formal education is: *others* decide for us what we are to read.

Most businesses will take a shortcut to profit when they see one: if universities are now willing to offer the sort of 'vocational' training formerly provided on the job, both the public and private sectors will be happy to freeride for as long as it lasts; the hidden long-term costs in terms of failed character development, unethical practices and a general low-trust social environment can simply be swept under the carpet as no one's responsibility in particular - a *bona fide* collective action problem. In such a context of institutional failure, one also understands Schlecht's plea to reach out to businesses directly, to try to turn character education into the business of business by selling it punchy, marketable 'World Ethos' products. Such an approach, however, seems doomed to failure; adults rightly resent being the targets of such moral engineering, especially when it comes as a top-down imposition from a managerial class paid significantly better than they are. And in reality, organisations don't have time beyond the odd phony tack-on seminar to address character issues anyway; either the bulk of the work has been done in the family and the education system, or it is too late.

Institutions of higher learning beyond the humanities - from medical schools to business schools - have a right and a responsibility to teach the ABCs of the real world; it is neither fair nor realistic to expect humanistic or character education - however defined - to take up too much of an advanced medical degree or MBA program. And yet even the most highly-trained specialist in any field will be forced to call on reserves of humanistic spirit at some of the most important points in her career; it would seem counterproductive and dangerous - let alone hideously ugly and totalitarian - to train human beings to become one-function robots at the expense of all spirituality. Even in the name of maximal 'efficiency' in a hyperspecialised economy, therefore, space ought to be given to individuals to explore and develop their own deep sense of autonomous vocation; the happiest and most productive workers, at least in Karl Schlecht's experience, are those who are intrinsically motivated in some deep personal way, not those who are just blindly following orders for a paycheck. But in the end I don't care if the facts back him up; *that* is the kind of world I want my children to inherit. Intrinsic motivation and a sense of vocation can of course be dangerous - murderous even - if they are not backed by a certain fairly specific form of ethical self-cultivation; I have tried

carefully to tread and share this path of humanistic ‘learning for the self’ over 24 chapters here. The success of the endeavour will be for others to measure and, I hope, multiply.

THE DIALOGICAL EAST ASIAN

Tu Weiming's Quest for Shared Meaning

Jonathan Keir

Cover: Tu Weiming

Earth-love, spirit-love, any love looks into that yonder, and whatever I try to say explaining *love is embarrassing!*

Rumi

You can only fight what you love. You have to know it from within, as experience. […] Discipline is the everyday name for creativity.

Carlos Fuentes

People who aren't in a constant state of fury aren't paying attention. […] She was simply above it rather than swamped by it. I don't know how you do this, because I cannot do this.

Fran Lebowitz

The 'right' answers should be obvious to anyone who has ever encountered the principle of hierarchy and subordination. Do I work well with others? You bet, but never to the point where I would hesitate to inform on them for the slightest infraction. Am I capable of independent decision making? Oh yes, but I know better than to let this capacity interfere with a slavish obedience to orders. […] When you enter the low-wage workplace — and many of the medium-wage workplaces as well — you […] learn to zip your lips for the duration of the shift. The consequences of this routine surrender go beyond the issues of wages and poverty. We can hardly pride ourselves on [much] if large numbers of citizens spend half their waking hours in what amounts, in plain terms, to a dictatorship. […] No matter that patriotism is too often the refuge of scoundrels. Dissent, rebellion, and all-around hell-raising remain the true duty of patriots.

Barbara Ehrenreich

It's not dialogue until everyone's crying.

Anonymous

Overview

In October 2019 an international conference - a veritable 'Spiritual Humanism Symposium' - was organised at Peking University in honour of Tu Weiming's 80th birthday. Tu's date of birth is written as 24 February 1940 in his passport, but his mother told him he was definitely born on 26 February, so he gets to have at least two birthdays every year. My Blitz-surviving grandmother's recent four score and ten were certainly *not* celebrated ahead of schedule; that would have been to jinx the whole thing of course, so the family dutifully waited for the day. Stiff upper lip and all that.

This little book, then, has been calculated for completion on precisely 26 February 2020: in my world, a proper 80th birthday present. As such, however, it can't be all fawning and yawning. The title - Tu's own playful twist on Amartya Sen's *The Argumentative Indian* (2005) - offers the first indication of a certain biographical flavour; the patient reader, however, will discover a hidden existential thriller, a novel disguised in expository form. My 2019-drafted *Spiritual Humanism as a World Ethos? An Anthology of Learning for the Self* left Tu wondering a little bit where he fit in amid all the other names on show: 'horizontal expansion' of a concept like 'Spiritual Humanism', he said, was all well and good, but it ought to be no substitute for depth. When you have written as much as Tu has, it must be sad to be reduced to one name in a global pantheon, no matter how glittering, and to have little more than a tiny fraction of your life's work included in it. This is the fate we will all endure in the end, if we are very lucky - and who is possibly to say what of Tu Weiming will survive in the year 2120? - but there can be no harm in giving him the honour of a short book here, as long as it adds a creative twist of its own to his legacy.

Which book to write, and why? Tu has written significant library shelves in both Chinese and English, but forbiddingly, he doesn't translate his own stuff; this means that: a) there are hundreds of Chinese articles, interviews and miscellaneous texts which have never appeared beyond the Sinosphere; and b) there is a bilingual octogenarian professor waiting in the wings to tear any brave young translator's efforts to shreds. Still, if Tu has largely been uncomfortable accepting the translation challenge himself, he has no choice but to welcome the efforts, however humble, of others. Copying the format of *Spiritual Humanism as a World Ethos?* - and in a way, almost apologising for it - I have decided to focus on 24 of Tu's (mostly Chinese) essays and lectures, offering translated excerpts and blunt millennial commentaries as we go. The main ostensible goals are to understand and critique Tu's conception of 'dialogue among civilisations' - one of the *leitmotifs* of his career as a global public intellectual - and to show how this critical spirit might be 'embodied' by new generations inspired by his work. At the very least, this little book offers readers an introduction to works which, for the most part, have not directly appeared in English; a majority of the selected essays and lectures - and these are the two forms for which he will chiefly be remembered - appeared in one of three recent Chinese collections which were themselves attempts to grasp Tu's sprawling legacy: Peking University Press's 2013 *Wenming Duihua zhong de Rujia (Confucianism and Dialogue Among Civilizations)*, Zhonghua Shuju's 2014 *Ershiyi Shiji de Rujia (Confucianism in the 21st Century)*, and Shanghai Guji Chubanshe's 2014 *Tu Weiming Sixiang Xuejie Wenxuan (Tu*

Weiming's Journey in Thought: Selected Essays). What we hope to have produced here, therefore, is something approaching a 'best-of-the-best-ofs' selection, a monument for a global audience beyond the narrow confines of academic Sinology. But we have also picked out individual pieces - other highlights from a prolific career - in the hope of telling a worthy and recognisable story. Tu never seriously experimented with long-form narrative - like Borges, he never wrote that novel - but there is ample cumulative drama in Tu's *oeuvre* on which a Borges would have seized; we aim to capture some of that here, and in so doing, to practise the kind of 'philosophy' in which Tu himself has always believed: a vocation much closer to art than to dry, pseudoscientific abstraction. If the reader may at times struggle to hear where exactly Tu's voice ends and mine begins - a strategy which would be intellectually dishonest if not for the subject matter at hand - may she be guided by the use of footnotes designed not to show off the non-existent breadth of my background reading for this project, but primarily to remind the reader that, for the most part, we are dealing with *my* translations and interpretations, and to encourage her to examine the original sources where she can. The 'creative transformation' I have undertaken may succeed or fail, but there is no intention to deceive; those wishing to read Tu Weiming directly should absolutely do so, whether in English or Chinese, because he has a distinct voice from the one which floats across these pages (more often than not sounding like me); but if I have provided an *invitation à la lecture*, then that matters more to me than being reminded, as if I didn't know, that my Chinese - and throw in my unlettered Antipodean English as well - aren't really adequate to tackle a project like this. One goes to war, alas, with the army one has.

Kuaotunu, February 2020

Contents

1. 'Dialogue Among Civilisations: Precursors, Purposes, Prospects'

> *I became interested in Confucianism in my early teens. By the time I got to university, you could say that I was already starting to consider the whole 'East-West cultural dialogue' question. As a student at Tunghai University in Taiwan, I was lucky enough to meet a number of American Ivy League graduates who came to us as English teachers; we talked a lot about differences between Chinese and Western (or at least Chinese and American) culture. When we graduated, we each had to pick a single phrase to describe our main sphere of intellectual interest. I chose 'dialogue among Eastern and Western cultures'.*[1371]

Tu Weiming

'Precursors'

If all love begins before it begins, then Tu Weiming's interest in the West in general - and the United States in particular - can be said to precede his arrival as a graduate student at Harvard in 1962. Still, 1960s Harvard only intensified Tu's dialogical passion:

> I was busy researching the history of Chinese philosophy, using Confucianism as my North Star, but at the same time I was interested in the history of American ideas and 17th- and 18-century European thought, most notably ethics, aesthetics and the philosophy of religion. I was lucky enough to run into a number of outstanding scholars and theorists of modernisation at Harvard; in psychology, there was Erik Erikson, who had introduced the concept of 'identity'. These days, we are accustomed to thinking of so-called 'identity' in cultural, political and social terms, but at that stage, it was only just starting to be discussed.
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> […] Another Harvard professor who exerted an enormous influence over me was Wilfred Cantwell Smith. […] Karl Jaspers had developed his concept of 'Axial civilisations' a few years before. As a Comparative Religion scholar, Smith believed that these spiritual traditions - Indian Buddhism, Chinese Confucianism and Daoism, Greek philosophy, Judaism and its later Abrahamic cousins - had all exerted continuous influence over humanity right up to the present day. The courses Smith taught on these various traditions were essentially lessons in dialogue among civilisations. The question how the major Axial players might, via debate, critique and dialogue, reach some kind of modern meld was one I always felt to be of the

[1371] Tu Weiming, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations: Precursors, Purposes, Prospects' ('Wenming Duihua: Beijing, Zhiqu, Lujing'), *Xungen*, v. 2, 2003, in Tu Weiming, *Wenming Duihua zhong de Rujia*, (Peking University Press, 2016), p. 106.

> utmost importance for the development of a culture of peace across humanity.[1372]

Unlike political entities such as nations, however, cultures do not mix and mingle only at their summits; elite exchanges among religious and cultural scholars are one thing, but a global 'culture of peace' - as the anarchic, hate-filled reality of 21st-century social media only highlights - is something else. It is hard not to look back on Tu's early efforts at academic 'dialogue' without a pinch of nostalgia for a simpler time:

> 1969 was an important year. The University of Hawai'i organised a meeting of Eastern and Western philosophers. There was a German scholar named Hans A. Fischer-Barnicol; he told me that they wanted to set up a Centre for Comparative Culture in Heidelberg, to find 100 outstanding scholars from all over the world, and to hold a series of civilisational dialogues based on a philosophy of peaceful coexistence. Representatives of European, North and South American, Islamic and East Asian Confucian civilisations, South Asia and Africa were sought; they had found Tang Junyi from Hong Kong, Keiji Nishitani from Japan, and several leading scholars of Islam. I got involved too. We regarded it as a common, ongoing cause.
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> […] In the early nineties, I took a year off from Harvard and headed for the University of Hawai'i's East-West Center. The Director, Victor Lee, asked me what research I wanted to do while I was there, and I said I wanted to advance the discourse on Dialogue Among Civilisations. […] It's an extremely difficult topic of course; we organised a bunch of international conferences, devoted sustained attention to each of the major civilisations, published 25 anthologies with contributions from leading scholars in each field. […] Ewert Cousins was the Chief Editor, […] and one of the things we ended up agreeing on was that, beyond the Axial civilisations, indigenous traditions had to be included in the conversation as well.[1373]

Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilisations' thesis - revolutionary in political science and seized on by the media - added little to debates in Comparative Religion which had already been raging for decades:

> There's an old view of modernisation as secularisation, as deconstruction of any cult of the sacred. Modern civilisation, on this view, is materialist civilisation - instrumental rationality, positivism, scientism… […] In the mid-20th century, this was regarded by many as a self-evident truth; […] the power of religion would gradually wane. […] Over the last half-century, however, academia has gradually discovered the importance - indeed, the *growing* importance - of religion. This turn in academia also extends to the concept of culture more broadly; it used to be believed that culture was a superficial mask of outward custom, and that changes in the economy would necessarily bring about changes in culture. Now we realise that things are

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[1372] Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations: Precursors, Purposes, Prospects', pp. 107-108.

[1373] Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations: Precursors, Purposes, Prospects', pp. 108-109.

> not that simple. Even the World Economic Forum, from the relative shelter of Davos, has recognised that culture and religion will be especially prominent themes in the 21st Century. [… Such questions of religion and cultural identity] cannot be discussed in terms of reductive economic laws; unquantifiable phenomena are involved here.[1374]

'Purposes'

The real 'purpose' of dialogue among civilisations, Tu argues, is not to weigh and measure cultures on objective, social-scientific scales; dialogue is a humanistic end in itself, and as such, always individual: contact with foreign cultures may make each of us better, but we cannot say how in advance. This very culture of 'learning for the self', however, has important social and political flow-on effects: 'Dialogue pushes us to work hard to realise a community which truly includes everyone.'[1375] How and why should this be so? Tu doesn't say directly, but he implies that the only way credibly to embody this spirit of dialogue is to learn to take human history - the history of all tribes - seriously. Few people anywhere live up to this ideal:

> There is a view, in fact still extremely widespread in the United States, that the West as represented by Western Europe and North America ought to be the universal standard by which political, economic and social systems - and the values underlying them - are measured everywhere. A lot of Chinese intellectuals also think that China remains in the pre-modern era, and that we therefore shouldn't be too loud about championing our traditional culture; we would be better off, on this account, to keep our heads down and continue copying the West, the science and democracy bit in particular.
>
> I don't wish to subvert the gains of the Enlightenment in any way, and I am in fact one who regularly heaps praise on them, but I do not think the Enlightenment contains the resources within itself to solve all the problems facing humanity. I am not saying that the [Enlightenment's] resources aren't good, only that they are insufficient, and that they will remain so under all future conditions. Why? The Enlightenment suffers from a handful of major flaws. Beyond narrow anthropocentrism, […] there is the problem of establishing a basis for the peaceful coexistence of humanity as long as instrumental rationality so powerfully predominates. With its materialism, scientism and cult of earthly progress, [the Enlightenment mentality] is apathetic towards the spirituality embodied by the Axial civilisations at their best; it developed, after all, in opposition to all religion.[1376]

Tu is working towards a dialogical model in which Confucianism (among other Axial and non-Axial spiritualities) is to be included in open debates about the meaning of 'modernity' (or in other words, about the meaning of 'meaning' itself); such an

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[1374] Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations: Precursors, Purposes, Prospects', pp. 109-110.

[1375] Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations: Precursors, Purposes, Prospects', p. 116.

[1376] Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations: Precursors, Purposes, Prospects', p. 111.

'inclusive humanism' requires, however, that Confucians be held to the same standards as everyone else:

> Old 'Confucian' notions of rigid hierarchy - whether between master and servant, parent and child, or husband and wife - hold no water in modern times; no serious Confucian today could possibly endorse them, for they are not compatible with the gains of feminism, the rule of law or the concept of human dignity. […] But through a process of self-criticism and self-cultivation against this backdrop of modernity, [Confucians] can still develop themselves. If the 'Western' values of freedom, democracy and human rights can not only be endorsed but also absorbed [everywhere], then why shouldn't Confucianism be able to contribute something unique of its own [to a global dialogue among civilisations]? I for one think it can.[1377]

This is by no means to suggest that the outcome of dialogue between individuals or groups should always be boringly or politely symmetrical; it simply lays the broad foundations for a global culture of learning: 'Call me an optimist, but I take the view that the more rights, privileges and resources one has, the more disposed one ought to be contributing to the development of human civilisation and a culture of peace.'[1378] 'Dialogue Among Civilisations' is ultimately not a scientific or academic research program, though it may have begun there; it is an exhortation or invocation to ordinary people to better themselves on their own terms by learning - *from* others, but *for* themselves.

<u>'Prospects'</u>

> *When we consider the dialogue between one civilisation and another, we must remember that it always involves individual people, living people engaged in a process of mutual learning. The problem as I have repeatedly framed it is one of 'embodied knowledge' - trusting one's own experience as an epistemological foundation. As a simple example, consider friendship: when you first see someone, it is as if you are seeing her in a painting; you only know her outward form. Can you say you know her just because you recognise her face? You need to talk to her as well, more than once or twice. Moreover, if the person is unwilling to let you get to know her, what chance have you got? You might have all her data at your disposal, her CIA file or whatever, but you still can't claim that you know her as a friend. For that, there needs to be a mutual willingness for conversational exchange; that's the only way you can slowly build a relationship. If all you want to do is use her for some prearranged*

[1377] Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations: Precursors, Purposes, Prospects', pp. 113-114.

[1378] Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations: Precursors, Purposes, Prospects', p. 114.

> *purpose, you can't call that friendship. Dialogue among civilisations is hard work because a high bar of intimacy must be met.*[1379]

On the one hand, then, 'if friendship between individual people is a lifelong business,' as Tu stresses, 'dialogue among civilisations may often be a matter of centuries.'[1380] On the other hand, however, there are only ever individual people; 'civilisations' are collective abstractions, so the idea of 'dialogue among civilisations' is ripe for cheap politicisation. The concept of 'dialogue' itself must also be prevented from descending to the level of euphemism, either in the corporate sense of acting as a cover for what the bosses really want (witness the creepy emergence of the verb 'to dialogue' in 21st-century Business English), or in the old theological sense of a platform for mutual proselytising:

> Dialogue in my view doesn't begin with the impulse to spread one's own gospel or explain one's truth to others. What is dialogue then? It is the desire for increased self-reflection, but also the desire to understand others, and through this understanding to expand one's own field of vision. This is the goal of dialogue; to cultivate a 'heart for learning'. […] Dialogue is about sharing in the value of others and creating a new meaning for life; if you're trying to force people to convert, overwhelming them with pressure to listen and learn from you, then the spirit of dialogue will quickly evaporate.[1381]

This does not mean that the impulse to teach is unhealthy; on the contrary, it is a natural part of any humane or humanistic benevolence. But it can only ever be one part of a wider story of civilisation and creativity; 'dialogue' is never really the what, but always the *why* of what one says:

> Suppose you take the view that truth is on your side, and that you represent the voice of truth: you have a responsibility to make me accept your view of things. If you bring this kind of attitude, then there is no way to resolve disputes and conflicts.
>
> […] Certain turns of phrase [therefore] make me uncomfortable. Since the 1980s, for example, there have been rumblings about a Pacific Century, an Asian Century, a Chinese Century. Ideas like these are extremely unhealthy. Why? Because they fail to overcome all the old [colonial] dichotomies; instead of transcending them, the roles have simply been reversed. The logic of domination remains; either you win, or I win. You've been in the ascendancy for 500 years; now it's my turn. Others held the knife over us before; now we get to hold it.

[1379] Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations: Precursors, Purposes, Prospects', p. 117.

[1380] Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations: Precursors, Purposes, Prospects', p. 118.

[1381] Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations: Precursors, Purposes, Prospects', p. 118.

> My view is that human civilisation as a whole, including what is left of the Abrahamic civilisations, must face together and reflect critically on the ideological legacy of the Enlightenment.[1382]

Luckily, however, there is a common global inheritance which Tu, in recent years, has started to call 'Spiritual Humanism':

> Whether one looks East or West, the study of benevolence (or more directly, the path of 'learning to be human') is an integral part of classical education. As we emerge from a century of extreme barbarism, such education faces some deeply meaningful challenges. Even if we can all now accept human dignity as an abstract universal value, we still actually have to embody this principle in our treatment of individual people, whether that person is poor, old and European, a Chinese businessman, a rabbi or imam, a wealthy young African woman, or anyone else. This requires the cultivation of a capacity to see such encounters as opportunities rather than threats.
>
> Such learning implies a rejection of obstinacy, prejudice, hostility and violence, whether rooted in religious, cultural, ethnic or racial biases. True dialogue requires the creation of a living partnership with others. Only thus can any sense of common cause be actively established.
>
> Trust makes dialogue possible and fruitful; it is the basis of all truly human exchange. […] The absence of trust complicates attempts at cross-cultural cooperation and thwarts the emergence of a culture of peace, while the presence of trust promises the possibility of continual expansion of the human community. […] Trust makes me view other people as open ends, not as means to the fulfilment of my own prior desires. In a world full of tension and conflict, trust is a manifestation of hope: namely, in the human capacity to excavate common ground with those once regarded as wholly foreign, other, and inimical. […] If legal action can remedy violations of business contracts, well, without trust, no meaningful human exchange is possible whatsoever. Through dialogue among civilisations, we not only uncover wisdom from our own traditions; the entire accumulated stock of the human community is opened up to us.[1383]

It is worth pausing to note just how revolutionary - how subversive of *both* Cold War ideologies - this vision of 21st-century 'dialogue among civilisations' is: rather than material production or consumption, *listening* becomes the quintessential human activity:

> The art of listening is the most difficult. Especially when one is young, it is hard to muster the patience to listen attentively; one wants to grasp the gist

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[1382] Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations: Precursors, Purposes, Prospects', pp. 118-119.

[1383] Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations: Precursors, Purposes, Prospects', pp. 119-121.

> in a hurry. One can do that with information, but with wisdom, real listening - listening on another level - is required.[1384]

Is 'dialogue' thus understood a threat to communist and/or capitalist political order? Yes and no. The Chinese Communist Party's official embrace of the 'Dialogue Among Civilisations' theme augurs well for the mid-term future of the Tu-founded Center for Dialogue Among Civilisations at Peking University; at the same time, however, the role of the humanities in any society, as Tu himself defines it, is to remain in 'loyal opposition' to political power and to critique it constructively where necessary. The road ahead for this Center for Dialogue Among Civilisations, where I have had the privilege of writing this book, can only be one of trust-building between University and Party authorities justifiably wary of foreign interference in China's domestic affairs, on the one hand, and foreign entities justifiably suspicious of the Party's propaganda machine on the other. If 'Dialogue Among Civilisations' becomes a derisive euphemism for China's One Belt One Road initiative, China's own economic and political rise - the Party's own stated agenda - will be thwarted, or at least tarnished; conversely, the idea of 'dialogue as listening' is as subversive of capitialism and a certain materialistic, rights-centred, liberal-democratic agenda - whether embodied by the United States, the European Union or other 'first-world' entities - as anything else. Tu Weiming's awkward status as a diaspora Confucian intellectual - too Chinese for some, not Chinese enough for others - should not prevent the essence of his message from being heard everywhere: there is no meaningful human life without the experience of trust, no trust without a willingness to listen, and no credible listening without the sacrifice of at least *some* short-term material self-interest. Ivorian poet Bernard Dadié captures this spirit of dialogue as succinctly as anyone:

> *My dream*
> *is not to be*
> *a solitary giant*
> *in a marble castle*
> *a luxury-class traveller. [...]*
> *My dream*
> *is*
> *to be*
> *with you*

[1384] Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations: Precursors, Purposes, Prospects', p. 122. One of the slightly unnerving things about talking with Tu Weiming in person is that he never seems to interrupt you the way most younger mortals do; one finds oneself talking for minutes at a time, repeating oneself perhaps, and generally wondering when he will chime in. Invariably, you just have to decide you've finished; then, after a few awkward seconds have passed, he will begin a carefully considered reply to each of the points you have been trying to make. This isn't the only way to do dialogue of course - as a serial interrupter and enthusiastic teacher, I like to strike while the conversational iron is hot, and would defend to the death my right to do so - but Tu's approach does reflect a certain sagely embodiment of the dialogical principle.

Tonight.
Forever.[1385]

[1385] Bernard Dadié, 'Mon Rêve', http://scans.hebis.de/17/81/11/17811150_toc.pdf, p. 77 (accessed 7/3/2012):

Mon rêve
n'est pas d'être
un géant solitaire
dans chateau de marbre
un voyageur de "cabine de luxe".
[…] Mon rêve
est
d'être à toi
ce soir.
Toujours.

2. 'The Problem of Dialogue'

This appendix to Tu's 2014 *Ershiyi Shiji de Ruxue (Confucianism in the 21st Century)* tries two things simultaneously: 1) to make a Confucian point, or a point about Confucianism, at the expense of other traditions; and 2) to reinvite those spurned traditions to accept the Confucian mandate on dialogue. This seems an unpromising *modus operandi* - especially for a Confucian scholar who, as we have just seen, places a unique premium on 'listening' - but a silver lining will emerge.

<u>'What Is Dialogue?'</u>

After briefly retracing the 'existential turn' in 20th-century continental philosophy (with its whole murky Heideggerian emphasis on 'being' and the pre-Socratics), Tu slows down a bit when discussing Plato:

> Socrates claimed to be ignorant, but really he revealed his understanding of ignorance on multiple levels. He was therefore able to lead a group of young people to philosophical wisdom, to enlighten them gradually by forcing them to part with their illusions and to enter philosophy's realm of truth.
>
> Plato's Allegory of the Cave also follows this same analogy. Ordinary people are stuck in darkness and chains, and can only see inside their own cave. To liberate them, dialogue will not be enough, because ordinary people on this account do not have the necessary capacities for self-awareness and self-overcoming. They must be pulled into the light by an external force.[1386]

Confucius, by contrast, expected his students to transform *themselves*; dialogue may be the *catalyst* for self-cultivation, but it is not the ultimate cause (Mencius, moreover, trusted that such faculties - not just critical or rational, but *self*-critical - were a natural part of what it means to be human).[1387] Although the *Analects* look like sermons rather than dialogues, on closer inspection Confucius's wisdom always turns out to be the fermented fruit of some long conversation or other with his students and fellow-travellers, not a collection of *reductiones ad absurdum*.[1388] This attitude to 'dialogue' is fundamentally different, Tu asserts, from the Plato-derived Christian tradition: Jesus's disciples have 'absolutely no way of understanding [his] inner world; they cannot be said to stand in a dialogical relationship'[1389] to the son of God. Confucius, meanwhile, is 'just a man, who

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[1386] Tu Weiming, 'The Problem of Dialogue' ('Duihua de Wenti'), in *Ershiyi Shiji de Ruxue*, (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2014), p. 265.

[1387] Tu, 'The Problem of Dialogue', p. 266.

[1388] Tu, 'The Problem of Dialogue', p. 266.

[1389] Tu, 'The Problem of Dialogue', pp. 266-267.

makes a lot of errors and carries a lot of regrets'.[1390] One can surely, however, understand the point Tu is trying to make here without sliding into such unnecessarily dichotomous thinking. Elsewhere - indeed, in the article we have just covered - Tu is able to recognise that contemporary Christian theology offers more sophisticated dialogical possibilities:

> [Catholic theologian] Hans Küng has argued that the twin Confucian principles of 'Do not do unto others' and 'In order to establish and enlarge myself, I must establish and enlarge others' are the foundational principles of dialogue among civilisations in general. Salvation can be found not only within the Catholic Church, but also beyond the confines of Christianity altogether; in other words, a person can identify as something other than Christian and still be saved.[1391]

Invulnerable didacticism, in other words, is not dialogue. If by definition the student can teach the teacher nothing, then we are in the realm of religious dogma, not the humanities.

'Dialectical Dialogue'

Like Karl Popper in his critique of the 'enemies' of an open society (Plato, Hegel, and Marx), Tu identifies 'dialectical' thinking with dictatorial rather than fully 'dialogical' modes.[1392] Instead of seeking to incorporate one's conversation partner in a higher argumentative synthesis, real 'dialogue' moves beyond dialectic, and also beyond mere 'toleration' for the other as she is - a negative virtue - to achieve genuine warts-and-all 'recognition' (*chengren*).[1393] Citing his beloved Raimon Panikkar's concept of 'dialogical dialogue', Tu once again wants to dichotomise the discussion: 'Strictly speaking, dialogical dialogue is very different from Greek, Christian, Jewish and Hindu' modes, which have their real roots in dialectical thinking.[1394] Even other traditions in the Chinese sphere neglect dialogue; Daoism prefers silence and mistrust of language, while Buddhism in its various guises has tended to prefer either open disputation or rote learning as paths to individual knowledge (Legalism, meanwhile, with its preference for 'the arts of control', 'does not permit dialogue').[1395] One can inhale this broad-brush intellectual history in one breath and exhale massive reservations about it in the next, but Tu's real goal is to set up a final 'synthesis' among Confucianism and other traditions which is 'dialogical' rather than 'dialectical'.

[1390] Tu, 'The Problem of Dialogue', p. 267.

[1391] Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations: Precursors, Purposes, Prospects', p. 118.

[1392] See Tu, 'The Problem of Dialogue', pp. 267-269.

[1393] Tu, 'The Problem of Dialogue', p. 267.

[1394] Tu, 'The Problem of Dialogue', p. 268.

[1395] Tu, 'The Problem of Dialogue', p. 268.

‘The Guts of Dialogue’

Levinas’s commitment to ‘radical otherness’ - a core mantra of postmodern thought in one guise or other - can get one beyond mere toleration perhaps, but it doesn’t qualify as ‘dialogue’ either[1396]; only a certain ‘mutuality’ fits the bill, and such reciprocity implies not mere ‘respect’, but a ‘reverence’[1397] more normally reserved, in English, for God: ‘Mutual learning must be mutual; you can’t impose your views on others; so-called “equality” is really just both sides recognising the other’s freedom and the voluntary nature [of all dialogical participation].’[1398] In other words, Tu’s apparent insistence on the superiority of Confucianism as a dialogical model is not intended as an imposition, but rather as an invitation, a friendly challenge to scholars and experts in other fields to reply in kind. It is an art form to call for reverence for Confucianism in one breath and reverence for foreign traditions in the same breath, but that is what Tu is trying to do, even as he appears to be insisting on the underlying superiority of Confucianism. This, in a nutshell, is the ‘problem of dialogue’: both self-confidence (the idea one has something unique and enriching to offer the world) and curiosity (the idea that one can still be changed and improved by contact with the world) are required in equal and opposite measure. By definition, however, one’s current horizon is only ever what it is; the only way one can trust in dialogue is because, in the past, we have direct experience of having been improved by it. Tu is not only trying to introduce his reader to Confucianism here; to believe so would be to make a category error about his entire dialogical enterprise. He is also, simultaneously, begging his reader to improve him here, to challenge him and teach him something he doesn’t already know, instead of lazily or sycophantically agreeing with his clichés about foreign cultures.

[1396] See Tu, ‘The Problem of Dialogue’, p. 270.

[1397] Tu, ‘The Problem of Dialogue’, p. 270.

[1398] Tu, ‘The Problem of Dialogue’, p. 271.

3. 'The Beating Heart of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism'

> *The idea of 'learning for the self', as it appears in the* Analects*, takes the following form: 'In the old times, there was learning for the self; now, the scholars learn for [praise, recognition and compensation from] other people.' This implies that the primary question for academic study is how to be a person; this can only begin with the individual, and take self-knowledge as the starting point. So-called 'learning for the self' means seeking knowledge for one's own sake. But the 'self' in question is not the* homo economicus *of Western individualist fame. […] Nor is it the atomised self […] of early Sartrean existentialism […] or the ascetic 'true self' we might associate with certain Indian philosophies. […] In the [earliest Chinese dictionaries], learning is equated with feeling. […] This gradual process [of Confucian learning for the self] is more than sitting alone in a room, fist on forehead, thinking, as Greek philosophy dramatises it; it is more than ideal contemplation, and transcends the idea that one can solve [existential] problems via private, rational thought alone.*[1399]

In his 1996 article '*Song-Ming Ruxue de Zhongxin Keti*' (literally translated as 'The Central Theme of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism', but rendered by me as 'The Beating Heart' in a bid to capture the '*xin*' part), Tu introduces his reader to the complexities of neo-Confucian discourse while somehow also seeking to extract a common kernel of humanistic wisdom for dialogue with the world. In modern philosophical terms, questions like 'why God created the world, and whether he has a plan or a blueprint for it, are not things that we mere created mortals can know; a certain scepticism accompanies all such [so-called "modern"] modes of thought.'[1400] Confucianism, meanwhile, promises something more, not just a certain access to Heaven, but also 'an ideal of political engagement, one based on moral practice and intellectual labour. […] Politics ought to be a concentrated expression of morality and culture, not just of economic forces. This is the Confucian ideal: a moralised politics.'[1401] Unfortunately, in Chinese history and culture, 'the moral ideals of Confucianism have often been politicised to the point of becoming an ideological weapon of social control'[1402]; while the Confucianism which relies on moral ideals to transform politics has been 'an important hidden current in Chinese life since the Warring States Period, and perhaps the most enduring [single movement] of all', it is nevertheless true that 'the main current has been the

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[1399] Tu Weiming, 'The Beating Heart of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism' ('Song-Ming Ruxue de Zhongxin Keti'), *Tianfu Xinlun*, vol. 2, 1996, (http://www.cnki.com.cn/Article/CJFDTotal-TFXL602.007.htm), p. 1/7.

[1400] Tu, 'The Beating Heart of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism', p. 1/7.

[1401] Tu, 'The Beating Heart of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism', p. 2/7.

[1402] Tu, 'The Beating Heart of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism', p. 2/7.

politicised Confucianism which acts as an ideological cover for dictatorship.'[1403] The Confucian examination system was both part of the solution and part of the problem:

> Concretely speaking, the imperial examination system for the bureaucratic hierarchy created classes of ruling elites who relied very obviously on politicised Confucianism for their passage to wealth and power. But this doesn't mean that all Confucians were 'politicised' in this way. True Confucians have always criticised sycophantic political culture, often to the point of breaking with it completely. This spirit of protest - from criticism to actual rupture - has more often than not won the respect of the Chinese thinking classes. [… If you] want to embody the dignity of the individual, or humanistic values in general, then [as Confucius himself put it], the burden is heavy and the way is long. This spirit can also be traced back to the Mencian ideal of equanimity in the face of wealth, poverty and power.[1404]

The challenge of reinvigorating this humanistic tradition in the Song-Ming period required an honest reckoning with Indian influences on Chinese cultural life:

> The move away from the Five Classics in favour of the Four Books reflects a critical attitude to the classical [Confucian] tradition. But there are two ways such criticism can be understood: one is to see it as claiming that the old texts are not overarchingly important, and that the supreme authority of the Five Classics should be challenged. Another is to interpret it as an attempt to strengthen the inheritance or transmission of those very classics via critical renewal.
>
> […] Zhu Xi criticised the tradition in both senses, by taking an extremely thin slice out of it and turning it into the Four Books. The Four Books are relatively short and easy to memorise, whereas the Five Classics are long, and really need to be abridged.
>
> […] The emergence of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism was [in any case] a creative response to the thoroughgoing influence of Buddhist culture in China.[1405]

Such cultural renewal, however, was only possible in creative opposition to the examination system itself; all the leading proponents of Song-Ming neo-Confucianism, 'right down to Wang Yangming, reflected critically on politicised Confucianism and the effects of the imperial examination system on the attitudes of the bureaucracy.'[1406] Since exams were 'the only path to a successful career for the young and ambitious', […] this created 'a complex social mechanism which hindered creativity and [the transmission of humanistic] wisdom. All the important thinkers of the period,' including Zhu Xi himself ('from a young age he was keen to

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[1403] Tu, 'The Beating Heart of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism', p. 2/7.

[1404] Tu, 'The Beating Heart of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism', p. 2/7.

[1405] Tu, 'The Beating Heart of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism', p. 3/7.

[1406] Tu, 'The Beating Heart of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism', p. 3/7.

absorb everything'), 'adopted a critical posture towards the examination system, often referring to it as a "dead letter", […] a mere exercise in bloodless rote learning.'[1407]

The Song-Ming neo-Confucian story as a whole, moreover, helped to persuade Tu that intellectual and bureaucratic life remain at permanent odds with each other, even as interesting compromises and mutual influences can always be observed:

> After a long gestation, respect for Confucius reached a new zenith in the late-13th Century; the imperial examination system began using the Four Books as the curriculum, and politicised Confucianism also rode the wave. […] From the Southern Song through to the mid-Ming period, the Zhu Xi school held sway, and was imported into Korea, where it enjoyed significant influence in both military and civil circles, infusing elite culture with a spirit of principled resistance to power.[1408]

In China, however, the intellectual ground for Wang Yangming had been laid by mid-Ming times: 'The emergence of Wang's thought represents a major event in our intellectual history.'[1409] Philosophically speaking,

> the 'nature is truth' (*xingjiliye*) thesis was accepted by all Song-Ming neo-Confucians. […] Not only human nature, but the nature of all things was truth; if one could completely understand the nature of any one thing, then one could penetrate the mystery of Heaven. Wang was determined to uncover the underlying principle at stake, to crack the code of the cosmos. If the truth of any individual thing was a manifestation of Heaven, then this certainly seemed possible.[1410]

The ultimate aridity of this approach, however, led Wang to the horizon of *zhixingheyi* (the idea of 'the harmonious union of knowledge and behaviour') at the age of '35 or 36':

> This was an important milestone in the history of Chinese philosophy; it brought Wang back to Lu Xiangshan, and in a sense to Cheng Hao, Zhang Zai and Zhou Dunyi as well, in particular to the view that moral behaviour can only be based on individual freedom and resolve. […] This thirst for moral meaning cannot be quenched by the attainment of some high-ranking post, social status, political power or economic profit. […] What is this resolve? Is it knowledge? Is it behaviour?[1411]

[1407] Tu, 'The Beating Heart of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism', p. 3/7.

[1408] Tu, 'The Beating Heart of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism', p. 5/7.

[1409] Tu, 'The Beating Heart of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism', p. 5/7.

[1410] Tu, 'The Beating Heart of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism', p. 5/7.

[1411] Tu, 'The Beating Heart of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism', p. 6/7.

Tu's goal in this article - titled, lest we forget, 'The Beating Heart of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism' - is to suggest that this crucial question has not been definitively answered, by Chinese or any other culture; Song-Ming resources, however, as well as those of the first Confucian flush, are still available, if only the world were willing and able to acquaint itself:

> On the influential Mencian view of human nature, we are all capable of sagehood - witness the Chinese penchant since at least Wang's time for claiming that 'the streets are full of sages'. [At the same time, however], Confucius himself was not a sage as such. […] He enjoyed 72 years of life, but if he had lived to 80, he would have had to spend those extra years struggling as well [i.e. to be the best he could be]; […] This spirit [of sagehood] is eternally beyond the grasp of the individual, or in other words has an inexhaustible source within the ego.
>
> […] Song-Ming neo-Confucianism, from Zhou Dunyi to Liu Zongzhou, contains many winding roads and forking paths, so how can we analyse its legacy? Some say that you can divide it into *lixue* or 'truth studies' (Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi), *xinxue* or 'heart studies' (Lu Xiangshan, Wang Yangming), and *qixue* or 'spirit studies' (Zhang Zai, Wang Fuzhi); this is Feng Youlan's view. Others argue for the following schema: 1) Cheng and Zhu; 2) the traditions spanning Zhou Dunyi and Zhang Zai, Zhang Zai and Hu Wufeng, and Hu Wufeng and Liu Zongzhou; and 3) the Lu-Wang tradition. On this view (shared by Mou Zongsan), Lu-Wang overlaps significantly with Zhou-Liu, but clashes with Cheng-Zhu. There are still other synopses [of this vast chapter of Chinese intellectual history]. […] The Ming Dynasty did not pass down much of Zhu Xi to modern China, but the same cannot be said of the situation in Korea or the transmission [of Zhu's thought] to Japan in the work of Yamazaki Ansai and other Shinto thinkers. From the perspective of East Asian civilisation as a whole, the second phase of Confucianism's development [i.e. in the Song-Ming period] is extremely tangled and complicated. How we can understand it and discuss it [remains to be seen]; there is a lot of work still to be done. What I have offered here is merely a rough sketch of the terrain.[1412]

[1412] Tu, 'The Beating Heart of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism', p. 7/7.

4. 'New Humanities and a New Enlightenment'

In the context of an emerging 'Second Cold War' between the United States and China, Tu understands that any meaningful reform of the 'global humanities' must entail - before it can really go anywhere else - some sort of deep and mutual understanding between Beijing and Boston:

> Of course, the ideology of American society is still dominated by Protestant religion, […] but New England - the beating heart of American intellectual life - has long been a hotbed for humanism as well. At Harvard in 1838, for example, Emerson's famous 'Divinity School Address' argued that Jesus was no more than a great human being, not a god, and that people should follow his moral example rather than any religious dogma (I once took part in a Christian-Confucian dialogue on the meaning of creativity […] in the hall where Emerson spoke). While half of the theologians and clergymen present at Emerson's address walked out in protest, one can only say that the tide has risen [since 1838]; humanism has become an important part of the contemporary American philosophical landscape. In intellectual circles, meanwhile, thoroughgoing rejections of religion have achieved prominence; the campaigns of Edward O. Wilson and other neo-Darwinian sociobiologists - namely, to replace religion with a scientific humanism - have been highly influential. Within Christianity, the Unitarian movement - hostile to the doctrine of the Trinity (and problematically rendered as *weiyishenjiao* or 'hypermonotheism' in Chinese) - remains deeply rooted in Massachusetts and beyond. […] The Unitarian creed continues to evolve, but could currently be described as extremely open-minded - to the point of distancing itself from Christianity altogether. Still, its influence within New England remains enormous. At the end of my public lectures, I often have Unitarians telling me how close Confucian views are to their own, and I hope there can be deeper exchanges between us in the future.[1413]

Accepting a Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Humanist Association in 2007, Tu was quick to point out that his own intellectual journey - begun in a radically different East Asian context in 1940 - had not been one of emancipation *from* spirituality, but rather of liberation *for* it:

> I felt pretty uncomfortable about [the prize]. At the start of my acceptance speech, I explained how I thought true humanism differed from 'secular humanism' as ordinarily understood [in Western intellectual circles].
>
> Secular humanism has been a major intellectual tradition since the Enlightenment. There are many sources which prove the influence of Chinese thought on 18th-century Enlightenment ideas; indeed, it is common knowledge that Voltaire and other Enlightenment luminaries were influenced by their contact with Chinese culture. There are also important parallels

[1413] Tu Weiming, 'New Humanities and a New Enlightenment' ('Xinrenwen yi Xinqimeng'), in *Wenming Duihua zhong de Rujia*, (Peking University Press, 2016, pp. 225-226.

> between Leibniz and Zhu Xi, and some people even wonder whether Kant's philosophical system is of purely Western inspiration, and whether other cultures might not figure in it in some way. In any case, the main thrust of Enlightenment thought clearly comes out of the West, and emerges as a critique of medieval Christian theology; the antipathy of Enlightenment thinkers towards Christianity was often visceral. But as Enlightenment thought emerged in opposition to religion and theology, and in hostility to the lies perpetuated by outworn religious dogma, it also extinguished the very idea of the sacred, and severed the organic link between people's spiritual and moral aspirations.[1414]

Tu supports all calls for a 'new humanism'[1415] which might reestablish this link; what he will go on to label 'Spiritual Humanism' is a broader, more ambitious project than shallow iconoclasm, and not an anti-theist project as such:

> Without recognition of one's identity, there is nowhere for the spirit to rest, but a narrow sense of self inevitably leads to conflict and dispute. Identity needs to entail a certain flexibility or adaptability; this actually gives recognition more value, and also makes it more likely. We generally think that the more rational a person is, the more open-minded she will be. […] In the long run, however, dialogue among civilisations [and not just abstract rationality] will be required. Amartya Sen goes so far as to argue that all talk of identity and recognition leads to conflict, and that it would be better to avoid talking about it altogether if we really want an open society. I prefer to think that […] we should be able to face all the dark and dirty secrets of our own culture, and to discuss them in public with others under a common roof, even as we claim allegiance to one culture or another.[1416]

Rather than atheism or scepticism or agnosticism (or any other existing -ism, for that matter), the common denominator - if one may even speak in such mathematical metaphors here - is the humility which grows out of all true humanistic exchange:

> Our biggest fear is people who are ignorant and arrogant at the same time. This is an important aspect of any 'new' or 'second' Enlightenment: […] strengthening people's confidence in the value of studying 'old' or 'traditional' cultures.[1417]

In one sense, Tu's reverence for the 'conversational ideal' squares with that of American reformers like Anthony T. Kronman:

[1414] Tu, 'New Humanities and a New Enlightenment', p. 226.

[1415] Tu, 'New Humanities and a New Enlightenment', p. 229.

[1416] Tu, 'New Humanities and a New Enlightenment', pp. 229-230.

[1417] Tu, 'New Humanities and a New Enlightenment', pp. 231-232.

> Any time anyone […] says, 'Well, you just don't understand it because you're not me, you don't share my experience, you don't see things as I do, you haven't suffered as I have' — whenever a claim of that kind is offered as a trump, in conversation, as something that would be unseemly or inappropriate or unjust to challenge, the conversation comes to an end. That's a conversation-killing move. […] Merely announcing [pain] and stressing its sheer physicality does nothing to establish its authority. That is to cede the day to the symptom. And that is a victory for unenlightenment and self-ignorance.
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> […] I use the example of a speakers' corner, a soap box in the park set up for whoever wishes to use it. People come and go, they talk about whatever they wish, they insult, they harangue, they respond. And that's great, that's an important part of our political culture. No one would wish it otherwise. The people who speak and the people who listen are trying to persuade or resist being persuaded. But you cannot describe what is happening as a conversation.
>
> But talking past each other in a classroom: That is out of keeping with the requirements of the conversational ideal, and it is the responsibility of the teacher to keep that ideal in view at all times. That is a special, rare, and valuable enterprise which the speech libertarians simply don't notice. By the same token, the defenders of limits on speech for the sake of inclusion do not have it in view either. What they miss is the way in which institutionalized forms of sensitivity compromise the conversational ideal and reinforce the idea that what ultimately matters is how I see the world, rather than the prospect for achieving some shared foothold. […] Always an aspiration that we fall short of achieving — I have no illusions about that — but the fact that you don't achieve it does not to my mind deprive the ideal itself of its magnificent force.[1418]

In a spirit of equal-opportunity Confucian humanism ('from the emperor to the common man, all must take self-cultivation as the root' etc.), Tu wants to universalise the privileges of dialogue in a way that Kronman, in his commitment to an 'aristocratic' ideal, seems almost unable to grasp:

> Many of my friends warned me against using the word 'aristocratic' [but] I decided to forge on ahead because it seemed to me to best express the truth of the matter. I could have used 'elite' instead. But that would have done my argument no good, and not pleased or placated my critics. So I decided to eat the whole enchilada.
>
> […] Why? I'll put the point as simply as I can. No one objects to the idea that the distinction between better and worse has straightforward application to pursuits of a narrow disciplinary or vocational kind. As long as the activity is appropriately limited, no one's democratic nose gets out of

[1418] Anthony T. Kronman, in Len Gutkin, '"Elite Schools Are National Treasures": Anthony Kronman on the "Aristocratic Ethos" in Higher Education', https://www.chronicle.com/article/Elite-Schools-Are-National/246657?key=137mX8P5kNfptPQAJSOgWF_qlazd-hCIQiN1sKqf82jvMsL1ec4FHNbsaGrwsxdZV3hHaVlDRzZWM2ZHYktjVDNITmEzUHZ3ZTNKeURuYWZQYlk1NUFyenJUVQ, 12/7/2019 (accessed 23/7/2019)

> joint if you say, 'Well some are better at it than others.' But our colleges have sought to do more than just train their students in a discipline or equip them with the knowledge they need for vocational pursuit. They have sought to do something more general — to equip them for a life of responsible and enjoyable observation, judgment, and action. They have sought to instill in them those traits of character which are important and perhaps indispensable to leading a life of an intellectually, morally, spiritually, and aesthetically rich and full kind. If one says that in this more general pursuit some succeed more fully than others, then the conflict between this idea and the democratic conviction that all men and women are equal in the polling booth and before the bar of justice sharpens. If it's pressed, it becomes awfully difficult to reconcile, perhaps impossibly difficult.[1419]

There are, however, a hundred ways to argue for or against democratic mechanisms in different contexts that do not involve questioning the 'conversational ideal' which is inextricably tied, for Kronman as for Tu, to the ideal of individual self-cultivation. On the one hand, Kronman insists that humanistic education is 'as worthy as any enterprise on earth. But I don't think it is possible to explain what that [enterprise] is, let alone defend and justify it, without recurring to the aristocratic ideal of character.'[1420] The 'tolerance of ambiguity' characteristic of 'aristocrats of the spirit', Kronman argues, allows them to develop 'souls' which are 'larger, freer, more developed.'[1421] Tu wants to affirm this model while opening the 'aristocracy' - much as the Enlightenment itself sought to do - to all those with the aspiration to join it, thereby abolishing the idea of 'aristocracy' as a club necessarily composed of 'few' privileged members. Tu's 'Spiritual Humanism' has a 'politics' alright, but it is a cosmopolitan politics of individual enfranchisement via dialogue, not some blind monological conservatism.

[1419] Kronman, in Gutkin, '"Elite Schools Are National Treasures"'.

[1420] Kronman, in Gutkin, '"Elite Schools Are National Treasures"'.

[1421] Kronman, in Gutkin, '"Elite Schools Are National Treasures"'.

5. 'The Humanities and Higher Education'

> *What was most rewarding [about my life as an educator] is hard to tell. I would like to continue my efforts to convey the Confucian traditions to even more places. Many of the young people that I've met wanted to know the 'ABC' of Confucianism. So I told them: Well, A: Confucian civilisation values learning; it's about studying as much as possible to become a true human being; B: Confucian civilization is fairly tolerant, so it is able to engage with all different kinds of cultures; and C: Confucian civilisation is dialogical; it especially aims […] to promote a culture of peace.*
>
> Tu Weiming

Tu's twin identities as a Confucian intellectual and American educator come together in this summary of a 2002 exchange with a delegation of Chinese university administrators at Harvard. Compiled by Tu's former assistant Li Ruohong, the pages do not quite read as a Tu text, but they nevertheless received the boss's stamp of approval for inclusion as an Appendix to his 2016 essay collection *Wenming Duihua zhong de Rujia*.

The central goal of 'The Humanities and Higher Education' is to understand the contemporary challenges facing the academic humanities in a much, much broader historical context than is ordinarily envisaged: the humanities were 'marginalised' in the age of Confucius, and will always remain so by virtue of their very nature. Humanistic education in practice proceeds, now as ever, in the background of the inevitable specialisation and division of labour which drives advances in material civilisation. Surely everyone needs and deserves at least *some* humanistic education, and a 'civilised' society will provide plenty for everyone; in our late-capitalist, post-Cold War global context, moreover,

> elite universities [around the world] have begun to advocate 'educating the whole person' above and beyond specialised examinations. The Chinese phrase *suzhijiaoyu* (in Hong Kong they call it *boyajiaoyu* and in Taiwan *tongshijiaoyu*) finds its American parallel in the idea of 'liberal arts education'. Naturally, different countries and regions will have different ideas about what constitutes such education and what should have priority in the curriculum, but the consensus is that a university, while offering students the chance to specialise in one or two areas of scientific or scholarly study, should also provide some form of 'general education' or exposure to the arts, with a view to inculcating a certain humanistic spirit among students.
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> […] What are the humanities? Universities on the Chinese Mainland tend to break the university up into natural and social sciences; the humanities hence fall within the ambit of the latter. This is quite different from the situation in countries such as the United States, which basically prefer the tripartite division of natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. […] In this system, it is clear that the humanities are not

> sciences of any kind, but if we look at the German situation, for example, certain ambiguities arise: all three fields - not only the *Naturwissenschaften* and *Sozialwissenschaften*, but the humanistic *Geisteswissenschaften* as well - are considered 'sciences'.
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> Whichever way we choose to understand the humanities, it is clear that they constitute an independent area of inquiry: they are about human self-understanding, self-knowledge and self-definition in the most direct sense. […] Literature's excavation of feeling, History's efforts at collective memory, Philosophy's wisdom and foresight, and the ultimate concerns explored in Religious Studies and Theology are all tied to questions of human existence, survival, and meaning. The history and culture of any nation or region is capable of offering us a deeper sense of our own selves, our past, and our place in the present.[1422]

Tu recognises the specificity of the current problem, but even in his diagnosis of the age and his warnings for the future, there is a clear Confucian sense[1423] of *plus ça change*:

> The contemporary world is governed, increasingly in its entirety, by instrumental rationality, scientism, and a cult of measurement and statistics; the idea of a global or universal humanities has been marginalised. We can see this in China for a start, and in the United States as well. In the overextended twin global shadows of a market economy and a politics of zero-sum self-interest, the space for the development of the humanities is extremely narrow. […] This marginalisation can also be attributed, however, to a feature of the humanities themselves: the direct tangible value of the humanities is very low, especially for those areas that do not ostensibly

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[1422] Tu Weiming, in Li Ruohong (ed.), 'The Humanities and Higher Education' ('Renwenxue yu Gaodeng Jiaoyu'), in Tu Weiming, *Wenming Duihua zhong de Rujia*, (Peking University Press, 2016), pp. 310-311.

[1423] As Tu recounts on p. 258 of *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity*:

> Confucius was deeply concerned that the culture (*wen*) he cherished was not being transmitted and that the learning (*xue*) he propounded was not being instructed. [...] The community that Confucius created through his inspiring personality was a scholarly fellowship of like-minded men of different ages and backgrounds from different states. They were attracted to Confucius because they shared his vision and took part in varying degrees in his mission to bring moral order to an increasingly fragmented polity. This mission was difficult and even dangerous. The Master himself suffered from joblessness, homelessness, starvation and, occasionally, life- threatening violence. Yet, his faith in the survivability of the culture he cherished and the workability of his approach to teaching was so steadfast that he convinced his followers as well as himself that Heaven was on their side. When Confucius' life was threatened in K'uang, he said: 'Since the death of King Wen [founder of the Chou Dynasty], does not the mission of culture (wen) rest here in me? If Heaven intends this culture to be destroyed, those who come after me will not be able to have any part of it. If Heaven does not intend this culture to be destroyed, then what can the men of K'uang do to me?' (Tu Weiming, *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity: Essays on the Confucian Discourse in Cultural China*, (New Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilisations, 2010).

> serve economic and/or political goals; this leads to the systematic neglect of literature, art, music, philosophy and history. […] If universities are not able to accept the responsibility for the creation of new [widely accessible and attractive] cultural resources, and choose instead to outsource cultural transmission [i.e. to the free market alone], then there is literally no telling what problems may arise [from such an abdication].[1424]

Rather than thinking that the 'McDonald's Problem' (i.e. 'Waste time on the humanities, and end up working at McDonald's') is new (or a problem), Tu prefers to think that the humanities' very marginalisation actually steels graduates for the demands of the so-called 'real world'.[1425] While a humanities education can be understood as an expensive status symbol (akin to a 'peacock's tail' in evolutionary terms) or eschewed altogether by the upwardly mobile in less decadent societies (such as the East Asian Tigers in the late 20th Century[1426]), Tu is interested in finding the 'real reasons'[1427] for humanistic learning:

> In the 1960s, the question of the purpose of university education was vigorously debated in the United States. Former UC Berkeley Chancellor Clark Kerr argued publicly that university education was geared toward direct social service; such nakedly instrumental logic was in its turn widely criticised. University education, Kerr's critics claimed, could not be reduced to economic or social benefit, but was also understood variously as providing 'basic research' in different fields of scientific and humanistic inquiry, fostering a spirit of critique *vis-à-vis* society, and shouldering the heavy burden of cultural transmission from one generation to the next. The ideal of independence from market mechanisms and freedom from subservience to political goals, in short, was loudly championed.
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> […] Beyond the obvious functions of service to stated policy goals and [unfettered] basic research in a variety of areas, an even more fundamental role of the university is to function as a centre of humane critique of social, cultural and political life. This comprehensive mandate to monitor and critique is one that neither government nor business nor any other sector of society can hold. The form and function of this critique transcends academic boundaries within the university, but humanists are arguably best placed to maximise its potential. It is worth stressing that this [mandate to critique] by no means implies a one-sidedly negative or subversive attitude towards a given form of government or particular policy initiative, but rather an ongoing diagnosis of the causes and effects of such policy; it is hence a form of constructive service, to which government [and corporate] leaders ought rightfully to pay attention.[1428]

[1424] Tu, 'The Humanities and Higher Education', p. 313.

[1425] See Tu, 'The Humanities and Higher Education', pp. 313-314.

[1426] See Tu, 'The Humanities and Higher Education', p. 314.

[1427] See Tu, 'The Humanities and Higher Education', p. 315.

[1428] Tu, 'The Humanities and Higher Education', pp. 316-317.

Both public and private ownership of universities bring their own attendant risks, but the common denominator of good university governance is the willingness to avoid 'the sort of compulsory education [which] bleeds easily into politicisation'[1429]: 'A university's capacity to provide such critique is not to be taken for granted; it is intimately connected to the political [and social and cultural and economic] reality in which the university operates. The success of university education depends upon the university's ability to remain independent of political and other external influences and interests.'[1430] The right to education cannot be understood as the right to be force-fed the same material as everyone else; a certain freedom to choose among a smorgasbord of more or less well-chosen options is intrinsic to the idea of humanistic self-cultivation, and a good university will find ways to promote such a spirit of open exchange among students and across faculty and department boundaries.[1431]

While 'an independent critical spirit' is 'the very quintessence of humanistic study'[1432], such a spirit cannot be cultivated in a knowledge vacuum; the Axial Age civilisations in particular, with their millennial histories, represent an enormous collecitve mine of untapped wisdom which can only be accessed if the enormous barriers to entry - linguistic, ethnic, historical, doctrinal and so on - have first been overcome. In the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, for example, American understanding of foreign cultures 'proved very poor - whether of Islam, East Asian or South Asian cultures - and this ignorance of global history led to a narrowly politicised view of events.'[1433] As well as improving citizens' ability to understand complex political problems, such education enhances the practice of all day-to-day professions: 'The passing down of humanistic tradition is not just the business of humanities scholars; such humane concern is a vital part of every true vocation. […] Whichever path a person chooses to walk in later life, literature, history and philosophy are [an inheritance] she should not have to do without.'[1434] Humanities education may or may not be a net driver of economic growth and technological development (i.e. once the trade-off between enhanced creativity and sunk education costs has been made), but what they *do* unquestionably provide is an unmonetisable, living connection to a past which is both awe-inspiring and never fully graspable, a force calling out for *your* creative redirection:

> In this period of explosion in knowledge, people are inclined arrogantly to assume that the more [technologically] advanced we become, the less we need to hear from the ancients. […] While it is true that a random school child today knows more in some areas than the greatest minds of the past, knowledge built on mere information, no matter how comprehensive, cannot

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[1429] Tu, 'The Humanities and Higher Education', p. 318.

[1430] Tu, 'The Humanities and Higher Education', 317.

[1431] See Tu, 'The Humanities and Higher Education', pp. 318-321.

[1432] Tu, 'The Humanities and Higher Education', p. 321.

[1433] Tu, 'The Humanities and Higher Education', p. 323.

[1434] Tu, 'The Humanities and Higher Education', p. 323.

> be equated with wisdom, [which always requires] direct experience and embodied thinking.[1435]

Reading the classics of Eastern and Western thought is hence understood by Tu as a series of 'exercises in wisdom'[1436]: 'A huge challenge we are facing is how to get the best of traditional culture [back] into our cultural tradition.'[1437] While this applies universally to all cultures, the echo of traditional culture in China has grown particularly weak since the wholesale Westernisation occasioned by the country's forced opening to colonial powers in the 19th century. The long intergenerational chain of Chinese 'humanistic concern' was then properly shattered by the Cultural Revolution; reestablishing it in a 21st-century context of rapid 'Reform and Opening Up' has not been, and will not be, easy.[1438]

The problem of defining the humanities' role in higher education, however, transcends national borders and local histories, and is essentially the same in all times and places:

> The reason why 'general education' or 'character education' matters at university is the intimate link between humanities study and humanistic concern. Humanistic concern looks like a series of concentric circles: the individual is part of a family; the family is part of a community, a country, the planet, the universe. Academia is completely broken down into separate disciplines, but this does not correspond to reality; […] humanistic concern is not bounded by the walls of academic research. Even if she is brilliant in one specific field, an individual researcher's general moral integrity may be next to non-existent. […] Conversely, natural scientists like biologists or physicists may be rich in their reservoirs of humanistic concern, richer even than certain humanities scholars.
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> […] In the face of what looks like the creeping marginalisation of the humanities, educators urgently need a change of perspective. The day that the humanities can seamlessly melt into a society's political and economic agenda is the day they finally lose their independent value and function. Because of the fundamental difficulty of measuring and evaluating the effects of humanities [education] (this is what separates the humanities from the natural and even the social sciences), the problem educators should face is not the marginalisation of the humanities, but rather how to make the most of this [eternal and permanent] marginalisation and get on […] with the business of character education, [which is] the cultivation of humanistic concern.[1439]

[1435] Tu, 'The Humanities and Higher Education', p. 325.

[1436] See Tu, 'The Humanities and Higher Education', pp. 326-327.

[1437] Tu, 'The Humanities and Higher Education', p. 327.

[1438] See Tu, 'The Humanities and Higher Education', p. 327.

[1439] Tu, 'The Humanities and Higher Education', pp. 328, 336.

6. 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn'

Tu begins this 2010 lecture at Zhongshan University by admitting that he 'wants to share some personal feelings rather than offer a turgid philosophical argument'.[1440] This does not mean, however, that he wants to abolish privacy:

> If I have certain feelings of my own, that's my business first; it may be that I want to write them in a diary and not share them with anyone. But the 'personal' I have in mind is the sphere of things that I not only want to share, but also feel could be of common interest, accessible in some way - things that others could trust. At the same time, I also think that these things could be critically appraised by others, whether in the form of eulogy or opposition (either way, it will be enlightening for me). […] But generally speaking, only philosophy conducted within Departments of Philosophy is counted as professional these days. My goals in this lecture are broader: one might say that I want to express my [personal] feelings about Philosophy as a discipline.[1441]

There is a lifelong tension in Tu's work between 'philosophy' as a necessary tennis net for the mind - a global game with various august traditions of rigour, a humanistic corrective to effete, self-indulgent lyricism in art - and a counter-vision of philosophy as a desertified provincial corner of a failed Western experiment in secular rationality. Tu's overall attitude of reform over revolution - reflected in his long and patient engagement in organisations like the Institut International de Philosophie and International Federation of Philosophical Societies - suggests a desire to cling to 'Philosophy' as a discrete discipline within the humanities, and to avoid its subsumption under the aegis of a more broadly defined humanities curriculum. This may just, however, be the compromise of a pragmatist; rather than trying to 'overthrow' Philosophy (an impossible, Himalayan exercise), he wants to make it into something new, dialogical, and international:

> Regarding the question of philosophy's 'spiritual turn', I would like to explain something at the outset. I am not talking about a wholesale transformation to a spiritual [rather than material] civilisation; I am also not saying that all branches of philosophy will be, or should be, 'spiritualised'. I am simply saying that, faced with the challenges of the 21st Century, Philosophy as a whole should expect a wave of spiritualisation along broadly Confucian lines. […] I look forward to a critical discussion of this topic.[1442]

<u>'Knowledge and Wisdom'</u>

[1440] Tu Weiming, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn' (Zhexue de Jingshen Zhuanxiang'), in Tu Weiming, *Ershiyi Shiji de Rujia (Confucianism in the 21st Century)*, (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2014), p. 109.

[1441] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', p. 110.

[1442] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', pp. 110-111.

Tu begins his answer to the perennial question of the difference between knowledge and wisdom by retracing the history of his intellectual involvement with India: following the Cold War chill in Sino-Indian political and cultural relations, Tu sought to play a part in reopening the channels of dialogue between the two countries, helping to organise events under the rubric 'Knowledge, Wisdom and Spirituality' in Delhi and Beijing respectively in the early 2000s.[1443] Surprised at his Indian colleagues' insistence on the need to understand all three concepts together ('frankly speaking, at the time I had no idea what the relationship between wisdom and spirituality was supposed to be, and I didn't know what the difference was meant to look like either'), Tu 'gradually came to understand what these Indian scholars had in mind with the term "spirituality".'[1444] Old modes of scholarship based on mastery and memorisation of specific fields of knowledge have gradually been replaced, in the modern era, by broader and more interdisciplinary approaches made possible by the ubiquity of information; while this allows for unprecedented breadth of inquiry by individual researchers, Tu wants to cling to an old ideal of learning the classics for their own sakes; he looks forward to a day when all graduates of Peking University will have read Confucian classics like *The Great Learning* and *Zhongyong*.[1445] Still, the penchant for memorisation does not, on its own, count as knowledge, let alone wisdom; Tu offers the example of a Harvard student who memorised *The Great Learning* - despite failing to understand the meaning of the classical Chinese text - in order to illustrate that a photographic memory is a mere tool, not a true 'embodiment' of knowledge.[1446]

As for 'wisdom', even the illiterate can possess such a thing; learning the classics, by rote or otherwise, may be a form of 'spiritual exercise', and *conducive* to wisdom perhaps, but it is no guarantee of anything.[1447] After comparing the respective approaches of Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming, Tu challenges his reader to devise an empirical test for the presence of wisdom[1448], safe in the knowledge that there cannot be one:

> There is no wisdom without wit. What, then, is the relationship between wit, rationality, intelligence and emotional sensitivity? People often criticise Chinese academic culture by saying that it is a kind of hermetically sealed box - full of vague references, lacking in explicit exercises in logic, reliant on analogy over analysis. But at least as far as Chinese *philosophy* is concerned, this is a pretty unfair view: the tradition explicitly links wit with emotional sensitivity, and considers them synonyms of a certain highly developed intuition. I can even assert that all major thinkers in the Chinese

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[1443] See Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', pp. 111-112.

[1444] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', p. 112.

[1445] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', p. 114.

[1446] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', pp. 115-116.

[1447] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', p. 117.

[1448] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', p. 119.

> tradition, whichever school they may have endorsed, have been capable of feats of logic to make any modern philosopher proud.[1449]

Even philosophy, however, must allow room for the 'fruitful ambiguity'[1450] of the best literature: 'While Chinese philosophy is happy to talk about "definitions", there is a prior understanding that such definitions are always limited, because definitions arbitrarily fix the scope of things. […] Ambiguity can sometimes be its own abundance; do not think that ambiguity always implies a lack of rationality, intelligence, or clarity.'[1451] In the face of an all-conquering Enlightenment hyperrationality, Tu wishes to defend something - in effect, poetry (or art in general) - that science will never conquer, no matter how sophisticated its methods. While many 20th-century Chinese reformers - Hu Shi and countless others - wagered on science's ability to resolve most of the big human questions, Tu takes the Socratic line, but adds a creative twist: 'The more we know, the more we know that we *should* know, but don't.'[1452] There is something in the wit or emotivity of humanistic engagement which generates longing; if we read one great story by an author, for example, we may be inspired - by no means irrationally - to go off and read everything that author has written (the same principle of contagion naturally applies across all arts). Zhuangzi - not Tu's favourite Chinese philosopher by any means, but still - put it this way: 'Life is finite, but knowledge is infinite.'[1453] This does not obviate the need for a dialogue between science and the humanities ('one of the most important dialogues of the 21st Century looks set to be between science and religion', and no 'serious' religion or cultural tradition could wish to pretend otherwise[1454]), but this dialogue can only be driven from the humanities' side: not everyone can or should pursue the frontiers of scientific knowledge, but the question of 'wisdom' applies to absolutely everyone, regardless of vocation. Indeed, such wisdom, to the extent that one is lucky enough to possess it, is the source of a true sense of vocation in the first place.

'Wisdom and Spirituality'

Although Tu makes much of books like Pierre Hadot's *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (2001), he also recognises that Western discourse on spirituality will not dominate the 21st Century as Western philosophy reigned in the 20th. He hence begins his discussion of 'Wisdom and Spirituality' by returning to his ongoing dialogues with Indian philosophers, most notably Rajangam Balasubramanian (coiner of the term 'Spiritual Humanism'): traditional Confucianism does not speak of 'spirituality' as such, but rather of the

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[1449] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', p. 121.

[1450] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', p. 121.

[1451] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', p. 122.

[1452] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', pp. 122-123.

[1453] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', p. 124.

[1454] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', p. 123.

‘harmonious unity of Heaven and human beings’ (*tianrenheyi*)[1455]; when Confucius himself speaks of his ‘ear’ being ‘obedient’ by the age of sixty, what he is describing is a spiritual transformation in which he has achieved ‘the ability to hear the external voice beyond his own subjective judgments’, a phenomenon explicable as neither arrogance nor hallucination, but only as ’a very high level of personal development.’[1456] Reaching a further horizon, by the age of seventy, at which he is able to ‘follow the dictates of [his] own heart’, Confucius enjoys ‘a meeting of individual freedom with the highest rationality’, a fusion in which he finally, and spontaneously, ‘wants what he is supposed to want’.[1457] Such an understanding of the individual’s relationship with the transcendent is scarcely possible within the confines of mainstream secular humanism; in a post-Freudian, post-Darwinian world, it may even seem quaint to place so much emphasis on spiritual exertion, as if such ‘work’ could ever be anything other than an exercise in self-deception. And yet this space of freedom from scientific determinism is precisely the one Tu wishes to carve out for the humanities in general and philosophy in particular: no amount of science can extricate us from the transcendental pleasure and responsibility of cultivating a relationship with ourselves. Western philosophy, under the leadership of figures like (the Catholic) Charles Taylor[1458], has slowly begun to recognise this structural poverty of secular humanism; Tu spent a significant portion of his academic career in the United States critically examining such kindred perspectives, both to learn something for himself and to position the modern Confucian contribution to ‘World Spirituality’ in its proper context: not ‘the enemy’s turf’ as such, but an ‘emerging global discourse’ still heavily dominated, for better and worse, by Western academic voices and habits of thought.

‘New Trends in the World of Philosophy’

While interwar Europe had been, via fora such as the Eranos Institute, a decent platform for global philosophical exchange among leading Eastern and Western minds, the Second World War, Tu argues, changed things:

> Europe was dependent on Marshall Plan aid, and European philosophers were extremely unsure of themselves. Anglo-American philosophers, by contrast, were highly self-confident; in the Anglosphere, analytic philosophy rose to prominence. This was at odds with the development of existentialism and phenomenology [on the Continent]. […] After the Second World War, even the most creative European philosophers felt unqualified and unable to engage with non-Western traditions; they had their hands full unpacking the horrors of Nazism.[1459]

[1455] See Tu, ‘Philosophy’s Spiritual Turn’, pp. 126-127.

[1456] Tu, ’Philosophy’s Spiritual Turn’, p. 128.

[1457] Tu, ‘Philosophy’s Spiritual Turn’, p. 128.

[1458] See Tu, ‘Philosophy’s Spiritual Turn’, pp. 126-127.

[1459] Tu, ‘Philosophy’s Spiritual Turn’, p. 130.

Half a world away, most contemporary Sinophone humanities scholars and social scientists had nevertheless been heavily influenced by the leading proponents of this inward-looking European 'discourse' ('Foucault, Derrida, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Habermas'[1460]). Tu was one of these: 'I met Foucault and Derrida, and I exchanged words with Habermas a few times. They were all extremely careful not to think too big; they felt that if they could solve Europe's local philosophical problems, that would already be great.'[1461] Moreover, much of the influence of 'continental' philosophy in Asia may be a reflection of its subsequent influence in the United States; it was first and foremost the 'irresistible rise and global influence' of *Anglo-American* philosophy after the Second World War which led Tu's generation to believe that 'if you wanted to do philosophical research, that meant extremely strict discipline and logical rigour; otherwise it wouldn't count as philosophy.'[1462] Arriving in the United States in 1962 on a Harvard postgraduate scholarship, however, Tu was lucky enough to be able to attend classes right across the university:

> At the time, I was very interested in Comparative Literature, but what attracted me most of all was Philosophy, the History of Ideas. The Harvard Philosophy Department, however, had only five sections: Logic, Epistemology, Philosophy of Language, Ontology, and Philosophy of Mind. I was interested in ethics, aesthetics and the philosophy of religion. These were not only absent from the curriculum, but actively regarded as unworthy of serious study. Now ignorance is one thing - we are all guilty of it to some degree - but ignorance wedded to arrogance is always a fatal cocktail.[1463]

This scientisation of philosophy ('the Department's attitude was "don't bother discussing anything before Wittgenstein, or outside the sphere of Anglo-American philosophical logic"'[1464]) may have eased slightly by the 1980s - Emersonian aesthetics and Rawlsian political philosophy were now able to be discussed, an 'unimaginable' improvement on the sixties[1465] - but even so, the older Deweyan ideal of the 'public philosopher' was emphatically *not* embodied by the ivory-tower generation of W.V. Quine (1908-2000).[1466] While this cultural moment did eventually pass, its influence was still felt, as always, well beyond its zenith, as the young acolytes trained in its heyday assumed positions of institutional power; as recently as 2010, Tu was still able to affirm that 'anyone who wants to study philosophy in

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[1460] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', p. 130.

[1461] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', p. 130.

[1462] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', pp. 130-131.

[1463] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', p. 131.

[1464] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', pp. 131-132.

[1465] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', p. 132.

[1466] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', p. 132.

the United States today will find it hard not to walk the analytic route for at least a good portion of the way.'[1467]

Never thoroughly convinced by American institutions and practices which failed to take his own rich Confucian heritage seriously, Tu set out to reform them from within, or at least from the margins, teaching Chinese philosophy courses outside the philosophical mainstream in Departments of History and elsewhere.[1468] Caught between Europe and Asia, 'provincial' American philosophers would gradually have to decide, in an era of accelerating globalisation and transdisciplinarity, whether they 'wanted to drown in the Pacific or the Atlantic first'[1469]; Europe was always going to prove the less daunting option. While the influence of Foucault, Derrida and company may have proven immense in the 1980s and 1990s, the pull of the Pacific may ultimately, beyond the copycat scientism of Asia's rapid modernisation, prove stronger in the long run[1470]; Tu himself has certainly sought to recover the pre-Meiji wisdom of the broader Confucian cultural sphere - not the degenerate pseudo-Confucian cronyism of the late Qing Dynasty, but something older - and to bring this wisdom, somehow renewed for the 21st Century, into dialogue with a Western philosophy (and indeed, a broader Western humanistic tradition) which has lost its way on both sides of the Atlantic since 1945 by bringing either too much or not enough of the Enlightenment to bear on global problems. Alongside the arrogant triumphalism of the Anglo-American philosophical sphere, indeed, continental European philosophy 'was also in a very different place after the Second World War than it was before it. The only major continental philosopher not to break with the Enlightenment tradition was Habermas; the others - postmodernists, structuralists and poststructuralists, feminists, ecologists - were all deeply critical of the Enlightenment mentaility.'[1471] In East Asia, however, and especially in China,

> the influence of Enlightenment thinking remains enormous. […] Scientism is a form of ideology which can be traced back to the experimental sciences of the 19th Century. Its logic is clear: if it can't be measured, observed, or touched, it isn't science. On this view, Chinese medicine, for example, becomes pseudoscience, and the humanities must endure a quantitative turn. A publication in a top journal is worth 10 points; a slightly less prestigious publication is worth 8; a third-rate publication might be worth 4 points, but the overall logic is short-term quantitative. There is nothing wrong with measuring things - without measurement, there are no standards beyond raw subjectivity - but in philosophy, history and literature, there must be other criteria than 'publish or perish'. […] John Rawls, for example, taught at Harvard for ten years without publishing a book, but any one of his lectures would have been good enough to be published in its

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[1467] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', p. 132.

[1468] See Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', p. 133.

[1469] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', p. 133.

[1470] See Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', pp. 133-134.

[1471] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', p. 134.

> own right; everyone knew how talented he was, how much time he was devoting to building his long-term legacy, and so people protected him. When *A Theory of Justice* was finally published, its influence was enormous; it went on to become one of the great works of 20th-century political philosophy.[1472]

With the likes of Rawls, Quine and Habermas on one side of the Enlightenment ledger and Foucault, Derrida and the postmodern 'theorists of power' on the other - all set against a backdrop of a gradual quantification of academic life driven by the runaway success of the natural sciences and the illusions of seriousness offered by modern beancounting methods - Tu wants to identify a 21st-century balm for philosophy's postwar wounds, and to celebrate anyone and everyone driving a 'spiritual turn' in the global humanities. If the likes of Hilary Putnam, Gianni Vattimo, Charles Taylor and even the later Foucault and Habermas all managed such a turn within a Judeo-Christian framework (and if a new generation of philosophers, including Martha Nussbaum, has achieved it within a predominantly Greek one), then what remains is to internationalise the conversation on spirituality via contact with the non-Western world.[1473]

After the excitement of the first World Congress of Philosophy to be held outside the West (Seoul in 2008)[1474], Tu campaigned enthusiastically to bring the WCP to China for the first time under the rubric 'Learning to be Human'. I was lucky enough to attend this event just after moving to Beijing in 2018, and I am in a position to know just how much energy and effort went into organising it. It is sad, therefore, but also true, that Tu's WCP Wang Yangming Lecture - 'Spiritual Humanism: Self, Community, Earth and Heaven' - has been viewed less than 1000 times on YouTube, while an initiative like the 'Happiness: Capitalism vs. Marxism' debate in April 2019 between Slavoj Zizek and Jordan Peterson, which covered essentially the same intellectual and spiritual terrain, reached an audience of millions online. Tu arguably belongs to the last generation for whom physical conferences were the chief form of academic exchange; the challenge for those who come after him is to find creative ways to pursue this agenda - as if 'Spiritual Humanism' could be said to have an 'agenda' - by taking advantage of an unprecedented media revolution comparable only to the advent of the printing press. If the humanities cannot capitulate to management jargon and the quantitative hegemony of the natural sciences within the ivory tower, nor can they cede the global public square to the ravages of the cultural marketplace and the myopic education policies of national governments without an ongoing fight. While it is not necessary to view Confucius himself as even the greatest *Confucian*[1475] (let alone as the leading voice in a global conversation), there are, Tu wants to assure us, resources in the long Confucian tradition of 'remonstrating with the ruler' which may serve philosophy - and the humanities in general - extremely well in their quest for 21st-century renewal and relevance.

[1472] Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', pp. 134-135.

[1473] See Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', pp. 136-138.

[1474] See Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', p. 139.

[1475] See Tu, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn', pp. 144-145.

7. 'Spiritual Humanism: An Emerging Global Discourse'

This 2015 speech, delivered in English at the Dialogue of Civilization Research Institute's 2015 Rhodes Forum, has also been viewed just a couple of thousand times on YouTube; we reproduce parts of the text here (which I had the honour of transcribing) for the same reasons most of the other chapters focus on Chinese sources: not to spread any gospel, but intimately to introduce the steeper and less travelled sections of Tu Weiming's 'quest' to the English-language reader. Although Tu falls back - here as elsewhere - on philosophical systematisations which cumulatively function as a recurring chorus or series of refrains in his work, each lecture adds its own inimitable flourishes: to the avid Tu reader, the meat of the main argument - recognisable and gradually even predictable in its flavour - eventually becomes less tasty than the crusts, which are worth savouring every time. He begins this lecture, for example, by saying what he has said a hundred times before in other places:

> Confucian humanism - or such is my understanding of that tradition - seeks harmony with nature and mutuality with Heaven. It is neither secular nor anthropocentric; it regards the secular as sacred by infusing Earth, body, family and community with spiritual value, and urges humans to realise and rediscover the ultimate meaning and deepest source of life in their Heaven-endowed natures. If our nature is conferred by Heaven, then the highest human aspiration is the unity of Heaven and humanity; human beings [on this account] are not merely [living] creatures, but partners in the cosmic process. Through active participation in the so-called Great Transformation, we are, in a way, *co*-Creators, and thus responsible for the well-being not only of the human community, but of Heaven, Earth and the myriad things in between. This 'anthropocosmic' insight, as I call it, can serve as a corrective to the secular humanism of the modernistic mentality.[1476]

Gradually, however, he starts groping for something fresh, something beyond pre-scripted New Confucian formula:

> My second observation: the convergence of cultures and religions requires a dialogical wisdom that recognises the interplay between a sense of rootedness and a sense of self-transcendence. Enlightenment demands for certainty are often in conflict with the patience required to deal with the complexities and ambiguities found in intercivilisational dialogue. Dichotomous modes of thinking - or the assignment of complex phenomena to neatly conceived categories - are incompatible with openness to radically different ways of perceiving the same reality. Teilhard de Chardin talks about 'centre-to-centre unisons', which suggests that individual elements unite by touching each other at the creative core of their being. They release new energy, which leads to more complex units; indeed, greater complexity leads

[1476] Tu Weiming, 'Spiritual Humanism: An Emerging Global Discourse', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ya-jsyg6c_I&t=5s, 18/12/2015 (accessed 30/1/2020).

> to greater interiority, which in turn leads to more creative unisons. Throughout the process, individual elements do not lose their identity, but rather deepen and fulfil it in unison [with others]. The Confucian belief that takes self-cultivation, a form of spiritual discipline, as the root for regulation of the family, governance of the state, and peace under Heaven is not based on deductive logic; it is based on the assumption that, through dialogue, individuals participating in an ever-expanding network of relationships will not lose their personal identities but develop an increasingly complex consciousness that actually enhances the interiority of each individual. […] The Confucian idea of harmony is harmony *without uniformity*; this aptly captures the fruitful interplay between communion and diversity. This form of humanism - taking the concrete, living human being as the focus of its attention - incorporates other units by realising the self through communion. Self-transcendence paradoxically enhances our sense of rootedness in Earth, body, family and community. […] The courage and wisdom to enter into others' consciousness, allowing ourselves to experience the other's values from her own perspective, is enormously enriching, [and permits] the discovery of values that are rejected, submerged, marginalised or only intuited in our own traditions. [Access to] another tradition, which may be radically different, can be truly liberating. It is unlikely that those with a rationalist mindset can really take advantage of such a cross-cultural enterprise.[1477]

Just as he has offered an eloquent defence of humanistic education for its own sake, however, Tu returns to the lazy instrumental argumentation which tries to use collective fear - of nuclear war, environmental disaster and so on - to motivate individual self-cultivation: 'From the perspective of the world of ideas, how we find a path towards peace and cultural understanding through dialogue among civilisations and a sustainable relationship with the Earth depends on a new way of thinking, a new cosmology, and indeed a new ethos.'[1478] When he finally asks, 'Is "Spiritual Humanism" a viable option to emerge (or re-emerge) from the current human condition?', the answer is surely that it must persuade on its own merits for the *individual*, not because of its ability to 'promote peace' or 'save the environment'. These are the pleasant potential side effects; once Spiritual Humanism becomes a vehicle for environmentalism or pacifism, it becomes just another ideology, which is precisely what Tu is trying to avoid by defending the autonomy of the humanities in the first place. Still, he can't quite resist having his cake and eating it too:

> In our secular age, presumably as the result of what Max Weber characterises as the process of 'rationalisation', *secular* humanism has become the dominant ideology. It is so common and prevalent that it now overshadows virtually all religious and [other] ideological persuasions. […] By advocating the unity of Heaven and humanity, a sense of reverence towards Heaven, respect and care for the Earth, a fiduciary commitment to

[1477] Tu, 'Spiritual Humanism: An Emerging Global Discourse'.

[1478] Tu, 'Spiritual Humanism: An Emerging Global Discourse'.

> solidarity, and peace under Heaven (these are not simply idealistic formulations), Spiritual Humanism underscores dialogue, reconciliation, and harmony. The *opposite* of harmony is uniformity and sameness; a precondition for harmony is difference, respect for the other. The emergence of an ecumenical and cosmopolitan consciousness is a precondition for us to envision a truly authentic culture of perpetual peace. I assume that all historical religions originating in the Axial Age and indigenous traditions throughout the world, when confronting the dual challenges of ecological degradation on the one hand and dysfunctional global governance on the other, would be encouraged to cultivate - in addition to their particular religious grammars of action (i.e. their own dogmas) - the language of 'humanism' as I understand it. We choose to be Christian, Buddhist, Muslim [and so on], but inevitably we are human as well. Put differently, we may choose to be human in Christian, Muslim, or Buddhist ways, but we are obligated by the current state of the world to be responsible for the well-being of the human community as a whole. The humanism that can guide us to survive and flourish in the 21st Century must broaden our intellectual horizons and deepen the moral [roots] of our current ethos.[1479]

Either Spiritual Humanism is good for the individual first, irrespective of historical, political, economic or ecological circumstances, or it is a calculated ideological response to a collective crisis. No feeling person could fail to be moved by environmental degradation or social unrest, but this does not mean that such crises should be the *drivers* of spiritual reform; on the contrary, such instrumental, reactive, quantitative, scientistic thinking is precisely what Tu has spent his Confucian life opposing. The case of China itself - and the reason why Tu packed up his comfortable retirement in Massachusetts to return to his country of birth at the age of 70 - is instructive in this regard:

> For almost a century now, the intellectual ethos of China has been overwhelmed by scientism, materialism, and - more recently - commercialism (not to mention instrumental rationality). We desperately need to formulate effective critiques of the unintended negative consequences of the advent of modernity, such as aggressive anthropocentrism, imperialism, colonialism, the Faustian drive to dominate, and possessive individualism. […] China's moral crisis is closely related to a lack of faith in something beyond the material world here and now. It is [a matter] of great urgency that Chinese people, especially the young, cultivate a sense of awe or reverence - toward Heaven, Earth and the human world in between - [which stretches] beyond wealth and power. Spiritual Humanism - a holistic vision for human flourishing - can help religions to become publicly spirited. It is vitally important for Chinese political and intellectual leaders to become religiously musical; this would certainly improve Sino-foreign relationships, especially with the West, the Islamic world and the Hindu [sphere]. It is also crucial for Chinese leaders to cultivate religious sensitivity through *mutually* beneficial dialogues with Chinese minorities, notably the

[1479] Tu, 'Spiritual Humanism: An Emerging Global Discourse'.

> Tibetans and non-Chinese-speaking Muslims. This, in my view, goes beyond issues of security; it strikes at the heart of Chinese cultural identity and global perceptions of China as a civilisation-state.[1480]

Spiritual Humanism can never be a perfect match for any government agenda, however noble or base; individual spirituality is logically prior to any collective or political ideologies, and occupies an entirely separate sphere. Humanistic education can indeed be pursued as a matter of government policy, but only ever for its own unquantifiable sake; otherwise it ceases to be humanistic, and becomes something else. It is in this sense that Tu, resigning himself to the eternal 'marginalisation' of the humanities in a public life destined to endure a modicum of quantification, bureaucratisation and superficial accountability, wants to turn his attention away from 'politics' altogether and towards individual ethics, not as a driving force of social and political reform (though it may lead to that) but out of a concern, always, for the *individual* human being in her relationship with *herself*. Still, Tu slips constantly in and out of humanistic 'for-its-own-sakism' and ideologised instrumental rationality in defence of his 'emerging global discourse':

> In Spiritual Humanism, reciprocity and the so-called Golden Rule […] must be supported by the positive [Confucianesque] principle of humanity: 'In order to establish myself, I help others to establish themselves. In order to enlarge myself, I help others to enlarge themselves.' By implication, in international communications, the global public good (e.g. environmental protection and the establishment of world order) takes precedence over exclusively national interests. I think the time is ripe for us to engage in dialogue on core values. Universal values embodied in the Enlightenment of the modern West, such as liberty, rationality, the rule of law, human rights, and the dignity of the individual should be fruitfully compared and substantially enriched by other universal values, sometimes wrongly characterised as so-called 'Asian' values, 'African' values and so forth. These values are all embodied in Spiritual Humanism, which is a legacy for the world - not restricted to the Sinic [sphere] - [embracing] justice, rightness or fairness, sympathy, civility, responsibility and social solidarity. In China, given the severity of corruption and untrustworthiness in the public sphere, we have learned to appreciate the values underlying the *homo economicus*, which can be defined as the [Enlightenment] values I just mentioned: liberty, rationality, the rule of law, human rights, and the dignity of the individual. [But] obviously, in order for the human community to survive and flourish, these values must be augmented and enriched by other universal values.[1481]

When he concentrates on specific cases, the issue at stake - the 'emergence' or otherwise of 'Spiritual Humanism' as a worthy subject for individual consideration - becomes immediately clear:

[1480] Tu, 'Spiritual Humanism: An Emerging Global Discourse'.

[1481] Tu, 'Spiritual Humanism: An Emerging Global Discourse'.

> Let me give you one example: if I insist on the importance of [basic] human rights (I respect your rights, you respect mine), even if I am a billionnaire and you are homeless, I have no obligation whatsoever to help you; other values will have to enter into the picture, such as justice, equality, fairness - not just legality, but civility; not just rights, but responsibilities; not just the dignity of the individual, but also social solidarity; not just rationality, but sympathy, empathy and compassion. An important spiritual exercise in the practice of Confucian self-cultivation is to extend our sympathetic feelings so that they encompass an ever-expanding network of human and non-human relatedness. The ideal of spiritual humanism is to form one body with Heaven, Earth and the myriad things. [But] my understanding of this problem [comes] not simply from my [ongoing] work within my own tradition - Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism - but through my extremely fruitful encounters and interactions with theologians - Christian, Orgratitudethodox Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Hindu - and [representatives] of indigenous (e.g. African) traditions (*ubuntu* etc.). The great advances in communication and information technologies have exponentially broadened and deepened the human capacity to learn, to relearn, and to unlearn. Space and time have collapsed into a new reality of immediate accessibility to data, information and knowledge about Heaven above, Earth below, and all things in between.[1482]

In other words, it is better for the *billionnaire* that she expand her sphere of moral 'relatedness', irrespective of flow-on justice effects for society or the environment. This, or so the 'argument' goes, is because she will enrich her own spiritual life by doing so, but as Tu has been saying all along, this is not a *rational* argument. Like the itinerant teacher and arch remonstrator Confucius himself, Tu is in the billionnaire-*coaxing* industry; the only way to be convincing is not just to talk hucksterishly about what spiritual enrichment 'could do for you', but to embody that enrichment to the extent that others - even billionnaires - are able to imbibe it directly from you. Tu talks *about* this 'spiritual transmission' business an awful lot, and in his best moments he succeeds in mainlining wisdom to his readers, but he also seems to want, like Hans Küng with his *Projekt Weltethos* in the 1990s, to market Spiritual Humanism to a hard-sell audience of 'religious' people around the world who already know (thank you very much) who they are:

> The defining characteristic of Spiritual Humanism is the awareness that we ought to show reverence for Heaven, for the transcendent. In my interreligious and intercivilisational dialogues over the last four decades, I have come to the realisation that Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Christians, Muslims [and others] can take an authentic spiritual-humanistic stance without in any way losing their primary identities within their own faith communities. There is an increasing number of believers who are willing and happy to call themselves 'Hindu humanists', 'Buddhist humanists', 'Jewish humanists', 'Christian humanists', 'Muslim humanists' [and so on], provided

[1482] Tu, 'Spiritual Humanism: An Emerging Global Discourse'.

> that the term ‘humanist’ can be broadened and deepened to embrace a true cosmopolitanism which is both naturalistic and spiritual.[1483]

For Spiritual Humanism truly to ‘emerge’, it need only improve or inspire *one* person; a quantitative argument about numbers of Hindus, Muslims, atheists or anyone else brought within its fold is missing Tu’s own real point (and I would have my own doubts about the numbers; there are boring fundamentalists in all traditions). Spiritual Humanism is not a political or social or collective platform, irrespective of its positive flow-on effects for society via its influence on individuals; it is, rather, an idea which - to the extent that it can be said to be of any ‘benefit’ at all - can only work at the level of *you*, whoever and wherever you are. Thinking that Spiritual Humanism can solve complex environmental crises, avert nuclear war or move some other collective metaphorical mountain - though who knows what it might *actually* do? - is the wrong way to start, more a *symptom* of the Enlightenment’s obsession with instrumental rationality than any inkling of a cure. Tu hints at this on and off, but like his ‘New Confucian’ forebears he seems so sprung in his defensive posture regarding his beloved Confucianism, so used to fending off challenges and standing up for himself and his tradition in two countries (the United States and China) where it has, to put it mildly, not been particularly welcome, that he ends up adding instrumental, ‘business case’ arguments alongside his intrinsic, humanistic ones. Like any artist in a world of functionaries, certain strategies of compromise and speaking the language of the enemy may make more sense than alienating everyone and having no pot to piss in, but the ‘emergence’ or otherwise of Spiritual Humanism will ultimately have nothing to do with sociology or focus-group analysis, and everything to do with poetry. As a philosopher, Tu himself is somewhere in the middle: the sociologist and the poet jostle for position from one comma to the next.

[1483] Tu, ’Spiritual Humanism: An Emerging Global Discourse’.

8. Confucius: Rethinking the Human

'The goal of Confucian self-cultivation,' Tu begins this short 1988 article, is 'to take the human being in her original, animal state and, via the discipline and criticism of the community, to build a self-consciousness which creatively transforms her into a concrete expression of truth, beauty and goodness.'[1484] It will take Tu - and us - a chapter to unpack the layers hidden in this statement. There is no doubt that the traditional Confucian emphasis on shame and the internalisation of the 'gaze' of others in human moral development is partially at odds with the Enlightenment liberation of the individual *from* her church or community. Protestantism's emphasis on the individual's direct, personal relationship with God helped to clear the way for a modern Western culture of alienation and detachment from the community, breeding an essential 'fuck you' stance to anyone trying to impose moral authority, and hastening a society-wide retreat into guilt-free (or *almost* guilt-free) consumerism.

Tu is convinced that you can't begin to talk about morality without Golden Rule prohibitions, at least in the negative ('Do *not* do unto others' etc.).[1485] While Erich Fromm and others have argued persuasively that the Golden Rule can always be understood as a strategy of mere self-interest and a convenient cloak for the most rampant forms of capitalism[1486], Tu wants to remind his readers - victims of 'Enlightenment' excess in this area - that ethics is more than just letting people do what they want. There is no meaningful individual 'identity' which has not been forged in a prison-like cauldron of social forces (i.e. family and school). Adult 'freedom' is the reward for time served; it cannot be conferred directly on minors without preventing them from ever finding their way to 'truth, beauty and goodness' in the first place.

The path itself, nevertheless, is always one's own; to reduce Confucianism to a boring and prescriptive 'social ethics' is to make a grave and total category error:

> *Xiao* or so-called 'filial piety' is indeed a value with a uniquely Confucian flavour, but it is not at all to be understood as some instrumental tool invented to serve a collective social need. Filial attitudes and behaviours may have a positive, measurable social function [i.e. for the parents directly, or for the stability and continuity of the society as a whole], but Confucian *xiao* is built on *individual* feelings of debt and gratitude; it takes a biological

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[1484] Tu Weiming, 'Confucius: Rethinking the Human' ('Kongzi: Ren de Fansi'), in Kong Xianglai and Chen Peiyu (eds.), *Tu Weiming Sixiang Xuejie Wenxuan*, (Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2014), p. 190.

[1485] See Tu, 'Confucius: Rethinking the Human', p. 190.

[1486] For a discussion of Fromm and the Golden Rule, see Chapter 5 of my *From Global Ethic to World Ethos? Building on Hans Küng's Legacy of Basic Trust in Life*, (Karl Schlecht Stiftung, 2018), (http://www.karl-schlecht.de/fileadmin/daten/Download/FD/From_Global_Ethic_Gesamt_PDF_Keir.pdf), pp. 72-76.

> fact of life and creatively elevates and transforms it into an embodied, humane, ethical imperative.[1487]

The ultimate justification for Confucian social discipline, therefore, is humanistic *self*-realisation (*weijizhixue* or 'learning for the self'), not conformity to an external, totalitarian law; one honours one's parents by freely and creatively transforming the tradition one inherits, not by meekly following orders.

One can understand the Axial Age and its myriad global fruits (e.g. Islam) as the forerunners of the European Renaissance insofar as such Axial and post-Axial spriritualities mark a global shift from tribal to civic life, a budding of moral self-consciousness commensurate with more sedentary and less coercive modes of social organisation. It may not necessarily be most fruitful, however, to compare Confucian 'thought' or 'wisdom literature' with its main Axial Age counterparts (Greek, Hebrew etc.): Confucian *weijizhixue* arguably (or as *I* at least have argued[1488]) has much more in common with the emergence of the modern European *novel* - the tradition inaugurated by Cervantes - than it does with the Cartesian philosophy or Thomist theology which have their roots in Athens and Jerusalem. Yet Tu seems to prefer the Jasperian 'Axial Age' framework for explaining what is 'unique' about the Confucian understanding of the 'human':

> The *Analects* of Confucius are usually regarded as the embodiment of an earthy, humanistic realm, far from the lofty meditations of Greek philosophy and farther still from Hebrew prophecy, religiosity and fear of God. The view, however, that Confucius concentrated on human social, ethical and political relations, and had no interest in the natural sciences, aesthetics or individual spirituality, is utterly false. […] Japanese scholar Tomonubu Imamichi is one who has argued persuasively that Confucius's experience of beauty directly informed his understanding of human nature. […] Western philosophy has been influenced by the Greek and Hebrew traditions, and breaks up aesthetics, ethics and religious studies into three disciplines; Confucians, however, regard aesthetic experience as the foundation of moral education, and it is via moral education that one can intuit and complete the Way of Heaven. In the West, […] one is required to transcend aesthetics […] and abandon the realm of feeling entirely before one can establish universal, objective standards of ethical behaviour; beyond that, only a leap of faith can allow you to overcome the limits of rationality and accede to the mysterious realm of religion. This way of understanding the human condition, for all it may have been criticised in East and West, is still the organising principle of Literature, History, and Philosophy curricula at universities all over the world. If we unconsciously use this template to understand the Confucian tradition, it is hard to avoid neglecting its aesthetic and spiritual dimensions and reducing it to a more or less dull form of moralising.[1489]

[1487] Tu, 'Confucius: Rethinking the Human', p. 191.

[1488] See Chapter 24 of my *Spiritual Humanism as a World Ethos? An Anthology of Learning for the Self*.

[1489] Tu, 'Confucius: Rethinking the Human', p. 191.

Confucian 'moral education', then, is closer to Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale* than acquiescence to any pseudo-Kantian philosophical system. It is no coincidence that I mention one of the great 19-century Western *novels* here, because the novel is the part of Western culture where Tu's Confucian quest to 'build a self-consciousness which creatively transforms [the individual] into a concrete expression of truth, beauty and goodness' effectively plays out: rather than reflexively comparing the *Analects* to the Hebrew Bible or Plato's *Republic*, perhaps we should compare it to *Don Quijote*, or Richardson's *Pamela*, or Kafka's *The Trial* instead. The whole 'Is Chinese philosophy 'philosophy'? question can hence be elegantly avoided; if Western 'philosophy' at its worst is basically logic or rhetoric on steroids (or coke), then Tu's description of the *Analects* puts the text firmly in the realm of World Literature: 'The *Analects* describes a place and time where real, living individuals crossed paths, but even though it is focused on concrete people, places and events (and their interweaving significance), the truth, beauty and goodness it embodies has deep and universal philosophical import beyond merely local interest.'[1490] Like a great novel, the *Analects* achieves 'sacred' or canonical status because of the 'flavour of human feeling' it contains.[1491] Just as Milan Kundera seeks to disentangle the heritages of Cervantes and Descartes[1492], so too does Tu wish to stress that the 'humanism' practised by Confucius and his followers in the *Analects* is 'a world away' from the aggressive, anthropocentric and anti-religious 'humanism' of the post-Enlightenment, rational-self-maximising West. Confucius, indeed, offers us the chance for 'a deep reevaluation of the humanist project; the journey he undertakes is not primarily logical [Socrates], meditative [Buddha] or conceptual [Kant], but rather *ana*logical, and takes our own (aesthetic) experience as a foundation for "embodied knowledge".'[1493] In other words, the *Analects*, before it is anything else, is *art*. That Confucius allows us to 'rethink the human' is in a way trivial - all good books, films, paintings, songs and other forms of human artistic expression do that - but what the *Analects* really provide is a gateway for those trapped within the greying disciplinary confines of Philosophy to graduate to the broad sunshine coast of Literature. The old joke 'I didn't graduate *in* Philosophy; I graduated *from* it' applies well to the case of Tu Weiming, but like a good Platonist, he insists on going back to the cave and digging his comrades - all those in East and West still trapped within the excesses of the 'Enlightenment mentality' - out of the darkness. It is the job of those who come after him to make more of the Confucius-Cervantes connection; it may not slot naturally into the Jasperian 'Axial Age' framework (or the Küngian 'Global Ethic' framework or the 'interreligious dialogue' framework more generally), but it does fit the broader understanding of 'dialogue among civilisations' that Tu himself embraces from his

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[1490] Tu, 'Confucius: Rethinking the Human', p. 192.

[1491] Tu, 'Confucius: Rethinking the Human', p. 192.

[1492] See Milan Kundera, *L'Art du roman (The Art of the Novel)*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1986). I also discuss *L'Art du roman* in the final chapter of my forthcoming *Spiritual Humanism* anthology, again with a view to understanding Tu Weiming's relationship with 'Western' culture in a less narrowly 'philosophical' and more broadly 'literary' light.

[1493] Tu, 'Confucius: Rethinking the Human', p. 192.

Confucian position. This is not to say that other civilisations don't have literary and artistic traditions to rival the Western novel in their exploration of human spirituality or the human 'self', but rather to remind 'philosophers' everywhere that they do not have any kind of monopoly on humanistic understanding. Philosophical 'rigour' and terminological sophistication have their uses, but they can be as much an obstacle as an aid to the creation of the shared meaning in which all true beauty consists.

9. 'What Is Spiritual Humanism?'

It should be clear that we are trying to embody rather than define 'Spiritual Humanism', so the decision to loop elliptically back to this 2014 lecture at Zhongshan University should not be misinterpreted as flogging any kind of dead horse; we are also endeavouring to narrate Tu Weiming's 'quest for shared meaning', not merely to keep paraphrasing him (or ourselves). What novelty or excitement or thrill of discovery not enjoyed in the first eight chapters does this lecture contain? The introduction is a rehash, but it does set the scene:

> The secular humanism represented by the Western Enlightenment is anthropocentric, and risks destroying the environment with its instrumental rationality. If we continue down this path, human survival itself becomes problematic.
>
> Learning to be human is a major area of philosophical inquiry. Confucianism's transcendental insight, with its comprehensive view of the human condition, does not posit a God in some faraway sky, but rephrases the question of ultimate meaning in terms of who we, ourselves, are. We cannot but understand ourselves as issuing from a family, a society, a country, and indeed a whole cosmos of interrelated things. To reduce Confucian thought to some secular grocery list of moral prescriptions is to extinguish its spiritual and religious dimensions altogether, and is completely unfair to Confucius himself.[1494]

So far, so familiar. In a section entitled 'Heaven's Transcendental Character and Confucian Decision-Making', however, Tu pushes right up against the central faultline cliché in so-called 'East-West dialogue':

> The concept of Heaven recoverable in [the early Confucian classics] is one of immanent transcendence. Whereas mainstream Abrahamic theology has focused on extrinsic perfectibility through the remote agency of God, many indigenous and folk religious traditions, as well as Buddhism and Confucianism, focus on cosmological 'resonance' instead. While the Abrahamic traditions end up stressing 'progress' or 'development' in the direction of an unattainable, forever external ideal, the resonance-oriented traditions take a broader view: […] learning for the sake of oneself on this account involves spontaneously transmitting one's inner 'progress' outwards, not the other way around.[1495]

Max Weber and his Protestant work ethic thesis are duly wheeled out in this context, but Tu wants to free all world religions - including Christianity - from the tyranny not just of bad science, but of scientistic, absolutising attitudes to aesthetic, moral and spiritual knowledge. If it is disastrous to understand the Bible or any

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[1494] Tu Weiming, 'What Is Spiritual Humanism?' ('Shenme shi Jingshen Renwenzhuyi?', Zhongshan University 90th Anniversary Lecture, November 2014.

[1495] Tu, 'What Is Spiritual Humanism?'.

other canonical text of World Literature or World Spirituality as a series of literal dictates from above, the *Analects* offer the reader a different kind of exhortation from the start:

> Confucius's itinerant lifestyle was not undertaken with the narrow goal of advancing his own social status, but rather with a sense of worldly mission. A central conviction of Confucianism is that society, with its arbitrary hierarchies and class structures, is more or less always unfair; […] the more money, power and influence a person has, and the more intellectual and physical resources at her disposal, the greater her responsibility to contribute to the peace, stability and health of the world around her.[1496]

Such urgency needs no external or empirical grounding; it is the spontaneous product of a certain from of aesthetic experience. The nourishment of art, however, must be directly imbibed; the best education reliably drills the well of beauty, but only the freely engaged student can ever do the real drawing. The decision - conscious or otherwise - to place one's inner life in the hands of a dictator (whether terrestrial or celestial), and to follow externally drafted orders on the grounds of 'faith' in their authenticity, always has something pre-Axial and anti-Confucian about it; *we* are the inalienable final arbiters of our own fate, not slaves in a hive. Once we become aware, via genuine aesthetic experience, of this dimension of self, we suddenly realise that we 'have no choice about being human' even as we change our moral and political allegiances over the course of our lives; indeed, it is this sense of independent identity which gives us the courage to take sides in the first place.[1497]

The current Chinese urgency to export its culture and expand its soft-power influence may have little to do with access to art in this sense, but the problem for any such official cultural policy is that 'cultural authority, unlike political and economic power, can only ever be conferred by direct [i.e. aesthetic] experience.'[1498]. The question of a 'renaissance' of Chinese culture must hence be understood not as an automatic product of economic or political dominance, but as a healthy desire to share what is best in oneself and learn what is best in others - the realm of spiritual or artistic rather than economic or instrumental exchange: 'To the extent that the Chinese people can be said to share the dream of a cultural revival, a kind of spiritual self-purification, then intellectual leaders in particular will have to stand up and be counted. […] Do people ultimately learn for themselves, establish themselves, and only then reach the horizon of others, or do they first go and concern themselves with others and only then establish themselves?'[1499] While different philosophical traditions (Confucian *weijizhixue*, *ubuntu* theology,

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[1496] Tu, 'What Is Spiritual Humanism?'.

[1497] Tu, 'What Is Spiritual Humanism?'.

[1498] Tu, 'What Is Spiritual Humanism?'.

[1499] Tu, 'What Is Spiritual Humanism?'.

Levinasian ‘alterity’ etc.) may seem to place greater emphasis on one side or the other[1500], aesthetic experience via education cuts through the entire arid dilemma:

> We have a new hope now. As innovation in science and technology accelerates, younger and younger people are able to achieve mastery of it. This increases, in principle, the resources available to them; if they are able to imbibe some culture on their way to becoming next-generation entrepreneurs, then our civilisation still has some real cause for optimism left.[1501]

Once again, it would be wrong to understand this passage as merely descriptive; Tu is reminding his readers to heed their self-given responsibilities as potential multipliers of aesthetic experience, to go out and teach these bright young minds, not out of any instrumental sense of saving the species (though they may well contribute to that), but out of a spontaneous desire to multiply what is best and truest and most beautiful in themselves. Tu may not be offering us aesthetic experience directly here, but he is reminding us of experiences we may already have had, putting them back into our minds, refocusing our attention on the spiritual dimension of our daily lives. ‘Spiritual Humanism’, among other things, is an echo, a reminder of what we already know; if university humanities curricula have a responsibility to provide contact with novel forms of beauty, they also have the duty to remind us of our own earlier encounters, and to remind us to keep reminding ourselves. The Philosophy lecturer’s tendency to reduce Spiritual Humanism to descriptive lists and formulae should not obscure Tu’s deeper purpose, which is less instrumentally motivational than intrinsically aspirational: if he can’t provide water of his own, he at least wants to offer more than a theory or description of water; he wants to create ripples on the surface of his descriptions that evoke the depths of the reader’s own self.

[1500] Tu, ’What Is Spiritual Humanism?’.

[1501] Tu, ’What Is Spiritual Humanism?’.

10. 'The Globalisation of a "Culture of Peace"'

> *Ethnocentrism, aggressive and exclusivist nationalism, cultural imperialism, territorial expansionism and even religious fundamentalism have not only not surrendered to Kumbaya globalism; they assert themselves ever more confidently, and threaten on a variety of fronts.*[1502]

This short section of an extensive 2007 exchange between Tu and the founder of Soka Gakkai International, Daisaku Ikeda (collected in Chinese under the title *Duihua de Wenming* or *Dialogical Civilisation*), highlights the challenges faced by individuals who become victims of their own success: founders of large religious organisations may attract the attention of thousands or even millions of sympathetic fans and followers, but their very popularity tends to relegate them to the status of vain and dodgy cult leaders in the eyes of critics. Does Tu harm or hinder his own 'cause' by agreeing to talk with such divisive figures? Does a 'dialogical civilisation' mean a willingness to talk - and hence to pander more than a bit - to *everyone*, especially the powerful and influential? In his own Foreword to *Duihua de Wenming*, Tu seems cautiously aware that the man he is engaging is not quite the god his followers may or may not be indoctrinated to believe he is: 'Daisaku Ikeda is a peacemaker, and also one of the world's most influential religious leaders,' he says first, as if ignoring the potential conflict between the first half of this sentence and the second. But then, on the next page, he offers himself a kind of disclaimer:

> Dialogue may not exactly be able to overcome national, religious or civilisational conflicts, clashes, misunderstandings or prejudices on its own; it may not be able to resolve deep issues of corruption in society and within individuals; it may be that dialogue alone does not allow you to understand others or know yourself; it may be that, when all said and done, the word 'dialogue' is a romantic and effete abstraction; but we can still call for dialogue, because […] it is the source of civilisation itself.[1503]

Regardless of one's view of Ikeda, then, and regardless of the benefit or otherwise to oneself or one's own brand profile of being seen with him, it is worth talking to *everyone*; proximity is never quite endorsement, even if all publicity is good publicity. The politics of all this, of course, let alone the economics of it, can never be squeaky-clean; on the one hand, Ikeda echoes Tu on Confucianism when he says: 'The choice is between being a slave of authority or of holding to your beliefs, living for your convictions. This is the history of Buddhism for the past 3,000

[1502] Tu Weiming, in Tu Weiming and Daisaku Ikeda, *Dialogical Civilisation (Duihua de Wenming)*, (Hong Kong, Commercial Press, 2008), p. vi.

[1503] Tu, in *Dialogical Civilisation*, p. vii.

years.'[1504] On the other, however, Ikeda has built multi-billion-dollar asset clusters around what critics have described as a 'personality-driven' cult with a 'totalitarian structure'[1505]. Ambition - even and especially the noblest - requires resources, and resources require compromise; Ikeda's investments in education certainly look like a genuine attempt to promote the humanities, but the reality may be a more prescriptive curriculum and secty atmosphere - financed by millions of tithing, Ikeda-awing hyper-chanters - than any true defender of art and human freedom could comfortably abide.[1506]

No man, however great, can carry the burden of a 'culture of peace' on his own; excessive reverence for *anyone* ends up being a disaster for everyone (most especially the revered person). But human hierarchies - of the kind Ikeda claims to have spent his life opposing - make fawning inevitable, and Ikeda has now sat at the top of one for a very long time. Tu cannot claim anything like the same organisational structure or purchasing power - or so it seems to a humble cog in his current aging machine - but he has fans and willing supporters all the same, and it is part of my current job - indirectly at least - to multiply that cohort. The dilemma of authenticity versus celebrity is exacerbated for millennials; we like to think we spot frauds a mile off, but turning oneself into a brand - as we are increasingly called to do via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and so on - is already the definition of inauthenticity. Tu's status as 'the Confucian guy' gets him global invites that honest, hardworking, unknown artists everywhere could never hope to receive, and he has spent a lifetime cultivating this brand - not as consciously or professionally as he perhaps could have, but nevertheless (as this interview with Ikeda and other conversations like it[1507] suggest) not always disinterestedly or ingenuously. If a 'culture of peace' above all involves a willingness to speak truth to power and resist authority - as Ikeda's Buddhism and Tu's Confucianism (or Hans Küng's Christianity, or Muhammad Iqbal's Islam etc. etc.) tirelessly remind us - then 'promoting' that culture risks becoming an oxymoron, because if you get too big, too mainstream, too powerful, you inevitably become the very problem you set out to change. Liberating individuals for art is hard work, but as soon as you are being paid to do it or want to generate money to do more of it, you risk instrumentalising the most precious and irreducible thing of all.

How does Tu solve this conundrum in his conversation with Ikeda? 'So-called "dialogical civilization",' he says, 'is not a standardisation of anything - it doesn't have such a preconceived goal - but rather strives to achieve a unity in which each individual cultural inheritance retains its own traditional flavour while also achieving

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[1504] Daisaku Ikeda, in Teresa Watanabe, 'Japan's Crusader or Corruptor?', https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1996-03-15-mn-47383-story.html, 15/3/1996 (accessed 11/9/2019).

[1505] See Editors, 'Cult of Curiosity', https://www.milwaukeemag.com/cultofcuriosity/, 10/4/2009 (accessed 11/9/2019).

[1506] See Benjamin Fulford and David Whelan, 'Sensei's World', https://www.forbes.com/forbes/2004/0906/126.html#207091282189, 6/9/2004 (accessed 11/9/2019).

[1507] See, for example, https://rothschildfoundation.org.uk/2014/06/10/the-henry-kissinger-lecture/ (accessed 18/12/2019).

the level of universality.'[1508] The political corollary of this 'dia-civ' attitude - the privileging of the individual or aesthetic over the tribal or syncretic - is a form of 'true democracy' in which 'not only the majority, but also minority groups receive proper admiration.'[1509] Tu agrees with Ikeda that 'excavating the self requires a sure footing in culture and tradition', and that this 'digging' into tradition is what allows the individual human being to 'discover the universality of her own existence'[1510], but this is precisely why overadherence to *any* set of doctrinal precepts or practices is antithetical to Spiritual Humanism: Tu wants to avoid the dangerous illusion that one can get anywhere near the bottom of Confucianism or any other major spiritual or cultural tradition by reading a single book or selected set of books about it, but he also wants to imply that what it means to be a good 'spiritual humanist' - whether one comes to it from a Buddhist, Confucian, atheist or any other background - includes both a theoretical and practical openness to foreign traditions which transcends the polite superficial curiosity of the tourist. If he wants to encourage people in general, and Chinese people in particular, to go and deep-read the Confucian classics for themselves, this does not absolve them of their responsibility to learn - really learn - about Sufism, French romanticism, Russian symbolism etc. etc. as well. Where one starts - the tradition one is lucky enough to grow up knowing most about - is less important than the adult attitude of openness and curiosity which early years spent 'digging' can foster. While this metaphor of digging down to reach the common spring recurs again and again in Tu's writings, less attention is paid to the dilemmas facing the young and globally connected today; perhaps only the Amish, or members of similarly isolated or marginalised groups, can be said to have no choice about where they start digging. My own case illustrates the point nicely: after a childhood spent learning a few singalong songs but generally failing to see any depth at all in Maori culture, it is as a globetrotting adult that I return to discover the work of novelists like Witi Ihimaera and film directors such as 'Polynesian Jew' Taika Waititi. The 'digging' I did, or ended up doing, was largely as a result of being forced to learn Latin and French at an old-fashioned, in many respects still-colonial high school; Tu's 'culture of peace', in other words, is not a set curriculum, but something subtly else: 'Culture and tradition must remain connected to living spiritual roots, invigorated and renewed by them. Truth is a never-to-be-repeated announcement; if the living water of justice and righteousness is not constantly added to the mix, it dries up and goes off.'[1511] This entails a shift in the understanding of 'culture and tradition' from a canon to be memorised to a process of '*self*-discipline' culminating in an 'internalisation of the law', a 'transformation to creativity'[1512] capable of seeking and recognising beauty and value in as yet uncharted continents (as well as unexplored corners of one's own). If on the one hand Tu can claim with a straight face that 'the greatness of

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[1508] Tu, 'The Globalisation of a "Culture of Peace"', in *Dialogical Civilisation*, p. 134.

[1509] Tu, 'The Globalisation of a "Culture of Peace"', p. 137.

[1510] Tu, 'The Globalisation of a "Culture of Peace"', p. 139.

[1511] Tu, 'The Globalisation of a "Culture of Peace"', p. 139.

[1512] Tu, 'The Globalisation of a "Culture of Peace"', p. 139.

Soka Gakkai International and President Ikeda lies in their contribution […] to the true globalisation of human society'[1513], then that is only because

> true human flourishing is as the Soka Gakkai International hopes and pursues: the internal blossoming of the individual human being. […] In order to attain this goal, 'cultural exchange', 'humanistic education' and 'open dialogue' are all necessary. […] Transcending the pursuit of individual self-interest and developing a conscious individual awareness of membership in a 'global village' are the first steps towards collective human peace and security.[1514]

The corollary of this is that law itself becomes an emergency backstop, not a tool for personal advantage: 'The best way to govern society is hence not through some specific set of legal measures, but by awakening individual feelings of sympathy and shame.'[1515] The big challenge for such ancient Confucian humanism in its current 'third epoch' is surely how to do so in authentic rather than manipulative or propagandistic ways - how to reach generations utterly bombarded from birth with emotional messages (the old joke that 'if Shakespeare were alive today, he would work in advertising' could be extended even more successfully to Confucius). Ikeda, meanwhile, chose the path of religion, a tactic which touches millions with its heavy formula but alienates millions more as it does so. Tu is happy to talk to such people - we are free to question his judgment in this specific case - but he also (and crucially) wants more than any 'organised' religion on its own can ever provide.

[1513] Tu, 'The Globalisation of a "Culture of Peace"', p. 140.

[1514] Tu, 'The Globalisation of a "Culture of Peace"', p. 140.

[1515] Tu, 'The Globalisation of a "Culture of Peace"', p. 141.

11. Religious Studies: From Divinity Dogma to Humanistic Learning

This article, first published in Taipei in 1988, covers the reform of tertiary-level American religious education from the early sixties to the mid-eighties - hardly laugh-a-minute stuff, one would think, but an important episode in the life of our protagonist:

> In 1963, the American Commission on the Humanities took the decision to include 'the history and comparison of religions' in its ambit; 'Religious Studies' hence took its place alongside Linguistics, Literature, History and Philosophy as a discipline in its own right. […] I got to Harvard in 1962 with a mandate to study the Comparative History of Ideas; in 1967 I moved to the Department of East Asian Studies at Princeton; in 1971 I began teaching in the History Department at Berkeley, before returning to the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at Harvard ten years later. The 26 years I have spent in the United States correspond more or less exactly to the gestation period of this new field; while it may seem that my own work has little to do with the emergence of Religious Studies as such, there are a number of reasons why the two are in fact closely linked. I would like to share some of my personal experiences here in the hope that new avenues for others might open up as a result.[1516]

<u>'Philosophy's Complacency Has Caused the Disappearance of Public Philsophers'</u>

Tu's years as a PhD student at Harvard (1962-66) coincided with 'the absolute zenith of social-scientific theories of modernisation'[1517], but also with the parallel rise of collective (anti-Vietnam) American critical self-consciousness and the simultaneous collapse of the Deweyan ideal of 'public philosophy' within an academic discourse dominated by hypertechnical analytic philosophy.[1518] While philosophers largely contented themselves with tedious explanations of 'narrow' logical inconsistencies, an unsurprising mass migration to Erik Erikson's psychology and even Herbert Marcuse's post-Freudian, neo-leftist ramblings took place among a generation of students in search of answers to questions of individual meaning.[1519] In Tu's own case, it was the lectures of Talcott Parsons, Robert Bellah and Wilfred Cantwell Smith on various aspects of religion, as well as Erikson's own barnstormers on humanistic psychology, which gave him a sense of being

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[1516] Tu Weiming, 'Religious Studies: From Divinity Dogma to Humanistic Learning' ('*Zongjiaoxue: Cong Shenxue dao Renwenxue*'), in Kong Xianglai and Chen Peiyu (eds.), *Tu Weiming Sixiang Xuejie Wenxuan (* (Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2014), p. 441.

[1517] Tu, 'Religious Studies: From Divinity Dogma to Humanistic Learning', p. 441.

[1518] Tu, 'Religious Studies: From Divinity Dogma to Humanistic Learning', p. 442.

[1519] See Tu, 'Religious Studies: From Divinity Dogma to Humanistic Learning', p. 442.

'welcome'[1520] in the classroom; though brief, Tu's 'dialogue' with Smith in particular proved decisive for his academic and intellectual development.[1521] Benjamin I. Schwartz, a Harvard Sinologist, also opened Tu's eyes to the 'profound spiritual dimension of Western civilisation in general, and the Jewish tradition in particular'. Parsons, meanwhile, offered an important example of intellectual humility:

> Once, in Parsons' class, I expressed my dissatisfaction with his endorsement of Max Weber's understanding of Confucianism. […] After a long discussion, he conceded the point to me. The next day, he not only amended his position, but explained to the class why he had done so. On the one hand I was very excited, but at the same time, this episode triggered a wave of sadness in me: why could this elite band of American scholars and students be so easily convinced of Confucianism's spiritual value at the precise moment [the mid-sixties] when Confucianism was reaching its *nadir* in the Chinese cultural sphere?[1522]

If professional 'philosophers' were largely uninterested in dialogue with an energetic young Taiwanese scholar (later nicknamed 'the Confucian helicopter' at Harvard for his omnipresence), an alternative community - composed largely of religion scholars - offered Tu a warm corner and a series of examples to follow.

<u>'Studying Religion Enhances Thought'</u>

Sinosphere academia was even less friendly to Tu's 'spiritual humanist' orientation than Anglophone Departments of Philosophy:

> Most Chinese scholars since the May 4 Movement in 1919 have ignored religion; although there have been sizable contributions from the likes of Chen Yinke, Tang Yongtong and Chen Yuan, these have avoided major doctrinal questions, and have been even less willing to explore the personal side of religious experience. For a long time I tended to see modern Chinese academia as strong on data, facts, and teleologies of history, but (or for precisely this reason) unable to overcome the barriers of instrumentality and positivism in its approach to the humanities. More broadly, I took the view that modern Chinese literature, with its lack of 'ultimate concern' for primary existential questions, had been unable to achieve any real human universality. In thrall to a functional system of coordinates with no place for truth, goodness or beauty, this culture, I felt, had been unable to unlock the spiritual force behind Western civilisation at its strongest, and had also been unable to continue absorbing its own Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist sources of nourishment. I now realise that my former views were a bit extreme, but the feelings underpinning them

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[1520] See Tu, 'Religious Studies: From Divinity Dogma to Humanistic Learning', p. 442.

[1521] Tu, 'Religious Studies: From Divinity Dogma to Humanistic Learning', p. 442.

[1522] Tu, 'Religious Studies: From Divinity Dogma to Humanistic Learning', p. 442.

> were absolutely genuine. I still firmly believe that the study of religion can discipline and enhance our habits of thought; moreover, the idea that we can just collectively stop talking about religion is the equivalent of an ostrich sticking its head in the sand.[1523]

In the United States too, resistance to the emergence of Religious Studies as a new branch of the university was fierce: theologians and scientists alike lined up against it. Wilfred Cantwell Smith's vision, however, was clear:

> Smith's *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1964) was a veritable Declaration on behalf of Harvard Religious Studies. The goal of this new branch of learning, Smith declared with revolutionary zeal, was not to study some fixed stock of organised creeds or 'religions' such as 'Christianity', 'Islam', 'Judaism' or 'Buddhism'; in fact, the English word 'religion' itself was problematically rigid - unable to do justice to the millennial flow of human spirituality or to grasp the ultimate concerns of so-called 'believers'. Smith suggested that an adjective ('religious') or outright neologism '('religiousness' or 'religiosity') might better embody the 'cumulative tradition' and dynamic 'faith' which was the true object of Religious Studies. […] He stressed the same point over and over again: Religious Studies is about individual people, not abstract creeds or organisations.[1524]

Tu's subsequent visits ('never in vain') to the 'headquarters' of American Religious Studies at the University of Chicago, as well as exchanges at Princeton in the late sixties and early seventies with colleagues such as renegade Nietzsche scholar Walter Kaufmann, only strengthened his conviction: a vibrant and increasingly international conversation about individual meaning was taking place at the margins of mainstream academic philosophy.[1525]

'"Religious Studies" Covers the Whole Cloth of the Humanities and Sciences'

Tu's institutional struggles to establish Religious Studies at Berkeley in the 1970s (alongside colleagues like Robert Bellah, William Bouwsma, John Noonan and others) forced him to confront the fact that this new 'discipline' was 'interdisciplinary' like no other: experts from across the humanities and social sciences - and even natural sciences like Darwinian biology - stepped forward to identify themselves as 'Religious Studies' scholars of one kind or another.[1526] The question, then, was how to carve out a distinct niche for the emerging field:

> At the time, it seemed that if we wanted to create a proper Department of Religious Studies, we needed to focus on two things: Regional Studies on

[1523] Tu, 'Religious Studies: From Divinity Dogma to Humanistic Learning', pp. 442-443.

[1524] Tu, 'Religious Studies: From Divinity Dogma to Humanistic Learning', p. 443.

[1525] See Tu, 'Religious Studies: From Divinity Dogma to Humanistic Learning', p. 444.

[1526] See Tu, 'Religious Studies: From Divinity Dogma to Humanistic Learning', pp. 444-445.

> the one hand, and social science disciplines (anthroplogy of religion, sociology of religion, psychology of religion etc.) on the other. We wanted Regional Studies to give us a solid platform for comparative work; there was no Sanskrit Department, and very little work was being done on Hinduism more generally. […] The situation with Buddhism was even worse; I once pointed out that a doctoral student hoping to specialise in Korean Buddhism really needed - beyond the obligatory French and German - Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese, Japanese and Korean as well. And given that we wanted sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists of religion too, only an institution the size of Berkeley, with its place in the University of California network, could hope to establish Religious Studies as a discipline in any meaningful way.[1527]

After a teaching stint at UC Santa Barbara in the summer of 1975, Tu was more convinced than ever of the revolutionary power of Religious Studies: 'I almost thought of quitting my job in the History Department at Berkeley and devoting myself full-time to the philosophy of religion.'[1528]

Nevertheless, it was going to be hard for the new discipline to win respect for its academic rigour until it could shake off the perception of backdoor proselytising. Success in attracting students was almost part of the problem; analytic philosophers were often distinctly proud of their refusal to be interesting or accessible to the outside world, and the rise of Religious Studies was hence seen by some as the very proof of its superficiality.[1529] The true conflict, however (the one that would define Tu's entire career), concerned the meaning and purpose of 'Philosophy' itself in an unshakably 'spiritual' world: was it a specifically 'Western' cultural endeavour, or a global pursuit shared by every great civilisation?

'Harvard Finally Gets Global About Religion'

Returning to Harvard in 1981, Tu was proud to take part in the development of the (uniquely rigorous and competitive) Religious Studies doctoral program. Under Smith's direction, students devoted themselves to comparative research (thereby requiring extensive knowledge of at least one tradition foreign to their own), as well as the evolution of religious traditions in various cultural contexts (e.g. Islam in different corners of the Middle East, Daoism across East Asia etc.) and religion in the framework of other disciplines (philosophy, sociology etc.). Taking over the running of graduate seminars from Smith in 1984, Tu expressed gratitude to colleagues from various fields for their efforts in enriching the overall experience, but insisted that

> the best thing was the chance to discuss foundational texts with outstanding students from all over the world. To the extent that I can claim today to know

[1527] Tu, 'Religious Studies: From Divinity Dogma to Humanistic Learning', p. 445.

[1528] Tu, 'Religious Studies: From Divinity Dogma to Humanistic Learning', p. 445.

[1529] See Tu, 'Religious Studies: From Divinity Dogma to Humanistic Learning', p. 446.

> something about Hegel, William James, Durkheim, Weber, Freud [and many others], it is because I was lucky enough to take part in these cosmopolitan discussions.[1530]

Research on religion is 'arduous' business, Tu concludes. because it requires both breadth and depth of rote learning, on the one hand, and a heightened awareness of one's own role as an 'active inside participant' on the other:

> I don't believe we can ever thoroughly objectify religion as a phenomenon or reduce it to the status of passive source material for scientific analysis. […] The distinguishing feature of the humanities in general is a healthy blend of embodied and factual learning. Research on religion, just like work on literature, philosophy, art and music (and even symbolic anthropology and depth psychology), feeds off the researcher's double identity as subject and object. […] There are many contrasting challenges when embarking on research on religion: you have to study a series of languages, but at the same time reflect constantly on the ultimate meaning of human life; you have to learn to argue, but also to listen; you have to grasp a whole swathe of specialist concepts, but also maintain a sense of the vast hung-together scene to which they refer; you have to learn both to venerate and to criticise the sources of tradition, but also to keep one eye on the shifting future of the highest ideals. At the very least, research on religion is excellent training for modern and postmodern intellectuals.[1531]

[1530] Tu, 'Religious Studies: From Divinity Dogma to Humanistic Learning', p. 447.

[1531] Tu, 'Religious Studies: From Divinity Dogma to Humanistic Learning', p. 448.

12. 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations'

After taking part in the Iranian-initiated 'Year of Dialogue Among Civilisations' project at the United Nations in (of all years) 2001, Tu offers a broad restatement of his position here in this 2002 essay. Samuel Huntington (an old Harvard colleague) had put forward his famous 'clash of civilisations' thesis precisely, Tu reminds us, out of a sense of the collective urgency of intercivilisational dialogue in a new century[1532]; Tu's own vision of 'dialogue', however, is personal before it is political:

> The hunger for recognition of one's identity is absolutely fundamental. Whether it takes the form of pride in one's own ethnic community, love of one's language, solidarity with one's gender or age cohort, ardent patriotism, or firm religious convictions, it is all part of the same natural hunger, the healthy expression of which is a necessary condition for world peace. It would be hard to overstate the importance of this basic hunger for recognition. But if one's sense of identity devolves into exclusivist fundamentalism, hermeticism, or exceptionalist arrogance, then clashes of apocalyptic civilisational scope are inevitable. If we want identities that are strong and stable rather than invasively exclusivist or boringly preachy, then dialogue is the way to get to them.[1533]

Citing Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong (1910-2005), Tu even suggests that the ancient Chinese ideal of a 'true community of all under Heaven' is only realisable to the extent that people learn to do more than trumpet their own group allegiances: 'Dialogue is an absolutely essential precondition if we ever want to realise this *Tianxia* vision.'[1534] Self-interested identity politics, in other words, may be necessary and justified in certain oppressive contexts, but such engagement on behalf of one's own cohort is never enough for any lasting peace, either for oneself or the world as a whole: there is always a beyond to which we owe creative allegiance as well.

Tu's understanding of 'dialogue among civilisations' arises, inevitably, out of the experience of the Cold War and its immediate aftermath, not the brave new world of the post-millennial Internet; pioneers like Toshihiko Izutsu in Japan, with his broad comparative studies of Sufism and Daoism, Hans A. Fischer-Barnicol with his Institut für Interkulturelle Forschung in Heidelberg (where 'different civilisations were to be studied on a level [postcolonial] playing field'), Ewert Cousins and his 25-volume World Spirituality series, Arvind Sharma's early work on world religions in general and Hinduism in particular, and even Tu's own Rockefeller Foundation-funded research on Axial Age civilisations from a Confucian point of view[1535] all

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[1532] See Tu Weiming, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations' ('*Wenming Duihua de Fazhan jiqi Shijie Yiyi*'), in *Ershiyi Shiji de Ruxue*, (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2014), p. 204.

[1533] Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', p. 206.

[1534] Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', p. 207.

[1535] See Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', pp. 207-210.

conspicuously belong, for better and worse, to the noble but eclipsed *Encyclopedia Britannica* era. If the 1990s witnessed a politicisation of the 'dialogue among civilisations' theme along Huntington-Fukuyama lines, then the 2000s and 2010s, owing to the sheer overload of information which have characterised them, have cried out for a more intimate approach. Tu himself, writing here in 2002 on the cusp of the Internet revolution, is at least able to identify what was wrong with the American triumphalism of the Y2K era:

> Bernard Lewis's new book *What Went Wrong* is currently enjoying a wave of popularity in the United States. He argues that, although the Ottoman Empire was radiant in its glory 500 years ago, the challenge posed by Western civilisation in the intervening period has reduced [the formerly Ottoman Middle East] to a state of bitterness, inciting a wave of anti-Western sentiment. We might say the same thing about Confucianism: the culture of the Chinese people was once glorious, but after more than a century of Western dominance, it is now riddled with weakness. And so it is said that Chinese people harbour feelings of hatred towards the West; these feelings of envy and enmity in the face of a [nonetheless radiant] Western civilisation lead to a love-hate syndrome. I am always wary when the language of abnormal psychology gets introduced into discussions like this.[1536]

Huntington argued that Islamic and Confucian civilisational 'clashes' with the West would be temporary; Western modes would win out over Islamic ('fundamentalist') and Confucian ('authoritarian') challenges once the embers of resistance had finished burning.[1537] Perhaps no one alive at that time was in a better position than Tu Weiming to understand just how breathtakingly arrogant (or, as he more politely puts it, 'immature'[1538]) such a stance really was and is. Though the untenability of this position has been made manifest by the demographic and social advances of non-European communities in Western societies (as well as by the failures of Western societies themselves to impose their own idealised agendas abroad - think Iraq, Afghanistan etc.), a question remained for Tu in 2002: now that 'dialogue among civilisations' had migrated permanently from the 'softer' precincts of Religious Studies and other university humanities departments to the very top of the global political agenda, the question became: 'How can we make dialogue a new constitutive norm of global [civil] society?'[1539] For one thing, the treacly language of 'tolerance' must be overcome:

> Dialogue is only possible if there is a real desire to increase one's understanding of one's interlocutor. The goal of dialogue, indeed, cannot be to persuade someone else of the superiority of one's own creed; if this is the attitude one brings, dialogue will not be successful. The reason why many

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[1536] Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', p. 211.

[1537] See Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', pp. 212-213.

[1538] Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', p. 213.

[1539] Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', p. 215.

> scholars of Islam are unwilling to talk to their Christian counterparts is a perceived proselytising agenda; such Christians are felt to engage with Muslims in order to prove the veridicality and intellectual maturity of the Christian faith *vis-à-vis* Islam. Such exchange does not qualify as dialogue; […] an extremely important principle of so-called 'dialogue' is that it not be seen as a tacit opportunity to spread one's own faith or reform the views of others. 'Dialogue' is first and foremost about one's *own* learning and self-reflection - a constant recalibration of the limitations of one's *own* worldview. […] This is the only stable mutual foundation for dialogical exchange among equals.[1540]

We return here to the tension inherent in Tu's avowal of Confucianism: there is something in the Confucian tradition, as Tu encountered it, worth sharing with others who may *not* have encountered it, but there is also much worth learning which lies outside the Confucian tradition as we normally understand it. Tu is not, to repeat, attacking the healthy impulse to teach and to share here, but he is pointing out that this cannot even succeed unless one is able to win the trust of one's dialogue partner that she, too, may be a source of previously unaccessed wisdom for *you*. This is not to reduce her to a means towards one's own advancement, but rather just the opposite: it is to ennoble her with the status of true equality. If another person is capable of being just as good, but also just as bad, as you, this does not mean that she always is; sometimes and in some ways, she will be both better *and* worse. But we cannot discover these relative merits and shortcomings unless we want to find them out, unless we somehow believe in her, and in contact with her, more than we believe in the sum of our own accumulated experiences. This openness beyond mere 'tolerance' is difficult in any circumstances, but it may be particularly hard work when the 'other' is associated, rightly or wrongly, with a group which has harmed us in the past. When Tu claims that the endpoint of dialogue is a 'celebration of diversity'[1541], he uses language that has been coopted beyond recognition in the last two decades; what he means is rather a celebration of some fundamental, hard-won *equality*. Triumphalists in all times and places are 'ignorant and arrogant'[1542] because they deny such equality to non-believers. If there is only one, fundamentally 'Western' brand of 'modernisation, then there can be no 'dialogue' between 'the West' and anyone else; if 'Westerners', however defined, are convinced they are talking to you from the future and calling you to catch up, then there is no existential vulnerability or justice in your relationship with them.

The relativism question lurks quietly but visibly in these waters: it cannot be that all civilisations and individuals are equally good all the time; dialogue must establish superiorities - sometimes yours, and sometimes mine. Tu wants to give Western civilisation its fair due - in post-1919 China as elsewhere, decentralised economic exchange, a politics of enfranchisement, civil society volunteerism and a stout defence of the dignity of the individual are all recognised as 'universal' values

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[1540] Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', p. 215.

[1541] Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', p. 216.

[1542] Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', p. 216.

of a welcome 'modernisation'[1543] - but the 'conversation' of human history cannot end there, as if Islamic and Confucian civilisations in particular (the ones Huntington singles out as posing the peskiest resistance to 'Western' hegemony) have nothing further to contribute to it. It is hence no surprise that, in a bid to walk the talk for his readers, Tu turns immediately from circumscribing the limits of Huntington's vision to 'personalising' the dialogue between Islam and Confucianism:

> Precisely because Huntington had singled out Islamic and Confucian civilisations as posing the biggest threat (he was particularly worried about a potential alliance between the two), Hossein Nasr and I organised the first Islamic-Confucian Dialogue Symposium at Harvard in 1993. Thirteen people attended. But then the University of Malaya, with the support of then-Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, organised a much larger event in Kuala Lumpur, attended by more than a thousand people, including many leading Muslim scholars.[1544]

One important outcome of this Malaysian dialogue was to force Tu to go back and read Wang Daiyu (1570-1660):

> Li Chaoran from Singapore gave a paper on Wang Daiyu. Sachiko Murata had never thought much of Wang, but after hearing Li's paper, she decided to go back and read his *Qingzhen Daxue*, among other works, and discovered that he had basically achieved a kind of happy 17th-century marriage of Confucian and Islamic insights. As a scholar of Confucianism, I can say that Wang Daiyu not only does not misrepresent the Confucian tradition, but also that his work contains many creative innovations. To be honest, I was blown away. I worked with Sachiko for five years on her translation of the *Qingzhen Daxue*, offering comments as she went along and a Preface for the completed edition. From there I delved into the worlds of other Chinese Muslim scholars from the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries, such as Liu Zhi (1660-1739), Ma Zhu (1640-1710) and Yusuf Ma Dexin (1794-1874). I was forced to conclude that the post-17th-century extension of the traditional Chinese *Sanjiao* (Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism) to include Christianity was still one short: from the 17th Century on, China was marked by five great religious traditions.[1545]

Although one can trace the presence of Islam in China back well over a thousand years, the sophistication of Wang's '*Halal Great Learning*' forced scholars of Islam unfamiliar with China to stand up and take notice; the assumption that such serious pre-19th-century work was confined to Arabic, Farsi and Turkish had been

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[1543] See Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', p. 218.

[1544] Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', p. 219.

[1545] Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', p. 220.

thoroughly exploded.[1546] The examples of Wang and Liu, moreover, undermine the status of Matteo Ricci as the paragon of intercultural dialogue with China:

> Ricci's *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* is typically regarded as a classic in the 'Dialogue Among Civilisations' genre. Many believe that his strategy consisted of digesting Confucianism and then using its core values and concepts to disseminate Christianity in general and Jesuit teachings in particular. But recently at Harvard, a scholar from Sichuan, Zhang Qiong, working together with a medieval Latinist on the contents of Ricci's letters to the Vatican, concluded that Ricci was actually trying to deconstruct Song-Ming neo-Confucianism (which basically envisaged a great connected chain of being from plants and rocks all the way to men and gods) and return Confucianism to its pre-Qin roots in the concept of *Tian* ('Heaven'), as this was the best way to prepare the ground for the arrival of the transcendental Christian God. Seen in this light, Ricci's approach is pure colonialism - the idea that we need to break you first before you will accept our version of things.
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> This all makes the work of Wang Daiyu and Liu Zhi even more valuable. Wang was of Central Asian stock, and grew up in an Arabic-speaking environment (he only started studying classical Chinese at the age of 20), but he regarded the whole Song-Ming neo-Confucian tradition as part of his own inherited patrimony. He was creatively critical of Daoism and Buddhism, but he was hence willing to take aim at Confucianism too. Liu, meanwhile, also digested every morsel of Confucian learning available to him; his basic posture was not that he had to root out 'foreign' influences, but rather to accept the bits he liked and build on them.[1547]

Why care about these 17th- and 18-century figures today? First and foremost, Tu argues, they present a united Islamic-Confucian front - Huntington's essential nightmare - not against 'the West' as such, but against a materialist and materialistic 'Enlightenment mentality' which, for a hundred years or more and on all six continents, has been intent on destroying the last vestiges of superstition, spirituality and metaphysics in human society.[1548] The reduction of both communist and capitalist politics to godless 'social engineering' leaves plenty of work to be done, but what exact form should such 'work' take, Tu asks, in a post-Cold War world?[1549] Throwing the myriad babies - the individual freedoms, rights and dignities, large and small - out with the bathwater of the Enlightenment, as wholesale postmodern and New Leftist critics are wont to do, is not a viable alternative, but

> if we look at the problem from an Islamic and/or Confucian perspective, then justice, sensitivity, refinement and responsibility have to be a part of the new

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[1546] Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', p. 220.

[1547] Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', pp. 221-222.

[1548] See Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', pp. 222-223.

[1549] See Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', p. 224.

> package as well. […] Ethical wisdom is not entirely subsumable under the instrumental rationality which typically measures IQ. Beyond all possible improvements in the material condition of our species, a spiritual civilisation must simultaneously be nurtured.[1550]

The sacrificial element - the idea that meaning is always bound up with some opportunity cost, some spurning of material advantage - morphs into hypermaterialism (a kind of spiritual anorexia) if it is overemphasised, but what the richest spiritual traditions achieve is a healthy simultaneous respect for both scientific and humanistic learning. This equilibrium is much harder to maintain in an individual spirit than either raw, get-rich-quick scientism or whack-job religious fervour; the temptations of materialist success on the one hand, and conspiracy-theory consolation for material failure on the other, may be the easy-reach, go-to options of the post-Cold War world, but What Tu is calling for is a more demanding (because dialogical rather than pharmaceutical) spirituality: at the end of 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', he highlights the necessity - very real, no platitude - of achieving a 'transnational vision' in these matters.[1551] Tu's idea that one might simply 'revive' moribund medieval or ancient 'academy' formats for humanistic education in the age of the Internet is quaint, to say the least, but the sense of belonging to a tradition - in this case, a dialogical civilisation comprising voices from all times and places - must be built somewhere, and in 2002, Islamic-Confucian dialogue seemed as good a place as any to start:

> The rebirth of China is of course an economic phenomenon, a geopolitical event with potential military implications, but I dare to hope that it will breed deep cultural novelty as well, a new mine of resources for the peaceful reorganisation of the human community. The dialogue between Confucianism and Islam is a key part of this global spiritual endeavour.[1552]

Tu's own approach has very much been to start with 'Confucius and the Qur'an', or at least to go back to seminal figures from bygone centuries such as Wang Daiyu; anything else, for a historian of ideas, risks seeming a bit superficial. In my own earlier work I have tried to juxtapose more modern figures - Tu Weiming and Naguib Mahfouz initially, and more recently the likes of Tang Junyi, Adonis, Yang Jiang and Muhammad Iqbal as well - on the grounds that a creative harmony among disparate contemporary voices opens the galaxies of the past and the wormholes of the future just as well as, or perhaps even better than, lonelier and more distant stars in the pantheon. But these quite different approaches - Tu's long-game Axial historicism and my own fetishisation of 20th- and 21st-century World Literature - are really two parts of the same overall project: namely, mixing ingredients for a global concoction to counteract the numbing but tempting senselessness of what Tu calls the 'Enlightenment mentality', but what I would

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[1550] Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', pp. 224-225.

[1551] See Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', p. 229.

[1552] Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', p. 229.

prefer to call ‘hyper-Enlightenmentism’ or, more simply, aesthetic nihilism: the idea, very simply, that art doesn’t matter, and makes nothing happen.

13. 'The Future of Dialogue Between Marxism and Confucianism'

> *In his history of Marxism, Kołakowski explains some puzzling aspects of Bolshevik practice in these terms. Everyone understands why Bolsheviks shot liberals, socialist revolutionaries, Mensheviks, and Trotskyites. But what, he asks, was the point of turning the same fury on the Party itself, especially on its most loyal, Stalinists, who accepted Leninist-Stalinist ideology without question? Kołakowski observes that it is precisely the loyalty to the ideology that was the problem.*
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> *Anyone who believed in the ideology might question the leader's conformity to it. He might recognize that the Marxist-Leninist Party was acting against Marxism-Leninism as the Party itself defined it; or he might compare Stalin's statements today with Stalin's statements yesterday. 'The citizen belongs to the state and must have no other loyalty, not even to the state ideology,' Kołakowski observes. […] 'The [great] purge, therefore, was designed to destroy such ideological links as still existed within the party, to convince its members that they had no ideology or loyalty except to the latest orders from on high. […] Loyalty to Marxist ideology as such is still [in 1978] a crime and a source of deviations of all kinds.' The true Leninist did not even believe in Leninism. […] Lenin worked by a principle of anti-empathy, and this approach was to define Soviet ethics. I know of no other society, except those modeled on the one Lenin created, where schoolchildren were taught that mercy, kindness, and pity are vices. After all, these feelings might lead one to hesitate shooting a class enemy or denouncing one's parents. The word 'conscience' went out of use, replaced by 'consciousness' (in the sense of Marxist-Leninist ideological consciousness).*
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> *[…] Pyatakov grasped Lenin's idea that coercion is not a last resort but the first principle of Party action. Changing human nature, producing boundless prosperity, overcoming death itself: all these miracles could be achieved because the Party was the first organization ever to pursue coercion* without limits*. […] Given an essentially mystical faith in coercion, it is not hard to see how imaginative forms of torture became routine in Soviet justice. […] After a while a shrewd member learned, without having been explicitly told, that loyalty belonged not to an issue, not even to justice broadly conceived, but to the Party itself.*
>
> Gary Saul Morson

A boy refugee from a Communist revolution, Tu has had a lifetime to think about his relationship with Marxism in general and the Chinese Communist Party in particular. It divulges no national secret to say that Tu's return to Peking University in the past decade has been divisive; many have welcomed him warmly as a

flagbearer for traditional Chinese culture, while others have dismissed him as a 'Taiwanese-American' infiltrator and out-of-touch poseur. With or without Tu Weiming - and increasingly without him - contemporary China gropes unsteadily for identity amid the triangular forces of 40 years of 'Reform and Opening Up', 70 years of (nominal) Communist rule, and several thousand years of Confucian-based traditionalism; in this 2013 interview, Tu lays out a vision for a possible future which also serves as a warning to those who would now consign Marx to the dustbin of history, as Chinese intellectuals a century earlier had sought to bury Confucius.

If postwar French philosophy - Marxist-influenced and globally influential - maintained an ambiguous relationship with 'humanism', there is nevertheless something in the original Marxian maxim from the *Theses on Feuerbach* - 'philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it' - that gels instantly with Confucian 'learning for the self' as Tu understands it.[1553] The problem is less Marx's global critique of the patent injustices of capitalism than Lenin's subsequent disavowal of all morality in the name of raw power[1554]; in such articles as 'Destructive Will and Ideological Holocaust: Maoism as a Source of Social Suffering in China' and elsewhere[1555], Tu has not minced his words on the Chinese version of what Gary Saul Morson calls 'Leninthink':

> In Lenin's view, Marx's greatest contribution was not the idea of the class struggle but 'the dictatorship of the proletariat', and as far back as 1906 Lenin had defined dictatorship as 'nothing other than power which is totally unlimited by any laws, totally unrestrained by absolutely any rules, and based directly on force.' He argued that a revolutionary Party must be composed entirely of professional revolutionaries […] with a readiness to do literally anything the leadership demanded. […] These and other disastrous Leninist ideas derived from a specific Leninist way of thinking. […] More than doctrines, it was the Leninist style of thought that defined the difference between an insider and an outsider. And that way of thought is very much with us.[1556]

Whereas Confucian ethics - at least in the Mencian idiom - exhorts the individual to expand the sphere of suffering she 'cannot bear' to include everything from her own family to the faraway rocks of Heaven, the violent Communist revolutions of the 20th Century, more or less without exception, called on the citizen to sacrifice even her own brother or parents in the name of the revolutionary cause - an utter

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[1553] See Tu Weiming, 'The Future of the Dialogue Between Marxism and Confucianism' ('*Mianxiang Weilai: Makesizhuyi yu Ruxue de Jiaoliu yu Duihua*'), in Tu Weiming, *Wenming Duihua zhong de Rujia*, (Peking University Press, 2016), pp. 290-292.

[1554] See Tu, 'The Future of the Dialogue Between Marxism and Confucianism', p. 293.

[1555] See Tu Weiming, *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity: Essays on the Confucian Discourse in Cultural China*, (New Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilizations, 2010).

[1556] Gary Saul Morson, 'Leninthink', https://newcriterion.com/issues/2019/10/leninthink, October 2019 (accessed 22/11/2019).

subversion of Confucian and other 'bourgeois' spiritual traditions.[1557] A post-Cold War dialogue between Confucianism and 'Marxism' is possible (and may prove fruitful), but there can be no 'dialogue' with any version of cultural *Leninism*:

> If there is one sort of person Lenin truly hated more than any other, it is - to use some of his more printable adjectives - the squishy, squeamish, spineless, dull-witted liberal reformer. In philosophical issues, too, there can never be a middle ground. If you are not a materialist in precisely Lenin's interpretation, you are an idealist, and idealism is simply disguised religion supporting the bourgeoisie. The following statement from his most famous book, *What Is to Be Done?*, is typical (the italics are Lenin's): 'The *only* choice is: either the bourgeois or the socialist ideology. There is no middle course (for humanity has not created a 'third' ideology, and, moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or above-class ideology). Hence to belittle the socialist ideology *in any way, to turn away from it in the slightest degree*, means to strengthen bourgeois ideology.'[1558]

This thinly veiled wish-thinking and power-grabbing, as Morson hastens to remind his reader in 2019, is still dismally prevalent in contemporary leftist politics well beyond old Iron Curtain battlelines; one must not, however, make the too-easy mistake of assuming that Marxism as a whole can be summarised in these unfavourable terms, just as it would be absurd to cite the cynical rent-seeking behaviour of Qing mandarins as decisive evidence for the permanent moral bankruptcy of Confucianism. It is intellectually dishonest and dishonourable to pick a fight with against anything other than the strongest possible version of any creed you truly wish to oppose; Tu's 'historian of ideas' worldview allows him to be charitable towards a Marxist 'discourse' which is 150 years old - and hence so full of internal disputes and contradictions as to render any single definition of 'Marxism' futile: 'Marx was a Jew, and did not completely abandon his roots. What Lenin represents is a revolutionary hostility towards religion in *all* its possible forms. What people mostly want to criticise when they criticise "Marxism" is the institutionalised state [violence] of Leninism-Stalinism.'[1559]

Marx sought to 'break the chain' of blue-pill, 'opiate' religion in all its absurd and varied guises, and precisely thereby to 'cull the living flower' of human spirituality; Tu cites the work of Lucian Bianco to remind his reader that, by contrast, a majority of early Chinese Communist 'land reformers', inspired by Lenin and Stalin, were basically local thugs intent on seizing power for themselves.[1560] While 'one of the great intellectual achievements of the post-1978 Reform and Opening Up period has been the gradual discrediting of this nihilistic aspect inherent in the

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[1557] See Tu, 'Destructive Will and Ideological Holocaust: Maoism as a Source of Social Suffering in China', in Tu Weiming, *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity: Essays on the Confucian Discourse in Cultural China*, (New Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilizations, 2010), pp. 130-159.

[1558] Morson, 'Leninthink'.

[1559] Tu, 'The Future of the Dialogue Between Marxism and Confucianism', p. 293.

[1560] See Tu, 'The Future of the Dialogue Between Marxism and Confucianism', p. 294.

philosophy of class struggle [at its Leninist worst]'[1561], China has not properly faced the legacy of the crimes committed in the first three decades of Communist rule (culminating in the Cultural Revolution). Tu recommends South African-style 'Truth and Reconciliation'[1562] before it is too late:

> You can't just bury it! For any nation, there is no freedom, let alone development, without historical memory. It's not like the problem of air pollution, which can be solved with immediate economic and political decisions; the deep psychological wounds of that era must be treated at the level of culture and ultimate concern. If those in their 80s and 90s do not receive help with that now, they will die with hearts full of hatred. You can't let that happen to a whole nation, let alone such a great nation. We Chinese have historical resources aplenty at our disposal to help us come to terms with the enormity of these events. But there is still so much amnesia, so much wilful forgetting; it can be painful to observe.[1563]

One path out of this cultural wilderness, as prescribed in the title, is a renewed dialogue between Marxism and Confucianism:

> Those engaged in research on Marxism need to go back and explore Chinese traditional culture, Confucianism, and the values on which our civilisation was built. Conversely, Confucian scholars have to delve in and see which corners of the Marxist discourse map might still be mined for useful resources. Both Marxists and Confucians need to face the realities of contemporary China in a thoroughgoing spirit of critical reflection. This ought to be the stock-in-trade of intellectuals on all sides; if we don't take the work seriously, who else will?[1564]

Tu then relaunches the discussion in a surprise direction with a comparison of Confucianism and Greek drama:

> For all his wisdom, self-cultivation and moral effort, Oedipus cannot avoid his preordained fate. This is not tragedy in the Confucian sense, which is even more profound, and connected to our own day-to-day decisions. The highest ideal in Confucianism is to become a sage, which is to say a person who achieves the fullest possible embodiment of humane benevolence and radiance, and who via spiritual effort contributes her utmost to the construction of a harmonious family, a just society, a safe and healthy nation, all the way up to the unity of everything under Heaven. […] Confucius made no kingdom of the future, no saving grace or utopian ideal; he chose instead to face present reality with its evolving share of tragedy. In other words, the distance between what one sees one *can* do and what one

[1561] Tu, 'The Future of the Dialogue Between Marxism and Confucianism', p. 294.

[1562] Tu, 'The Future of the Dialogue Between Marxism and Confucianism', p. 296.

[1563] Tu, 'The Future of the Dialogue Between Marxism and Confucianism', pp. 296-297.

[1564] Tu, 'The Future of the Dialogue Between Marxism and Confucianism', p. 299.

> actually *does* not only does not get smaller as one approaches the sagely ideal, but actually keeps expanding.[1565]

There is, then, no cheap or revolutionary catharsis of any kind in Confucian sagehood:

> It doesn't matter how long you live; you only get one life. […] Each individual's capacity for benevolence is as Marx described: our individual freedom is the foundation of everyone else's freedom, and the degree of benevolence attained by each individual is the measure of our 'humanity' as a whole. […] The more each of us can do, the higher humanity's benevolence stocks will rise, and the reverse is also true; *this* is the world we live in. Everybody has a sense of responsibility for *something*. We are trapped in layer upon layer of limitations which we must struggle constantly to overcome.[1566]

The paradigm example from Chinese antiquity is Emperor Shun, who triumphed over miserable and ungrateful kin not by exacting cheap revenge, but by remaining true to a higher principle of *xiao* or 'filial piety' which ended up inspiring both his own family and those beyond it.[1567] Formal education is good and desirable, but not strictly necessary; tragedy and self-cultivation are equal-opportunity human universals, as the Chinese Communist Revolution itself showed:

> In the Confucian tradition, book learning was always for a minority, whether described as 'elites' or otherwise. Most people lacked the economic security or other preconditions of patience for it, and were forced to develop themselves morally within the confines imposed by illiteracy. Still, there have always been those rare individuals who lacked privileges but found ways to persevere with the cultivation of self-awareness and foresight. The progress of civilisation has depended heavily on such individuals, whose sense of self crystallises in quiet determination. […] One need only look at some of the amazing martyrs of the Communist Revolution in China to get a sense of this tragic purpose. […] The goal of such exemplars was neither self-aggrandisement nor the interests of a specific group or social class, but the advancement of humanity as a whole. […] Circumstances conspired to force them to sacrifice themselves for all of us, and they were ultimately willing to do so.[1568]

Like Marx and his truest disciples, Confucius, Mencius and their heirs share a 'deep and thick'[1569] sense of history which manifests itself as a profound appreciation for

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[1565] Tu, 'The Future of the Dialogue Between Marxism and Confucianism', pp. 300-301.

[1566] Tu, 'The Future of the Dialogue Between Marxism and Confucianism', p. 301.

[1567] See Tu, 'The Future of the Dialogue Between Marxism and Confucianism', p. 301.

[1568] Tu, 'The Future of the Dialogue Between Marxism and Confucianism', p. 302.

[1569] Tu, 'The Future of the Dialogue Between Marxism and Confucianism', p. 302.

the contributions of the sage-kings and other outstanding forebears. The Confucian commitment to the idea of a Mandate of Heaven, moreover, engenders (as Marxism also does, in its own *prima facie* heavenless way) visions of a distant and more just human future.[1570] If the Cultural Revolution did its level best to obliterate this exact patrimony, and if several decades of 'Reform and Opening Up' have merely created a consumerist society in its place, then this is not a 'desired outcome'[1571] either for Confucians or Marxists. The dialogue between the two, then, must be built more or less from scratch: 'In terms of our future cooperation, we must understand that the humanities in China […] have been thoroughly marginalised.'[1572]

[1570] See Tu, 'The Future of the Dialogue Between Marxism and Confucianism', pp. 302-303.

[1571] Tu, 'The Future of the Dialogue Between Marxism and Confucianism', p. 303.

[1572] Tu, 'The Future of the Dialogue Between Marxism and Confucianism', p. 305.

14. 'In Search of Confucian Entrepreneurs'

> Lenin regarded all interactions as zero-sum. To use the phrase he made famous, the fundamental question is always "Who Whom?" - who dominates whom, who does what to whom, ultimately who annihilates whom. To the extent that we gain, you lose. Contrast this view with the one taught in basic microeconomics: whenever there is a non-forced transaction, both sides benefit, or they would not make the exchange. For the seller, the money is worth more than the goods he sells, and for the buyer the goods are worth more than the money. Lenin's hatred of the market, and his attempts to abolish it entirely during War Communism, derived from the opposite idea, that all buying and selling is *necessarily* exploitative. When Lenin speaks of 'profiteering' or 'speculation' (capital crimes), he is referring to every transaction, however small. Peasant 'bagmen' selling produce were shot.
>
> Gary Saul Morson

What holds for 'Marxism' must hold for 'capitalism' as well; a commitment to 'dialogue' on all sides includes up, down, left *and* right. It is not wrong to understand Tu as a critic of the overcommodification (summarisable in the phrase 'market society') of things which ought to be valued beyond the trading floor, but he has also expressed his support for pragmatic, market-based approaches to human economic development. Tu's Confucianism in no way presupposes a cult of poverty or a rejection of material comfort; affluence (at least up to a certain level) makes the business of self-cultivation easier. The question is rather how best to secure an environment conducive to human moral flourishing - amidst material scarcity and insecurity - without abandoning the idea that flourishing itself is always the responsibility of free individual human beings; once the bottom tiers of Maslow's pyramid have been broadly satisfied, more material resources only mean more potential influence - negative as well as positive - on the cosmos around you.[1573]

Still, self-cultivating individuals with active spiritual lives will seek harmonious union with Heaven and all underneath it; precisely to this end, a modicum of control and insurance amid the tectonic, galactic chaos of our world is not at all to be sneezed at. Wealth is desirable as a safety net for the self and as a means of helping others, but profit for its own sake is a non-starter in all spiritual traditions; circumstances may demand that we choose a road of principled resistance to injustice. Tu's 2015 *'Muqian Zhongguo Meiyou Rushang'* (literally translated as 'China Currently Has No Confucian Entrepreneurs', but rendered by me as 'In Search of Confucian Entrepreneurs') makes his dissatisfaction with 21st-century 'neoliberalism' quite clear, but it stops short of questioning the most basic and

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[1573] See Tu Weiming, 'In Search of Confucian Entrepreneurs' ('*Muqian Zhongguo Meiyou Rushang*'), *Zhongguo Cishanjia*, 17/7/2015, https://xw.qq.com/foxue/20150716016140/FOX2015071601614000?from=singlemessage&isappinstalled=0 (accessed 26/11/2019).

uncontroversial lesson of the Cold War, namely that the decentralised allocation of material resources is by and large more efficient than central economic planning. If private entrepreneurs are here to stay in one form or another, what does that mean for Tu's Confucian humanism?

> In contemporary language, an entrepreneur is 'Confucian' if she maintains an interest in politics, engages in [civil] society, and keeps her finger on the pulse of culture. This is the intellectual cream of the business world, a species of public intellectual which is both self-aware and, as a result, acutely aware of wider responsibilities to the common weal.
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> In her business activities, the Confucian entrepreneur is not self-seeking; the old Confucian *jianlisiyi* adage - 'reflecting on justice wherever one sees profit' - is the guiding star of her conduct.[1574]

Tu is aware that this platitude will need some serious unpacking in 2020 if it is to be taken seriously anywhere. Is it 'just', for example, to turn oneself into a brand in order to make a living? What concrete responsibilities - 'spiritual' as well as material - do managers have to their staff and clients? And aren't employees ultimately bound by the same moral gravity as investors and bosses? 'Confucian entrepreneurship', if it is ever to mean anything international or universal, will have to be about much more than Corporate Social Responsibility with Chinese characteristics; it will have to earn a reputation as a sustained, holistic critique of everything from post-Taylor 'management science' to investment practices, office politics, positive psychology and beyond - in short, the entire global 'capitalist system' from top to bottom, both the sustaining architecture and the flowery appendages. The outcome of this critique, however, is unlikely to be a complete overhaul:

> It is a grave error to think that justice and profit are always opposed. What is justice but the harmonisation of interests? The ultimate imperative of justice is big profit, not small profit - the profit of the many, not just the one fatcat. But the goal of this profit is not profit itself, so much as the opportunities for moral advancement that profit provides.[1575]

There is, then, nothing in Tu's defence of 'profit' that contradicts the central assumption of the 19th-century American labour movements, beloved of box-office critics of capitalism like Noam Chomsky, that it was 'self-evident' that those who worked in the factories should own them. The broad Marxist alienation thesis - summarised well by Terry Eagleton in his half-joking defence of Marxism as the ideal creed for lazy people - holds for Tu's Confucianism as well: the problem is not work as such, but *meaningless* work, which is always 'unjust' by definition. What exactly is it about working for 'the man' - rather than oneself - which is alienating or meaningless? Is it the constant self-censorship required for a paycheck, the denial of the freedom to exercise one's own moral and intellectual judgement, to move in and out of 'politics' as one sees fit? In the Chinese tradition, the *junzi* or 'noble

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[1574] Tu, 'In Search of Confucian Entrepreneurs'.

[1575] Tu, 'In Search of Confucian Entrepreneurs'.

intellectual' may have typically been seen as a *shi* or scholar-warrior (alongside farmers, artisans and merchants in the old Chinese *shinonggongshang* caste system[1576]), but Tu's equal-opportunity Confucianism - or more specifically, *Mencianism* - extends the imperative of moral self-cultivation to absolutely everyone:

> In the Chinese tradition, the true qualification for intellectualhood is the quality of one's spirit of service to the people as a whole, one's feelings for the entire state of the world under Heaven beyond mere selfish engagement in the ratrace of the day. […] An intellectual emerging from the contemporary world of business will naturally retain a critical spirit, not just in matters of formal politics but towards the society and culture as a whole in which she operates.[1577]

The first responsibility of a 'Confucian entrepreneur' - in a sense prior to all the others - is to offer her employees an equal opportunity to become *junzi*-intellectuals themselves, and hence to *work for themselves* (not her). This obviously raises a whole series of political questions beyond the individual entrepreneur's immediate control, but Tu's definition of a 'Confucian entrepreneur' as a 'public intellectual' implies that she, too, has a responsibility - proportional to her success, and disproportionate compared to others less fortunate - to lead by example precisely by encouraging critique and active self-cultivation among her employees. This may be much easier said than done, but the ideal stands.

Simultaneously, a vital subset of 'Confucian entrepreneurship' discourse concerns the nature of 'Confucian employeehood': if business leaders have an enlarged responsibility both to speak truth to power and to liberate those in their charge to do likewise, the same principle surely applies to individual employees, who may possess less power, but often more truth, than their bosses. Confucius remonstrated with his rulers but did not become a ruler himself; a vital part of his self-given mandate was to prevent his superiors from falling victim to their own hype, and to provide an antidote to the sycophants who self-interestedly refrain from voicing real dissent. Such a whistleblowing attitude to one's job is likely to have real costs (and may ultimately cost one one's job, or at least one's promotion), but those with a deep sense of history and cultural belonging will understand that it is their responsibility to raise the moral stock of humanity by acting in such small but significant ways. Modern China has lost contact, Tu argues, with this 'vital cultural awareness'[1578], but the examples of the disciples of Confucius, from Zi Gong to Yan Hui, show that 'meaningful' work may involve anything from making money to pay for important, worthwhile projects to a 'penniless' path nevertheless rich in its wider human and cosmic significance:

> Much of the dialogue between Zi Gong and Confucius concerns questions of ultimate meaning and the relationship between humanity and Heaven. Zi

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[1576] See Tu, 'In Search of Confucian Entrepreneurs'.

[1577] Tu, 'In Search of Confucian Entrepreneurs'.

[1578] Tu, 'In Search of Confucian Entrepreneurs'.

> Gong's business career, meanwhile, was full of risk, vision and success. Confucianism owes much of its later expansion to his largesse; in a sense he was the most loyal disciple of all, [because] he created a lot of the material conditions which allowed Confucianism to flourish. He was certainly the most entrepreneurial of all the disciples, engaging in a wide range of activities and developing a number of industries. […] Unromantic considerations - influence, image, reputation - have always played a conspicuous part in much so-called philanthropy, but once you have been successful, you have to find a meaning beyond your own success; otherwise you risk losing yourself entirely. But those who seek meaning do not by any means always achieve material success; Yan Hui, for example, lived in misery. Still, such people find intrinsic joy in what they are trying to do. And to the extent that they are authentic in this quest for meaning, it proves contagious.[1579]

Business is one field of endeavour among many in which meaning, and hence inspiration to others, can be multiplied; Tu dismisses as Legalist fantasy the myth that Confucians reflexively disparage 'merchants' at the expense of other professions[1580] (economic development clearly requires specialisation and division of labour, not just generic armies of 'farmers and soldiers'[1581]). The Chinese word *Rushang* ('Confucian entrepreneur') emerges as a self-conscious label in Ming times - and there are important individual case studies from the Ming, Qing and Republican eras - but the tradition was abruptly cut, for obvious reasons, in 1949, at least on the Chinese Mainland; contemporary 'Confucian entrepreneurship' discourse is hence heavily dominated by Japanese, Korean, Malaysian and other voices from the Sino-periphery.[1582] The most influential 'Confucian entrepreneur' of modern times, or at least since Zi Gong, was indeed not Chinese at all: Meiji industrialist Shibusawa Eiichi (1840-1931), author of *The Analects and the Abacus* (and set to feature on a new round of 10000-yen banknotes), is widely regarded as the godfather of Japan's unprecedented economic modernisation.[1583]

But if business itself is a worthy and meaningful pursuit, *talking* about its meaningfulness is fraught with inherent risk. Tu's flattering portrayals of leading figures in East Asian companies like Mitsubishi, Shiseido, Samsung and Hyundai[1584] - their commitment to ancient Confucian learning and so on - may be intended first and foremost as proof-of-concept examples to a contemporary *Chinese* business community reacquainting itself with its own traditions, but the idea that dialogue with the business world first requires a foot in the door - a promise of selling them something they might want to buy - rather than an argument for humanistic learning on its own terms and for its own sake, will require

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[1579] Tu, 'In Search of Confucian Entrepreneurs'.

[1580] See Tu, 'In Search of Confucian Entrepreneurs'.

[1581] Tu, 'In Search of Confucian Entrepreneurs'.

[1582] See Tu, 'In Search of Confucian Entrepreneurs'.

[1583] See Tu, 'In Search of Confucian Entrepreneurs'.

[1584] See Tu, 'In Search of Confucian Entrepreneurs'.

messy compromises, not least when that business community is a principal source of funding for humanities teaching and research in the first place. I have now worked at the coalface of this mess for a number of years; I have seen no shortage of businesspeople try to use people like Tu Weiming to enhance their reputations, but I am also a prisoner of having seen plenty of 'researchers' willingly mislead businesspeople and their foundations to fund projects that the businesspeople themselves fail to understand (and would not support if they did). A 'dialogue' between the academic humanities and social sciences, on the one hand, and the 'real world' of business, on the other, may be desired for any number of good reasons, but what is the proper relationship between these 'two cultures'? Who is buying and who is selling? And is such a mercantile metaphor apt for a properly 'dialogical' relationship at all? Can 'research' on Confucian entrepreneurship ever remain objective if it is being funded by organisations with certain vested interests? And how can businesses 'leverage' the power of meaning and morality to enhance their own workers' productivity without instrumentalising and degrading the very thing they may legitimately wish to promote?

If there is always an incentive to 'listen and learn' a bit too conspicuously from potential donors or clients, and hence to abandon - wholly or in some surreptitious part - the critical spirit on which a kingdom of dialogue might be built, then perhaps Lenin was on one unintended level right to regard *all* 'buying and selling' as fundamentally exploitative. Do true 'dialogue' (and hence true meaning) begin where buyer-seller relationships end, and where the unadorned truth can finally be told? One tremendously refreshing and important aspect of life in post-Soviet Russia as I encountered it during 18 months in the country in 2012-13 was an unexpected frankness in interpersonal relationships, at least with older people, not yet soured by the fake smile which capitalism motivates and makes habit; some ineffable legacy of Marxism had survived all that Lenin and Stalin had ruined. Far from being separate from the discourse on 'Confucian entrepreneurship', the self-censorship which greases the wheels of day-to-day global capitalism seems to me to be at the absolute heart of it: a true 'Confucian entrepreneur' today will not only know about the Confucian classics and encourage her staff to learn more about them (and also be well versed in the intellectual history of the Cold War and the cultures of 'foreign' civilisations), but she will also inspire her employees - by the power of her own example - to be true to themselves and honest in their dealings with her. Access to the 'culture' - in Tu's mind, 'especially classical culture'[1585] - which promotes this sort of genuine moral leadership should not, however, be the privilege of bosses, managers or elites, or a mere cosmetic feather appended to otherwise ruthless MBA programs; it is the equally legitimate striving of the global 'proletariat'. The dialogue or 'discourse' on Confucian entrepreneurship could hence be meaningfully extended by embracing, for example, the work of Edith Hall on 'classical education and working-class British life':

> The hero of Thomas Hardy's tragic novel *Jude the Obscure* (1895) is a poor stonemason living in a Victorian village who is desperate to study Latin and Greek at university. He gazes, from the top of a ladder leaning against a rural barn, on the spires of the University of Christminster (a fictional

[1585] See Tu, 'In Search of Confucian Entrepreneurs'.

substitute for Oxford). The spires, vanes and domes 'like the topaz gleamed' in the distance. The lustrous topaz shares its golden colour with the stone used to build Oxbridge colleges, but it is also one of the hardest minerals in nature. Jude's fragile psyche and health inevitably collapse when he discovers just how unbreakable are the social barriers that exclude him from elite culture and perpetuate his class position, however lovely the buildings seem that concretely represent them, shimmering on the horizon.

[…] Museums in Britain were visited by a far wider class cross-section than their Continental equivalents, where the admission of visitors to the princely galleries was closely monitored. There was a sense that art and archaeology somehow belonged to the nation rather than exclusively to wealthy individuals; free admission was customary. A Prussian traveller in London was disturbed to find in 1782 that the visitors to the British Museum were 'various … some I believe, of the very lowest classes of the people, of both sexes, for as it is the property of the nation, everyone has the same right … to see it, that another has'. And classical sculptures such as the Parthenon frieze and the Venus de Milo were endlessly reproduced in forms accessible even to the poorest Briton: plaster reproductions in municipal museums across the nation, cheap self-education magazines such as *Cassell's Popular Educator*, and volumes published by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, available in libraries of Mechanics' Institutes. Lower-class visitors' memoirs often imply that what they saw in museums nurtured an impulse towards self-education.

[…] Once the classical Athenian democracy became an acceptable constitutional ideal by the late-1820s, Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War moved to the centre of the working-class autodidact's curriculum: a young miner who was a member of the Ashington Debating and Literary Improvement Society in Northumberland, and who was killed by a fall of coal in 1899, died with a translation of Thucydides in his pocket, the page turned down at Pericles' funeral speech.

The nub of the controversy over classical education has always been whether it 'counts' to read classical texts in modern-language translation. By 1720, the battlelines had been drawn up. Britons who were unable or unwilling to bankroll their sons' classical educations fought back. The Greeks and Romans could be approached by routes that didn't require years glued to grammars and dictionaries. They could be read in mother-tongue translations, by great poets such as John Dryden and Alexander Pope, even though this was obviously derided as a vulgar mode of access to the Classics by those who had purchased the linguistic training. The material covered in ancient authors could be enjoyed even by the completely illiterate in accessible entertainments such as travelling booth theatres and fairground shows. […] Classical education need not be intrinsically elitist or reactionary; it has been the curriculum of empire, but it can be the curriculum of liberation.[1586]

[1586] Edith Hall, 'Classics for the People', https://aeon.co/essays/why-working-class-britons-loved-reading-and-debating-the-classics, 13/11/2019 (accessed 29/11/2019).

If 20th-century Japanese barons could take time to read Confucius in classical Chinese, workers and managers in the West can now access the wisdom and inspiration of the East, and *vice versa*, in translation. At the very least, it is a mistake to understand the Meiji Restoration, in which Shibusawa played such a prominent role, as a complete break with classical tradition; it was rather a creative, modern embodiment of the ancient Confucian ideal which must be renewed once again in the Internet Age:

> We are a learning civilisation, so our entrepreneurs can learn from Japan and Korea as well as the West. We are also fairly open-minded; we don't tend towards narrow fundamentalism in spiritual matters. […] And we are a dialogical civilsation; we love talking. […] The old *Tianxia* idea of the myriad things forming one body under Heaven means everything is on our radar.[1587]

A salient feature of Tu's Spiritual Humanism is its broad opposition to the dominance of *homo economicus* models, not only in the social sciences (where they are, to be sure, less fashionable than they used to be) but also, and above all, in the real world (where they may also be less fashionable in theory, but still the default setting in practice). Business leaders are well placed to push back against them:

> The so-called *homo economicus* is a kind of rationalistic animal; she knows her own interests and pursues them, in a relatively free market, within the limits imposed by the law. She adheres to certain ideas of freedom, rationality, rights, and the rule of law, and respects the dignity of the individual to some extent as well. This is much better than someone who actively harms others, or self-harms, but it falls a long way short of our ideal. The business community can take the lead on transforming this [cultural poverty] by the power of its own example: beyond freedom, there are ideas of justice, equality and the public good which can be meaningfully embodied; beyond rationality, there is sympathy and mercy; beyond the rule of law, there is a spirit of deference and courtesy; beyond power, there is responsibility. […] A great entrepreneur will not be content with the day-to-day management of her own company.[1588]

Tu may underestimate the difficulty of embodying such values credibly to one's inferiors (why not just give all the money and power away and become as insecure as the rest of us?); he seems, in short, to overestimate the possibility of authentic 'dialogue' between the financially unequal. Lenin had a point about 'exploitation' a century before the #MeToo movement, even if he adopted horrific and counterproductive means to try to solve the problem; in a world in which 'buying' and 'selling' are features of social life - and until global GDP is four or five times higher and the robots have liberated us all for poetry, their future looks pretty stable - 'entrepreneurs' have an indispensable role to play, if only they can find creative

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[1587] See Tu, 'In Search of Confucian Entrepreneurs'.

[1588] Tu, 'In Search of Confucian Entrepreneurs'.

and credible ways to embody the selflessness which a life of self-cultivation sooner or later entails:

> The next phase of Confucianism's development will be marked, hopefully, by the emergence of Confucian entrepreneurs. Academic research may be specialised and deep, but its influence is limited. Confucian ideas may have a sizable influence in politics, but the risk of 'politicisation' by less savoury ideologies is omnipresent. The business world is where [real Confucian values] are likeliest to make themselves felt.[1589]

[1589] Tu, 'In Search of Confucian Entrepreneurs'.

15. ‘Confucian Humanism and Democracy’

I am restored by my decline
And by the harsh awakening it brings.
[…] What is it worth, then, this insane last phase
When everything about you goes downhill?
This much: you get to see the cosmos blaze
And feel its grandeur, even against your will.

Clive James

A dual conviction sustains Tu’s Confucianism: the idea that material progress and comfort are, *ceteris paribus*, good; and the sense that ultimate meaning is a meeting with that which one cannot control - a mastery of the self in the face of the inexorable. What on Earth does this mean for human political institutions? Corruption and tyranny may thwart the former, but they seem to make no difference whatsoever to the latter; a Solzhenitsyn or Spartacus can still enjoy a meaningful life of resistance and dignity no matter how unpleasant such a life might be in its various stages. Is there anything about ‘democracy’ which makes individual lives more ‘meaningful’? Tu’s 1989 lecture ‘Confucian Humanism and Democracy’ predates Daniel Bell’s highly influential *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy* (2015) by a quarter of a century, but also reminds its reader that the Confucian ideal, for all its apparent stoic fatalism in the face of aging, sickness and death, is not the lazy apology for the *status quo* that Max Weber parodied it to be. Fear of hellfire for Protestant sloth may be one sort of motivation for productive activity, but it is not a terribly humane one; in Tu’s case, the pleasures of dialogue are themselves among the reasons to go to work in the morning, though part of that work is always to strengthen the democratic fibre of the human community itself, or in other words to increase the stock of ‘humanity’ to be passed down to the next generation. Such ‘work’ may take an unimaginable variety of authentic forms beyond the public examination, ballot box or parliamentary debate; society is less a matter of choice between ‘meritocracy’ and ‘democracy’ - as if getting what you deserved or casting a single vote were ever the most important things - and more a question of how to perform free, meaningful service (beyond the mere outward semblance of it) to the concentric Confucian circles of self, family, human community, nature and Heaven.

Members of the *wuchanjieji* (‘propertyless class’ or ‘proletariat’) will - *ceteris paribus* again - have a much harder time self-cultivating in this way than the leisured classes whose expenses are automatically covered, but Tu characteristically asks his Chinese reader to think back - beyond the birth of Karl Marx and the tripartite slogans of the French Revolution - to ancient Greece and Rome as the twin sources of ‘highly complex’ modern Western thinking about property, political representation and individual freedom. The humiliations of the Opium Wars are in any case a ‘superficial’ place for any serious modern Chinese

intellectual to start, or end, her forays into the history of 'democracy'[1590]; likewise, the principle of the rule of law emerges over many centuries in the interplay of Greek, Roman and Christian cultural factors, including the hard work of - gulp - *lawyers*:

> Lawyers played a vital role in the Renaissance - and farther back still in Greek and Roman times - as paragons of open debate and orderly procedure: you can talk first, then it's his turn, and then someone else can do the judging. […] Chinese society, meanwhile, has basically been held together by *li* or ritual, which is not the same thing as law. China has never really believed in lawyers; the legal profession has more often than not been derided in popular discourse as a gaggle of loophole-seeking, self-enriching liars. This propensity to misuse one's understanding of the law in one's own private interest has led to a widespread feeling in China that the more law one knows, the more of an arsehole one is likely to be. The idea that law can be a force for stability as well as plunder has yet properly to take root in China.[1591]

Jokes about lawyers aside, the corollary of this relative occidental respect for the law is that contractarian thinking has become a feature of so-called 'Western individualism' in a way that is simply not true of China: 'The concept of the contract emerges very early in Chinese history, but contracts have never been central to the functioning of Chinese society. Rather, it is the family, the clan, the village.'[1592] Confucian 'learning for the self' emerges out of this tribalism, not as the outcome of some private utility calculus; Tu summarises the Confucian *weijizhixue* ethos by asking: 'If you can't stand on your own two feet, how will you ever be able to help others stand on theirs?'[1593] If legalistic modes are concerned with securing one's own interests in a competitive world, Confucian 'individualism' transcends 'fairness' from the beginning: self-cultivation is *for* me, but not just about what's *in it* for me: an ethic of service may not be the *goal* of self-cultivation (which can have no goal other than itself), but it is nonetheless implicit in the Confucian worldview. How the individual cuts through tribal groupthink to achieve this life of private, individualised spirituality remains one of the great mysteries of the post-Axial Age, but what all Axial civilisations offer to the individual (an ostensibly new gift in human history) is just such a personalised spiritual path. What therefore matters in politics is securing sufficient material resources (for oneself and others) to make proper self-cultivation easier, not securing more resources for its own sake (or to have more than others). Beyond the logic of the Lockean proviso, however, a 'Faustian spirit'[1594] in Western

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[1590] See Tu Weiming, 'Confucian Humanism and Democracy' ('*Rujia Renwenzhuyi yu Minzhu*'), in Kong Xianglai and Chen Peiyu (eds.), *Tu Weiming Sixiang Xuejie Wenxuan (* (Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2014), pp. 449-450.

[1591] Tu, 'Confucian Humanism and Democracy', p. 451.

[1592] Tu, 'Confucian Humanism and Democracy', p. 451.

[1593] Tu, 'Confucian Humanism and Democracy', p. 452.

[1594] Tu, 'Confucian Humanism and Democracy', p. 452.

civilisation - traceable to the myths of Prometheus and Ulysses - has gradually come to dominate the post-Enlightenment world in the form of addiction to novelty and dominion for their own sakes: a toxic wedding of consumerism and imperialism. Like Machiavelli, however, whose name is wrongly attached to doctrines he vehemently opposed, Homer, Aeschylus, Marlowe, Goethe and the many others who have built on the myths of Prometheus, Ulysses and Faust have tended to do so from a critical, or at least ambivalent, standpoint: Dante, for example, famously consigns Ulysses to the lower reaches of Hell in Canto 26 of the *Inferno* precisely because his selfish thirst for knowedge is detached from the desire ever to share it with his own tribe. John H. Finley summarises centuries of Western hostility to such selfishness, and reverence for Dante's Christian takedown of it, as late as 1921:

> That a medievalist should call forth the homage of the twentieth century to the extent of being honored in all civilized lands and by cultured peoples who, for the most part, do not know the language spoken by him, or who do not profess the religion of him who wrote the most religious book of Christianity, is a marvel explainable by the fact that the *Divine Comedy* is a drama of the soul - the story of a struggle which every man must make to possess his own spirit against forces that would enslave it. The central interest of the poem is in the individual who may be you or I instead of Dante the subject of the work, and that fact exalts the personal element and gives the spiritual value which we of modern times appreciate as well as did the 14th century.[1595]

Tu, then, is at best exaggerating for effect when he says that, in contrast to a 'Promethean', 'Ulyssean' or 'Faustian' 'West', 'China' has stressed the importance of 'staying at home and achieving harmony rather than indulging in escapist fantasies'.[1596] What, it is worth asking, is uniquely 'Chinese' about 'wanting to assume responsibility' or 'thinking beyond oneself to consider parents, siblings, neighbours, the wider community, the nation, and all under Heaven'[1597]? One can, if one wishes, choose to see Western culture as an infernal *qiuyiqiuxin* ('quest for the different and the new'[1598]) - much of the worst of 'modern art' might well be said to fit this description - but this is about as one-eyed a view of the 'West' as a reduction of 'Confucianism' to the religion of Chinese imperial authority would be. The 'Faustian spirit' which might be said to underlie the worst excesses of the modern West - the lust for control over foreigners, and even over nature itself - may not have an exact corollary in the Chinese cultural tradition, but to pretend to a Chinese audience that the legend of Faust is not first and foremost a *cautionary* tale is, to

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[1595] John H. Finley, in John T. Slattery, *Dante: The Central Man of All the World*, (New York: Kennedy & Sons, 1920), http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16978/16978-h/16978-h.htm (accessed 4/12/2019).

[1596] Tu, 'Confucian Humanism and Democracy', p. 452.

[1597] Tu, 'Confucian Humanism and Democracy', p. 452.

[1598] Tu, 'Confucian Humanism and Democracy', p. 452.

put it mildly, misleading. The 'extrinsic transcendental God'[1599] of the Abrahamic religions - Judaism and Christianity in particular - is also used by Tu as a pretext for talking about Western understanding of government and law as 'necessary evils' instituted by fallen human beings to limit the authority of any one individual (for only a transcendental God might resist the absolute corruption of absolute power).[1600] Though China has its own Legalist tradition (as well as a more pessimistic Confucian account of human nature in Xunzi), Tu regards the main pipeline of Confucian spirituality as more trusting of human nature in general (witness Mencian claims of the fundamental and equal goodness of all human beings) and, in particular, the ability of the best leaders to lead by example and achieve *tianrenheyi* ('the harmonious union of Heaven and humanity') in their own persons.[1601] Several centuries of Western 'Divine Right of Kings' discourse, as well as Aristotle's vision of man as a 'political animal' who realises his highest nature by engaging in public debate, are conveniently sidestepped here.

For all the false dichotomies, wilful exaggerations and glaring omissions (the historian of ideas can always be outflanked when summarising), Tu at least shows his audience that the influences on individual modern thinkers and their conceptions of 'democracy' may be considerably older, deeper and more diverse than our petty contemporary wrangling typically permits us to realise. After 150 years of invasive influence, 'the values of modern Western civilisation,' for example, 'have bedded down deep roots here in China, and have become part of the garden of our tradition' to such an extent that the old Confucian flora are now 'scarcely visible'.[1602] As evidence of a veritable 'split' with Confucian tradition, Tu reels off a series of core cultural concepts ('science', 'philosophy', 'society', 'religion' etc.) imported into mainstream Chinese via Japanese translations from Western languages[1603], and goes on to remind us that a culture once obsessed with continuity has been rocked by major convulsions every decade since the Opium Wars.[1604] A feeling of having inherited a long-term civilisational project cannot easily be retained in such circumstances, no matter how much willpower and learning one brings to bear on them.[1605]

How, then, can the ancient spirit of Confucian humanism hope to reassert itself against the weedy influence of 'Faustian' ideologies? What role, if any, might 'democracy' have to play? Tu basically avoids the question by falling back on his familiar Confucian *weijizhixue* line here, but he says enough to suggest that standard Western arguments for democracy, especially when set against the urgency of the crises (environmental, political etc.) of the present era, fall well short

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[1599] Tu, 'Confucian Humanism and Democracy', p. 453.

[1600] See Tu, 'Confucian Humanism and Democracy', p. 453.

[1601] See Tu, 'Confucian Humanism and Democracy', p. 453.

[1602] Tu, 'Confucian Humanism and Democracy', p. 454.

[1603] See Tu, 'Confucian Humanism and Democracy', p. 454.

[1604] See Tu, 'Confucian Humanism and Democracy', p. 455.

[1605] See Tu, 'Confucian Humanism and Democracy', p. 455.

of the necessary zeal.[1606] In order properly to answer the 'Confucian humanism and democracy' question, a full consideration of the idea of a 'New Axial Age' is required.

[1606] See Tu, 'Confucian Humanism and Democracy', pp. 455-459.

16. 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age'

Reflecting on the difference between 'dialogue among civilisations' (*wenming duihua*) and a future 'dialogical civilisation' (*duihua wenming*), Tu starts this 2007 lecture by citing Richard Rorty, who was foolish enough to believe, before physically visiting China, that the world was on its way to adopting English as a global language.[1607] Rorty's postmodernism is a kind of riff on Christianity or the Abrahamic monotheisms broadly understood; it has not seriously engaged with the spiritual and symbolic universes of Confucianism, Hinduism or Buddhism (let alone non-Axial traditions).[1608] The legacies of all these ancient traditions in the 21st Century are profoundly uneven and unclear; the very idea of distinct 'cultural spheres', identifiable by geography, is rapidly being undermined by the flooding of the open cultural marketplace characteristic of global modernity. Nobody - not even Richard Rorty or Tu Weiming - can possibly claim to have a handle on this whole torrential story; Karl Jaspers himself, the godfather of the idea of the Axial Age, foresaw the continued discrete influence of Socrates, Confucius, Buddha and Jesus well into the 21st Century, even as the possibilities for exchange expand with every passing day to match exponential improvements in communications technology.[1609]

The chief characteristic of the (first) Axial Age was the roughly simultaneous appearance, at several points on the Eurasian continent (Greece, Palestine, India, China), of a common humanistic spirit; scholars since Jaspers have had fun disagreeing with each other over how much (if any) real mutual influence there was, what exactly this 'common spirit' might have been, and what its final legacy may still be. Tu weighs in with his own two cents:

> The real breakthrough of the Axial civilisations was not the discovery of God or Brahma or any other such [transcendental] concept in itself, but the liftoff for human self-reflection that [such concepts] provided. […] This reflection may involve Heaven, but Heaven itself is made of extrinsic stuff; it may very well be that *we* are intimately involved in the business of ultimate meaning. The heavy hand of the Enlightenment, moreover, has not only relegated such spiritual paths to the background; it has gradually begun whisking them off the chessboard of human possibility altogether.[1610]

Too-easy elisions (of the 'Westernisation = Modernisation = Globalisation = Secularisation = Rationalisation' kind), made possible by Max Weber and his contemporary heirs in the social sciences ('interested in religion' but 'not particularly

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[1607] See Tu Weiming, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age' ('*Cong Xinzhouxin Shidai Kan Duihua Wenming yu Qiutongcunyi*'), in *Ershiyi Shiji de Ruxue*, (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2014), p. 232.

[1608] See Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', pp. 232-233.

[1609] See Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', pp. 236-237.

[1610] Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 238.

sensitive to religion'[1611]), only exacerbate the problem of arrogance which, among Tu's philosophical contemporaries, Rorty most egregiously exemplified: the idea that the premodern, non-Western world has nothing real to offer. China's Song-era neo-Confucian turn, to cite one obvious counter-example, represents a cultural moment broadly comparable with the Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment in its humanistic splendour[1612]; 21st-century global intellectual life should somehow, Tu argues, begin to reflect such multipolar complexity:

> Even if there is a close connection between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism, and even if the rationalism of the Enlightenment represents an important peak in the development of human civilisation, the current situation has moved on from these [historical moments]. […] There remains a strong conviction that, as scientific rationality unfolds its discoveries on the world, we will gradually understand more about everything. […] But why, then, does the power of [religion in one sense or other] seem to be on the increase? There is a tendency to associate this trend with zones of acute conflict, but I think that's a pretty superficial assessment of what's going on. […] In fact what we need to do is to make sense of the complex relationship between tradition and modernity.[1613]

Even Lu Xun, the great modern advocate of Chinese self-criticism and parodist of Chinese delusions of grandeur, retained a deep optimism, 'a strong sense that we are capable of standing tall again'[1614] which must have come from somewhere. If the modern mass migration and general cultural cross-pollination made possible by passenger aviation and the Internet have diluted the original doses of Axial and other premodern influences, this should not mean that new cocktails cannot be invented from a mixture of old and new ingredients; on the contrary, the global cocktail hour of a New Axial Age - with all the creativity, experimentation and exchange that such a party entails - might even be said to have arrived:

> The Chinese people have achieved liftoff economically; the world is very interested in that, and the political implications loom large for everyone. But what is our concept of culture? What are we learning *for*? And how should we learn? From the perspective of culture or spiritual civilisation, do the Axial civilisations (and this is an absolutely crucial question) have any meaning left for us? Or have we already entered a new world of scientific and technological globality, one with which all spiritual conceptions of civilisation are simply incompatible? […] We always hope to learn from the superpowers, but […] this is a fundamentally wrong attitude: even a superpower is only one reference among many. A people with a history as rich as ours should have no trouble embracing the world as a whole. […] We

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[1611] Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 239.

[1612] See Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 240.

[1613] Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', pp. 241-242.

[1614] Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 245.

> should be able to draw on the experiences of all civilisations, including Latin American, African and others. [1615]

If this rings hollow and boring, the idea of a one-size-fits-all, *homo economicus* cliché for humanity's future has no meat on it either: 'The so-called "economic man" is a rational animal; he knows where his own interests lie. Via the market - not a perfectly free market of course, but at least a functioning one - he expands his profits within the the limits that the law allows.'[1616] Leaving people alone in this way is not enough (and in a world of abundant choice, such 'freedom' may be experienced as paralysing[1617]), but denying people's privacy and forcing them into things against their will is, Tu reminds us, straightforwardly totalitarian:

> I remember back in the 80s, a Chinese exchange student in the US talked about how hard it would be to get the right to privacy off the ground in Chinese law. Especially in family contexts, a mother would wonder what 'privacy' her children could be expected to have: we're a family after all, and we have such affection for you; why do you need a right to hide things from us? Schools and the wider society tend to function on an extension of this same logic: if you want privacy, it means you definitely have things you don't want to tell us, dangerous things, otherwise why would you want to hide them?[1618]

Parallel to the challenges of privacy and individual consent, however, the problem of income inequality looms large in Tu's vision of a healthy and just world[1619]; while he may tend to focus on the responsibilities of the wealthy and powerful to wield their resources responsibly, he also understands that chronic, massive and systemic inequality is simply unsustainable, if not from a realist standpoint then at least from the 'spiritual idealist' perspective he defends (i.e. the economically underprivileged have an unfairly and counterproductively hard time with the business of self-cultivation). Tu's overall politics are probably to the right of a Lu Xun, for example, but it is hard to see him disagreeing with Lu's fundamental insight that 'money cannot buy freedom, but freedom can be sold for money. Human beings have one great drawback, which is that they often become hungry. To remedy this drawback, and to avoid making people puppets, the most important thing in society seems to be economic rights.'[1620]

Not unrelated to the bread question, the publication of the *Earthrise* photograph, taken from the Moon on 24 December 1968, marked an important

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[1615] Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', pp. 247-250.

[1616] Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 251.

[1617] See Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 251.

[1618] Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 252.

[1619] See Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 252.

[1620] Lu Xun, in Nicolas D. Kristof, 'China's Greatest Dissident Writer: Dead But Still Dangerous', https://www.nytimes.com/1990/08/19/books/china-s-greatest-dissident-writer-dead-but-still-dangerous.html, 19/8/1990 (accessed 11/12/2019).

turning point in Tu's life: 'It was the first time that humanity could see the whole planet in one go.'[1621] The burst of emotion (and instrumental rationality) unleashed by this image ('we ought to pool the accumulated wisdom of humanity and discuss how we are going to survive [in such a fragile environment]'[1622] etc.) is completely understandable, but Tu's defence of 'dialogue' is, as we know by now, more direct and personal than that: 'Dialogue among civilisations […] deepens the well of our self-understanding and makes our self-reflection more comprehensive.'[1623] The ultimate rationale for dialogue, and by extension for democracy, is not that they secure our access to a Universal Basic Income and/or rights to individual privacy and critical expression, but that they help us to improve the quality of our relationship with *ourselves*; the individual rights and freedoms broadly guaranteed by post-Enlightenment politics matter not in themselves, or as the result of some rationalistic, contractarian syllogism, but precisely because they are the prerequisites for the self-cultivation where all meaning happens. This is the very opposite of a solipsistic or consumeristic quest: our relationships with ourselves are not only *mediated* by culture, nature and Heaven, but in some hard-to-explain sense *constituted* by our free interaction with them (witness Tu's famous and oft-repeated formulation of the cultivated human self as a 'centre of relationships'). It is unlikely that there will ever be a convincing theory of this process, because the 'embodied knowledge' of dialogical exchange, unlike the detached knowledge of science, discovers itself as it goes along. We don't 'consume' art; aesthetic experience becomes a part of us.

The 'dialogical civilisation' of the 'New Axial Age' extends to indigenous and other previously marginalised traditions as well as the pioneering Axial civilisations and their modern and postmodern offshoots.[1624] 'Dialogue,' moreover, 'is not just a means of resolving conflicts and disputes; it has an intrinsic value of its own, as a way of life.'[1625] The 'intimacy' required for such dialogue is, in practice, 'extremely difficult to achieve', both because life gets in the way and because a certain kind of sustained mutual attention is required for it[1626], but when it does succeed, it quite literally (cliché alert again) 'expands our horizons.'[1627] Pushing beyond the vacuous, Tu cites concrete, decades-long exchanges with Christian theologians as examples of dialogue which 'not only forced me to confront the shortcomings of the Confucian tradition but also gave me a sense of its latent potential. […] Without Christian stimuli, I would never have fully grasped the importance of Confucian culture; I would have kept regarding Confucianism as a mere social code.'[1628] The Chinese

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[1621] Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 253.

[1622] Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 255.

[1623] Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 255.

[1624] Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 255.

[1625] Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', pp. 255-256.

[1626] See Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 256.

[1627] Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 257.

[1628] Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', pp. 257-258.

concept of *hexie* - lazily translated as proto-totalitarian 'harmony' most of the time - is really underpinned by this ability to 'enrich our own sensitivity' and thereby to 'deepen our capacities for self-reflection' via humane, aesthetic contact with the social and natural worlds.[1629] An entrepreneur may enjoy all the material success in the world, but if she has no sense of her own dialogically enriched 'cultural identity' and the 'ultimate concern' which comes with it, then 'where can the meaning in her life come from?'[1630]

Even juxtaposing 'dialogue among civilisations' with Huntington's 'clash of civilisations' thesis risks obscuring the real significance of the former by reducing it to a 'geopolitical' theme[1631]; just as the *he* in *hexie* requires different individual voices, the *tong* in the Chinese *datong* or 'Great Unity' also implies, not 'sameness', but a 'voluntary, participative and mutual'[1632] spirit among all members - in short, a choir of free individuals, not an army of conscripts. If such 'harmony' or 'unity in diversity' (summarisable in the less hackneyed Chinese phrase *qiutongcunyi*) is extremely difficult to achieve in a family of three or four members (let alone in bigger teams and groups), nevertheless, 'when it *is* achieved, it proves to be of enormous value to the development of the individuals within the group.'[1633] If the petty tyrant or *xiaoren* seeks *tongerbuhe* ('conformity over individual expression'), the noble individual or *junzi* prefers a *qunerbudang* ('free association over toeing the party line') stance.[1634] Tu reminds his audience that 'in China, this line of thinking can be traced back well beyond Confucius.'[1635]

[1629] See Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 258.

[1630] See Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 258.

[1631] See Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 258.

[1632] Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 260.

[1633] Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 260.

[1634] See Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 261.

[1635] Tu, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qiutongcunyi* in a New Axial Age', p. 261.

17. 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit'

In this 2004 interview, Tu addresses the cultural dimension of China's 'Reform and Opening Up' process undertaken since 1979. There is no real 'opening up', in short, compatible with a wholesale rejection of Chinese tradition; what is required instead is solid self-awareness: 'This kind of learning is built on the ability to absorb the best in one's own cultural tradition and throw out the dregs. Strong subjectivity requires a critical and self-reflective spirit.'[1636] Confucian cultural conservatism should thus be understood in dynamic terms, 'not along the old *shuerbuzuo* lines of merely aping one's predecessors, but precisely because a true passing down [of tradition] involves creativity and the innovations of those doing the interpreting.'[1637] Culture itself, in other words, is dialogical: it only ever exists to be creatively transformed in the hearts and minds of those generations coming into fresh contact with it. To suggest otherwise is to offer a 'politicised misrepresentation'[1638] of what culture is: there is in fact no necessary connection between Tu's Confucian 'cultural conservatism' and any reactionary economic or political agenda, no sense that such conservatism is 'not in favour of human freedom' or 'unwilling to tackle inequality' (as critics of a certain traditionalistic Confucianism might prefer to claim of Confucianism as a whole).[1639]

For all their anti-Confucian rhetoric, indeed, 'liberal revolutionaries like Lu Xun, […] Hu Shi and others' were actually a testament to 'Confucianism's creative vitality'.[1640] Without necessarily even knowing it, the opposition of such critics to the corrupt elements in contemporary Confucianism 'opened up broad new reaches'[1641] of authentic Confucian discourse at a time when others, claiming to be doing so, were ruining the very thing that needed to be salvaged:

> There was a time when I regarded Chiang Kai-shek's cultural policies, with their nationalist elements, as an attempt to weaponise Confucianism in the fight for political control. The damage done to Confucianism by political conservatives and reactionaries - starting with military men like Yuan Shikai (1859-1916) and other early 20th-century warlords - simply cannot be overstated.[1642]

[1636] Tu Weiming, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit' ('*"Yuandao": Ruxue yu Wenhua Baoshouzhuyi*'), in Tu Weiming, *Wenming Duihua zhong de Rujia*, (Peking University Press, 2016), p. 124.

[1637] Tu, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit', p. 125.

[1638] Tu, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit', p. 126.

[1639] Tu, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit', p. 126.

[1640] Tu, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit', p. 126.

[1641] Tu, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit', p. 126.

[1642] Tu, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit', p. 127.

The *Ruxue* or 'Confucianism' that *ought* to be under discussion, then, is really a synonym for a certain self-critical and dialogical attitude to humanistic learning which is older than Confucius himself. Like a poet, Confucius provided innovative takes on the learning he received, exemplifying and embodying the tradition precisely by adding his own twist or voice to it, taking it from what it was and leading it towards what it could, with further innovation and embodiment from us, still be. Whether 'Confucianism' is better understood as a set of 'religious' dogmas or 'philosophical' doctrines is an entirely Western, and frankly unnecessary and misleading, debate[1643]: more than any specific *product* of human or humanistic ingenuity, 'Confucianism' is the living spirit of such creativity in the first place, at least as manifested in one civilisational context. Western intellectual categories like 'religion' and 'philosophy' may be useful as 'references'[1644], but they can cloud things as well as clarify them; what matters most is understanding and constantly expanding one's own 'intellectual pedigree':

> If you say you don't have a pedigree, then you don't understand yourself well enough. Habermas, for example, has a very clear one, which runs from the Frankfurt School to Max Weber, Marx [and beyond]. In my own case, Mou Zongsan, Xu Fuguan and Tang Junyi all exercised a massive influence on me; they themselves were roused by Xiong Shili and Liang Shuming. Going back further into history, Liu Zongzhou (1578-1645) and Yi Hwang (1501-1570) both played big roles in my development, as did Wang Yangming and Zhu Xi, Xunzi and Mencius. Now if I had to decide whose contribution to Confucianism I thought was greater, well, I would choose Mencius over Xunzi, but that doesn't absolve me from understanding and learning more about Xunzi. In the debate between Zhu Xi and Lu Xiangshan, I tend to side with Lu, but it would be ridiculous if I stopped reading Zhu Xi and just blindly started towing the Luist line. Zhu Xi's influence has been more than ten times greater than that of Lu Xiangshan; though I might identify more readily with Wang Yangming, the Zhuist tradition inherited by Yi Hwang offers a powerful critique of Wang, such that I am obliged to engage with it.[1645]

If 'academic researchers'[1646] have a responsibility to understand, recognise, deepen and diversify their 'pedigrees', then the same applies more broadly to any self-cultivating *junzi*: while the first wave of 'Confucianism' was limited to 'Qufu and the Chinese Central Plain' (and Song-Ming neo-Confucianism took the tradition 'from China to East Asia'), any meaningful 'third epoch' or 'New Confucianism' in our time will have to *jinrushijie* - 'go global'[1647] - if it wants to be true to its *own* roots. Those roots, however, must also simultaneously be cultivated; the recent history of

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[1643] See Tu, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit', p. 127.

[1644] See Tu, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit', p. 127.

[1645] Tu, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit', p. 129.

[1646] Tu, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit', p. 129.

[1647] Tu, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit', p. 130.

Communist repression of Confucianism, typified by the 'bitter' journey of Feng Youlan (1895-1990), perhaps best of all explains Tu's decision to pack up his life at Harvard and head to Beijing at the age of 70 (five years after the following words were written):

> Japanese and Korean Confucianism are light years ahead of us, 50 years or more! Between 1949 and 1979 no one really talked about Confucianism on the Chinese Mainland. Just look at what Feng Youlan had to go through! Many argue from abroad that he betrayed Confucianism, but I value the authenticity of his complex intellectual trajectory, from the innovative early take on the Confucian tradition down to the late reembrace of Zhang Zai's *Hengqusiju* ['To name the conscience between heaven and earth/ To settle a livelihood for our populations/ To trace the lost learnings of past sages/ And to lead peace for all future generations']. Everyone's individual case is complicated; what I hope is that, in the long run, Confucianism can develop in a spirit of relative openness and breadth, but without losing a firm sense of its own identity.[1648]

What Tu is so vigorously opposing here is the shallow, Lonely Planet approach to dialogue among civilisations: the imperative to absorb the best from other cultures does not absolve the self-cultivating individual of the need to pursue depth in her relationship with herself and her own existence, which in the first instance can only mean - however defined - her engagement with her own 'native' culture (indeed, it is the very depth of this 'well' which, in Tu's preferred idiom, connects it to other sources). Naguib Mahfouz - with whom I have compared Tu Weiming before[1649] - says the same thing, in an Egyptian voice, about literature in general:

> Literature presents human experience; the main thing is that the experience be honest and deep. If it achieves this result, well, there's no need for any other experience. Literature must give everything; the writer must give what he is best placed to give; there is no bigger mistake in literature than seeking breadth at the expense of one's own expertise, and venturing to write about things of which one has only a superficial understanding. That's not a good way to go about it. […] For example, visiting a foreign country and writing a novel about that country: how can you write a novel about this country without drinking deep its spirit? That's why I cited Hardy for example, and Faulkner too, who always wrote about a single village in the American South. [...] All of his protagonists, male and female, were from this

[1648] Tu, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit', pp. 130-131.

[1649] See my doctoral thesis, 'Warriors for Civilisation: Naguib Mahfouz, Andrei Tarkovsky, Tu Weiming and their Western Counterparts', https://publikationen.uni-tuebingen.de/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10900/57853/wfc%20library2.pdf?sequence=1, Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctorate, 'Literary Interzones', University of Tübingen (Germany), University of Perpignan (France), 2014 (accessed 16/12/2019).

> one village. [...] I am truly a man of limited horizons, and I write about what I know, without pretensions.[1650]

On one level, the Internet makes all this seem like a giant anachronism (short of Amish lifestyle choices, we are all a video-call away from each other now), but the 'depth' challenge - namely, of embodying of one's cultural 'pedigree' or lineage - remains, and is in fact made harder by the mindboggling scope of cultural choice now on offer. Do I honour my teachers - Tu Weiming, for example - and stay true to the 'Original Way' by learning classical Chinese and reading all the books that *they* read, or by translating and discussing more modern books from my own unique travels, books which they do not know exist, but which echo and amplify what *I* already know about them? There is no formula for authenticity here; in a world where not everything worth reading can be read, difficult (and perhaps somewhat random and serendipitous) choices must be made. Tu himself is often criticised for offering a popularised Confucianism (once anonymously described to me as 'barstool philosophy') in comparison to the specialist scholars who have dared less to venture beyond the confines of their own Sinological slither of the ivory tower; but between academic jargon - of interest to one or two library rats - and cynical self-help platitudes (which may sell millions but may infuriate anyone who, like Tu, 'takes culture seriously'[1651]), a humanistic sweet-spot can surely still be sought and, with a bit of luck, found.

Surprised to hear that he had found his way onto *Nanfang Renwu Zhoukan* magazine's list of '50 Most Influential Chinese Public Intellectuals', Tu immediately distinguishes between mere 'intellectual celebrity' and true public intellectualhood, which few in East or West properly understand.[1652] Real public intellectuals do not just blow their own trumpets and market their own ideas for a quick buck; they find ways to enhance the strength of the 'platforms' on which humanistic or 'ethical' wisdom can be exchanged.[1653] Most attempts to build such platforms - magazines, journals, now blogs, social media groups, podcasts, YouTube channels and so on - are short-lived, lasting a couple of years at most[1654]; discussing the journal *Yuandao* (one of few cultural endeavours to celebrate a 10th anniversary), Tu compliments the editors on providing a rare 'common platform for rival schools to bump into each other'.[1655] The omnipresent danger, exacerbated exponentially since 2004 by the advent of social media, lies in 'rival schools speaking on different platforms'[1656], thereby thwarting humanistic innovation and creativity. While

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[1650] Naguib Mahfouz, 'Conversation with Aḥmad Muḥammad 'Aṭiyya: We Haven't Yet Achieved the Local: How Can We Think About Achieving the Global?' ('Lam Naṣil Ba'd 'ilā al-Maḥalliyya, wa Kayfa Nufakkir fī al Wuṣūl 'ilā al- 'Ālamiyya?'), *Al-Iḏā'a wa al-Tilifisyūn*, 31/1/1984.

[1651] Tu, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit', p. 125.

[1652] See Tu, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit', pp. 131-132.

[1653] See Tu, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit', p. 132.

[1654] See Tu, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit', p. 132

[1655] Tu, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit', p. 132.

[1656] Tu, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit', p. 132.

defending the importance of classical Chinese in the modern world and reminding people like me that they ought to know much more about it than they do, Tu also envisages the 21st-century republic of letters that could come into being if only the humanities could solve their global crisis and build a truly common 'platform for discussion':

> I have discovered that the humanities as a whole, including Confucian studies, are losing a tremendous amount of internal heat. This is not a law of nature. There are many reasons for this waste of energy: one is the general marginalisation of intellectuals and humanistic inquiry, which translates as a measurable lack of money; as resources dwindle, funds that remain are ever more greedily coveted. The humanities have not been strong enough; they have been unable to maintain a dialogue *inter pares* in the face of an onslaught from the natural sciences, economics and management studies, which now suck up the lion's share of collective gold. Internally, moreover, the humanities are hopelessly divided - a scenario unlikely to improve without a more generous share of resources.[1657]

It is hard to know exactly what solutions Tu is proposing here, but what *is* being vehemently rejected is the logic of the 'narrow, micro-circulation journal'[1658] that makes so much sense in the sciences; while there may be a place for such hyperspecialised work in the humanities too, the main thrust of a humanist's job is to 'build the public platform' itself. Beyond unreadable and unread publications, the legacy of true humanistic engagement always somehow transcends the words one writes. While it may seem odd for a novelist like Gabriel Garcia Marquez to say that 'I do not want to be remembered for *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, nor for the Nobel Prize, but for the newspapers'[1659] he helped to establish, what he means, like Tu, is that individual literary or philosophical magic is only ever the icing on a deeper cake of commitment to the expansion of a common heritage, a *yuandao* or 'original way'.

[1657] Tu, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit', p. 133.

[1658] Tu, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit', p. 133.

[1659] See Catherine Addington, 'Unmagical Realism: The Journalism of Gabriel García Márquez', https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/unmagical-realism, 31/12/2019 (accessed 15/12/2019).

18. ‘Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism’

Vitaly Rubin was killed in an automobile accident, near Beersheba, Israel, on October 18, 1981. He was a Professor of Chinese Philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He assumed this post on his arrival in Israel in 1976 after a tortuous, four-year struggle to leave the Soviet Union, where he was born [in 1923] and educated. During those four years, the international community of China scholars, led by David Keightley, Frank Shulman, and William Theodore de Bary, waged an unrelenting campaign to persuade the Soviet authorities to let Rubin live in the land of his choice. This unprecedented, worldwide support helped sustain Rubin's morale during his long ordeal; it also helped secure his release.

[…] Rubin was a Jewish nationalist and a pioneer fighter for democratic rights in the Soviet Union. His admiration for Confucian humanism, which he found similar to the teachings of the Prophets and the ethics of Martin Buber, endowed him with optimism and courage that helped him withstand painful physical and psychological pressures. His interest in humanistic philosophy did not stop in the classroom. It was part of his lifestyle.

During his life Rubin endured incredible hardship. As a volunteer-soldier during World War II, he was captured by the Germans, escaped, and rejoined the army, only to be sent to a labor camp because of Stalin's suspicion of ex-prisoners of war.

Yet, these last five years brought him tremendous joy and satisfaction. He made the most of the opportunity to write and teach as he wished, and to travel freely. Students and colleagues and his many friends throughout the world will remember him with affection. Above all, he will be remembered as a symbol of man's yearning for freedom.[1660]

Harold Z. Schiffrin

[1660] Harold Z. Schiffrin, ‘Obituary: Vitaly Aronovich Rubin (1923-1981)’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XLI, No. 3, May 1982, p. 645.

Tu begins this 1986 essay on the future of Confucianism[1661] not by paying tribute to anyone Chinese or East Asian, but by thanking a dissident Soviet sinologist for his support: 'As one of those active in the New Confucian movement, I can say that Rubin's words of encouragement have been extremely precious. […] Although I never met him personally, I hear in his writing the voice of wisdom and the spirit of curiosity. He is someone who put his body and soul, not just his head, into his work.'[1662] In particular, Rubin's attraction to the possibility of a third major Confucian epoch - after the tradition's classical and Song-Ming flowerings - moved Tu to 'clarify the question' at stake.[1663]

'The Problem'

> *I slept, and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke, and saw that life was service. I acted, and behold, service is joy.*
>
> Rabindranath Tagore

For all his pro-Confucian enthusiasm, historian Joseph R. Levenson (1920-1969) was convinced that the *junzi* ideal - and by extension, the humanities as a whole - were in the process of being rendered obsolete by modernity's irresistible and growing demand for 'specialisation and professionalisation'[1664]: what remained of any 'Confucian spirit' in a post-industrial, growth-hungry, technocratic world with a Calvinesque fetish for rationality was a 'vague mandarin nostalgia for poetry and philosophy as the twin ideals of happiness.'[1665] The influential Weberian thesis which stressed Confucianism's putative ethic of accommodation to the *status quo* (unpardonable in modernity) was nevertheless challenged by those who, like Thomas Metzger (1933-), not unfavourably compared the Confucian emphasis on

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[1661] Tu Weiming, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism' ('*Maixiang Rujia Renwenzhuyi Disanqi*'), in Kong Xianglai and Chen Peiyu (eds.), *Tu Weiming Sixiang Xuejie Wenxuan*, (Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2014), pp. 417-429. I have taken the unorthodox step here of working with the Chinese translation, even though the original article was written by Tu in English. This is an in some ways an unfair choice, but it is meant to highlight the scope for liberality and creativity when translating between Chinese and English; moreover, since part of the point of this book is to introduce English readers to some of Tu's untranslated Chinese material, it may be worth getting a feel for how much is being 'lost' or' transformed in translation by seeing the process at work. The curious reader is hence encouraged to consult Tu's original 'Toward a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism: A Background Understanding', in Irene Eber (ed.), *Confucianism: The Dynamics of Tradition*, (New York: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 3-21, 188-192 for comparison.

[1662] Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', p. 417.

[1663] Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', p. 417.

[1664] See Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', pp. 417-418.

[1665] Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', p. 418.

self-cultivation and authentic social service with rigorous Puritan asceticism.[1666] Other Western scholars, like Wm. Theodore de Bary (1919-2017), did their best to call colleagues back to second-epoch (Song-Ming) sources; but without the living, embodied connection to the tradition made possible by Wing-tsit Chan (1901-1994) in the United States, Tang Junyi (1909-1978) in Hong Kong, and Okada Takehiko (1908-2004) in Japan, the 'password' to the humanistic dynamism of the Confucian heritage might well, Tu argues, have been lost.[1667] Confucian-sphere *economic* success, at least, has since attracted the eye of Western sociologists, and forced a rethink of Weber's dismissive swipe; perhaps even Levenson himself, but for his own premature death in a canoeing accident in 1969, might have been inclined to change his bleak prognosis, especially if he had also been allowed time to discover the work of Xiong Shili, Xu Fuguan, Mou Zongsan and other prominent 20th-century 'New Confucians'.[1668] De Bary's pioneering work on the 'leading lights' of Song-Ming neo-Confucianism also highlighted the limits of Levenson's historical insight; the shallow, racist cultural policies of late-Qing leaders like Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909), moreover, with their calls to cherrypick useful bits of Western technical knowledge but keep the 'body of society' Chinese, were more than anything a symptom of the *decline* of Confucianism's traditional openness to dialogue and learning.[1669] Lu Xun, as Tu stresses yet again here, was a more robust embodiment of that self-critical spirit - still well alive after May 4, 1919 - than a hundred Zhangs.[1670]

The problem of predicting Confucian humanism's survival into a third epoch, in short, depends very much on who your 'Confucian humanist' friends in history are; defensive, protectionist postures, understandable as they may have been in a context of late-Qing humiliation and external imperial exploitation, end up looking as short-sighted and 'un-Confucian' as the idea that 5000 years of Chinese history might ever just have been traded in for blind wholesale Westernisation. Even the 'systematic study of the Song-Ming giants' is 'only a first step' towards the 'originality and creativity' of a fully-fledged new era: 'Relying on [this kind of] academic research alone will not bring the tradition back to life; scholars of ancient Egypt and classical Buddhism, for all their patient labours, have not resurrected these literary traditions. Likewise, Chinese scholars of Confucianism ought not think that they can inaugurate a new era of Confucian humanism on their own.'[1671] Something of the embodied charisma - not of cheap guruhood and demagoguery, but of actual moral leadership - will be required; Confucius himself - and those worthy 'Confucians' who came after him - achieved this ideal not by worrying about their own insignificant 'destinies' or 'legacies', but rather by tending to the health of the evolving 'tradition' to which they humbly, freely and creatively offered their

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[1666] See Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', p. 419.

[1667] See Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', p. 419.

[1668] See Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', p. 420.

[1669] See Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', p. 420.

[1670] See Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', p. 420.

[1671] See Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', p. 420.

contributions.[1672] The 'problem', then, can be summarised as follows: the writer interested in her own name or fame is missing the entire point of art, while wilfully arcane discourse intended only for a handful of specialists misunderstands the point of humanities 'research' just as badly.

'Some Historical Background'

> *He laid down a view of art that was less systematic - he once compared an ambitious American critic's theory of literature to a man making plans for a unified world laundry - than* true*, on point. Appetite was his great engine, but appraisal was his greatest gift. He got it right, again and again.*[1673]
>
> Adam Gopnik, on a
> favourite critic's 'moral sense'

The corollary to the Confucian emphasis on meaningful, creative moral leadership is persistent hostility to cheap politicisation. Tang-era neoclassicist Han Yu (768-824) is singled out by Tu as one of many in the tradition to have advocated 'not just the minimum outward maintenance of [so-called] Confucian moral standards, but the higher, inner ideal of Confucian truth; the hope was to embody this truth in one's private lifestyle.'[1674] Such loyalists could 'never be satisfied' with the transformation of Confucianism into a political ideology or set of social norms[1675]; although participation in politics and society was a 'natural' or even 'obvious' extension of this deeper commitment, 'self-realisation remained the ultimate concern; […] political and social engagement had to stem from a self-cultivating root.'[1676]

The 'second epoch' of Confucian flowering - in the Song Dynasty - would not have been possible, however, via introspection alone: the 'emergence and domestication' of Buddhist ideas played an equally decisive role.[1677] Beyond isolated navel-gazing or incestuous hermeticism, in other words, prolonged foreign contact is a conspicuous feature of cultural fertility - in this Indo-Chinese case as everywhere else. The implication for a potential 'third epoch' of Confucian humanism is obvious: broaden your canons. A tradition capable of feeding only on itself will eventually ossify; while Song-Ming neo-Confucianism is often portrayed as

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[1672] See Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', pp. 420-421.

[1673] Adam Gopnik, 'Clive James Got It Right', https://www.newyorker.com/culture/postscript/clive-james-got-it-right, 30/11/2019 (accessed 22/12/2019).

[1674] Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', p. 422.

[1675] See Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', p. 422.

[1676] Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', p. 422.

[1677] Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', p. 422.

a ‘betrayal of the Tang-era cosmopolitan spirit’[1678], it is really better understood as an example of the continuity-via-rupture in which all creative endeavour consists.[1679] If the subsequent development of ‘neo-Confucian’ discourse - less in Qing China than in Korea, Japan, Vietnam and elsewhere on the Chinese periphery - embodies such vitality[1680], Confucianism overall has failed to ‘internationalise’ beyond East Asia for one thudding gravitational reason: ‘Although the Confucian classics are now available in English [and other languages], it is still true that the overwhelming majority of information about Confucianism is coded in Chinese characters. It is abundantly clear that if Confucianism is to enjoy a ‘third epoch’, exchange will have to be facilitated in [other] languages.’[1681]

In the age of Google Translate and AI, solutions may be at hand to the information obstacle which has hindered the diffusion of the Confucian *chuantong*, but the work of *creative transformation* - which can only be done by self-cultivating human beings - remains. Even if robot artist algorithms start throwing things together as well as, or ‘better than’, us (whatever ‘better’ might mean here), these products must still be read and chewed by individual, breathing people if they are to have any ‘meaning’; more valuable than any machine-mediated Esperanto, what the 10th-century Song ferment gradually produced was a common ‘grammar of behaviour’, a rich reservoir of Confucian - but also Buddhist and Daoist - tradition which permeated at least the elite circles which enjoyed access to it. How and why? If only because

> a strong and therefore open sense of identity gave these individuals the confidence to appropriate foreign symbolic resources without losing their own sense of spiritual direction. They advocated an all-inclusive humanistic Way without belittling Nature or Heaven, and tried to incorporate the broad experience of ultimate concern into their work. They firmly believed their own tradition contained truth, but […] their moral metaphysics entailed an open, collective endeavour.[1682]

In slightly plainer language, this meant that access to the critical intelligence and wit of other people - ‘foreigners’ however broadly or narrowly defined - was understood (consciously or otherwise) as necessary for one’s own ongoing self-cultivation. Such ‘appetite’ for humanistic nourishment waxes and wanes in all of us, but ‘Confucians’ at their best somehow whet it in each other. If the 10th-century Song aristocracy was one such cauldron of spiritual exchange, which 21st-century global platform might emerge to rival or surpass it?

[1678] Tu, ‘Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism’, p. 422.

[1679] A parallel (and broadly contemporary) argument in an Arab cultural context - and which opened my eyes to this one (or was it *vice versa*?) may be found in Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi’r*, (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2005(1971)), highlights from which I included in Chapter 10 of my *Spiritual Humanism as a World Ethos? An Anthology of Learning for the Self*.

[1680] Tu, ‘Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism’, p. 422.

[1681] Tu, ‘Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism’, p. 423.

[1682] Tu, ‘Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism’, p. 423.

‘Modern Transformations’

If the Song Dynasty was immediately preceded by a shining Tang cosmpolitanism, late-20th- and early-21st-century Chinese intellectuals do not, on the face of it, seem so lucky: both the ‘Confucianism’ of Kang Youwei (1858-1927) and Liang Qichao (1873-1929) and the anti-Confucianism of the May 4 Movement are portrayed by Tu, in one sense at least, as a bewildered smorgasbord of foreign and local influences, an intellectual and spiritual state of affairs commensurate with the chaotic history of China in the aftermath of the Opium Wars.[1683] Questions of individual ‘cultural identity’ could not calmly be asked amid such upheaval, as existential threats to the Chinese collective remained altogether too urgent; even the Han nationalist flavour of May 4, 1919 was of primarily ‘instrumental value’[1684] in helping the Chinese to adopt *Western* institutions and hence compete with other nation-states in a *realpolitik* world. The self-confidence to think beyond such ‘Who Whom?’ calculations - the very essence of ‘cosmopolitanism’ or ‘Confucian humanism’ as Tu defines it - had all but evaporated; the subsequent Maoist overthrow of Chiang Kai-Shek’s Nationalist project (culminating in the hideous excesses of the Cultural Revolution) reflected something like the death drive of an us-and-them pathology with deep cultural roots in China’s violent and traumatic 19th Century.

Out of such wild iconoclastic hammering, however, the basecamp for a proper assault on the ‘bad Enlightenment’ - the scientism, the nationalism, the instrumentalism, the materialism - was unknowingly being prepared: ‘In the cauldron of effort to prove that a [traditionalistic] Confucian value orientation was incompatible with the spirit of modernity, the symbolic meaning of Confucianism was purified.’[1685] The ‘public image’ of Confucianism was ultimately harmed less by ‘liberals, anarchists, socialists or other proponents of Westernisation’, whose critiques of Qing corruption were often far more ‘Confucian’ than they seemed, than by far-right warlords who sought to legitimise their ‘farcical’ lust for power by recourse to Confucianesque ritual and rhetoric[1686], but even these lousy pantomimes went into the cultural crucible out of which Tu Weiming’s New Confucian teachers emerged.

‘The Current State of Affairs’

Writing in 1986, Tu admits that ‘those intellectuals with a feeling for the true Confucian spirit have obviously had it tough’[1687] in the 20th Century. Nevertheless,

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[1683] See Tu, ‘Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism’, pp. 423-424.

[1684] Tu, ‘Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism’, p. 425.

[1685] Tu, ‘Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism’, pp. 425-426.

[1686] See Tu, ‘Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism’, p. 426.

[1687] Tu, ‘Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism’, p. 426.

> since May 4, 1919, there have been two main sources of inspiration for creative Confucians: one has been the critical spirit of the West. Zhang Junmai (1886-1969), fresh from the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, proposed a new way of understanding China's national legacy. His later determination to found the China Democratic Socialist Party [in 1946] was born of the desire to integrate Western liberal democracy and Confucian socialism. Although his attempt to provide a 'third force' in Chinese politics failed in the short term, his comparative philosophical analysis was [like the work of Feng Youlan] at the forefront of New Confucian innovation.[1688]

The other vital fount of outside inspiration for early New Confucians - Xiong Shili and Liang Shuming in particular - were Buddhist modernisers like Ouyang Jingwu (1871-1943) and Taixu (1890-1947).[1689] Tu does not mean to suggest, however, that the river of Confucian tradition itself had dried up completely: If both Hu Shi's modernising pragmatism and Mao Zedong's dialectical materialism seemed fundamentally incompatible with the work of a Mencius, Dong Zhongshu, Zhu Xi or Wang Yangming, this did not mean that other less canonical figures from Chinese intellectual history, from Wang Chong to Zhang Zai and Wang Fuzhi, were not still relevant to the discussion.[1690] The violent anti-Confucianism of the Cultural Revolution, moreover, was itself a kind of testament to the fact that the tradition as a whole, far from being irrelevant, was still well and truly alive; in the same way that New Atheism in the West has offered a tremendous opportunity to 21st-century Christianity to rejuvenate itself (and the 'heretical' poetry of an Adonis might be said to have done the same sort of unwitting favour for a moribund Islam), the Cultural Revolution disproved Levenson's thesis that Confucianism had entered the museum phase precisely by providing such a clear opportunity for creative transformation.[1691] The very abject failure of the Cultural Revolution, in other words, was the lifeline for which the Confucian tradition had spent more than a century groping and hoping, the rock-bottom equivalent of the pedophilia and suicide-bombing from which 21st-century 'Christianity' and 'Islam' would have to relaunch themselves for a global audience in a 'New Axial Age'.

Parallel to shocking events on the Chinese Mainland, the patient mid-century labours of Qian Mu, Tang Junyi, Xu Fuguan, Mou Zongsan and others on the edge of the Sinosphere ('lone soldiers putting up a brave fight'[1692]) played their part in keeping the dream of a *bona fide* third epoch of Confucian humanism alive:

> Tang Junyi, Xu Fuguan and Mou Zongsan had already raised the question of Confucianism's coming Third Era. The goal of their lifelong labours was not only to open up this possibility in their own hearts, or in the hearts of

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[1688] Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', p. 426.

[1689] See Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', p. 427.

[1690] See Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', p. 427.

[1691] See Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', p. 427.

[1692] Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', p. 428.

> those closest to them, but to reach the hearts of the world by the power of their own example. The real challenge they tackled was how on Earth Confucianism was going to address the problems thrown up by Western-style 'science and democracy'. Even if these problems were unprecedented in Chinese history, the contemporary Sinosphere urgently needed to find ways to address them. […] But in a deeper sense, what these thinkers recognised was that the shortcomings of [the Enlightenment mentality] were a problem everywhere.[1693]

'The Future'

What Tu and his New Confucian forebears envisaged, in 1986 as now, was the diffusion of a dialogical ethos with deep roots in the humanistic cultures of the Axial civilisations and beyond, not a shallow or abstract universalism incapable of improving individual people's spiritual lives. The 'third epoch' of Confucian humanism, to the extent that it establishes itself as a real phenomenon, will hence involve a new quality and degree of Confucian engagement with the world (and *vice versa*); Tu's vision of such 'exchange' is weighted - too heavily perhaps[1694] - towards the ivory tower rather than the café, salon, pub or contemporary online equivalents where global citizens now congregate, but the idea stands that the third epoch of Confucian humanism will be marked, if at all, by contributions from all over the world: Confucianism is the colour-blind patrimony of people like Vitaly Rubin, just as world culture - human philosophical, literary and artistic endeavour everywhere - is also now firmly within the purview of 'Confucian' interest. As with earlier cosmopolitan bloomings (Tang China, Renaissance Italy etc.), creative spiritual responses to contemporary challenges must be sought by drinking beyond narrow ethnic and philological lines, but this cannot entail doing away with the very traditions that remind us (or reveal to us for the first time) what we might be missing - and what a secular and scientistic 'modernity' might threaten - in the first place. Neither instrumental self-help nor shallow eclecticism offer shortcuts to such wisdom.

[1693] See Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', p. 428.

[1694] See Tu, 'Establishing a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism', pp. 428-429.

19. 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity'

> *Dictatorship has, in one sense, been the default condition of humanity. The basic governmental setup since the dawn of civilization could be summarized, simply, as taking orders from the boss. Big chiefs, almost invariably male, tell their underlings what to do, and they do it, or they are killed. […] Only in the presence of an alternative […] has any other arrangement really been imagined.*
>
> Adam Gopnik

Tang Chenglian's Chinese translation of Tu's 1998 essay, which appeared first in German as 'Eine konfuzianische Sicht auf die Grundwerte der globalen Gemeinschaft', is a hard read for a foreigner; this is not the lucid Tu Weiming with whom I am familiar. The experience reminds me yet again, however, that my own 'Tu Weiming' is also some way from the original; the creative possibilities of Chinese-English translation entail a simultaneous burden of responsibility. This very sense of obligation to be loyally creative (or creatively loyal) reflects Tu's own attitude, not to the Enlightenment as such, but to the much older tradition to which he belongs, and to which the Enlightenment has caused perhaps the single greatest creative rupture in its 5000-plus-year history. The 'global modernity' which has emerged from the shadow of the Enlightenment had well and truly reached China by the end of the 20th Century: 'The overwhelming majority of Chinese intellectuals are putting their energies into modernising the country as fast as possible, and hence seek to bathe in the radiance of the Enlightenment as they do so.'[1695] If the 'spiritual archeology' of the Enlightenment reveals a certain enthusiasm for 'secular' Confucian ethics among pioneers like Leibniz and Voltaire (dissatisfied as they were with unconvincing literalist theologies of Abrahamic revelation[1696]), Tu is calling for a *resacralisation* of an Enlightenment project born in healthy scepticism of outworn religious dogma but ossifying - in China as elsewhere - into counterproductive hostility to spiritual life:

> The narrow application of a Social Darwinist vision of competition among civilisations has often served to accelerate the sinister union between cold analytical capabilities and strong [nationalist] emotions; from there it is a short hop to the idea that international relations are a game of wealth and power.
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> Colonialism and imperialism perhaps give us sufficient reason to reject the Enlightenment mentality as a source of inspiration for the human community as a whole, and to reject the modern Western civilisation which has been built by them. […] But if we try to imagine a feasible ethics devoid

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[1695] Tu Weiming, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity' ('*Dui Quanqiu Shequn zhi Hexin Jiazhi de Ruxue Toushi*'), in Kong Xianglai and Chen Peiyu (eds.), *Tu Weiming Sixiang Xuejie Wenxuan*, (Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2014), pp. 417-429.

[1696] See Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 490.

> of freedom, equality, human rights, privacy and the rule of law - all legacies of the Enlightenment too - we see immediately that we can't. The Enlightenment has brought so many unintended consequences along with it - positive as well as negative - that a reevaluation of its value orientation has become an absolute necessity.[1697]

Different cultures must take part in this creative-critical process: the idea that Western symbolic resources, for all their 'complexity and richness'[1698], might raise the ships of humanity on their own, in self-referential conversation, is dismissed by Tu as 'unconvincing in theory and even less likely in practice.'[1699] Proto-Enlightenment thinkers like Leibniz at least regarded Confucian China as 'an important reference'[1700]; if figures like Hegel dismissed Confucian ethics as 'feudal'[1701], and if the unfolding of Hegelian absolute spirit, the oscillations of Marxian dialectical materialism and the rattlings of Weber's 'iron cage of modernity' were all incompatible with the idea that Confucianism and other non-Western spiritual traditions had anything to offer in the face of History, then the key might be to recover the 'spirit of openness'[1702] more recognisable in 18th-century than 19th-century European intellectual life. The parallel endeavour of excavating the untapped resources of the Enlightenment itself also remains; one problem for a universal ethics or 'global ethic' is the lack of attention paid to the idea of *fraternité* and - in Roger Ames's idiom - the 'familied' nature of individual existence in general.[1703] Kant's abstract universalist 'kingdom of ends', for all its emphasis on treating individual people with the dignity they deserve, is ultimately a 'utopian abstraction' and 'sociologically untenable'[1704]; freedom and equality are not enough on their own. Tu highlights recent communitarian contributions to debates in Western political philosophy[1705], but also stresses that a 'reclarification'[1706] of Enlightenment values via creative comparison with different (i.e. non-Western) ethico-religious systems is a minimum requirement for dynamism in global debates on ethics[1707]; Confucian humanism, for instance, broadens the anthropocentric gaze of the Enlightenment by emphasising 'both anthropological and cosmological' elements: 'It is only by active participation in the great changes of the universe that

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[1697] Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 491.

[1698] Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 491.

[1699] See Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 491.

[1700] Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 491.

[1701] Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 491.

[1702] Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 492.

[1703] See Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 492.

[1704] Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 492.

[1705] See Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 492.

[1706] Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 493.

[1707] See Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 493.

we can truly become creatures with souls. We are participants in the universe, both individually and collectively; we are responsible for a sacred mission, namely making ourselves, our families, our nations and our universe ever better.'[1708] A 'reformed' Enlightenment mentality - more Herbert Fingarette's 'secular as sacred' than alienated Weberian worldliness - will embody this 'deeply spiritual and intrinsic reverence'[1709] for the natural world:

> Everything (the sun, moon, stars, plants and animals, mountains and rivers) has *lingxing*, a spiritual nature, and has been formed by the same fate. Each of the myriad things under Heaven is a concrete manifestation of one cosmic impulse. We have something resembling blood ties to all of these things; meaning resides in the self-cultivation which allows us to develop and flourish by taking the realities of self, family, nation and all under Heaven and transforming them to the point that we become willing participants in, and concrete manifestations of, the destiny of the universe. This is an art form which involves the fashioning of extrinsic givens (ethnicity, gender, age, geography, social class, religious affiliations etc.) into tools for self-transformation.[1710]

Unfortunately, the 'Faustian drive to accumulate wealth and power' has left Western spiritual life - or the global spiritual life influenced by this 'Enlightenment mentality' - trapped in Weber's 'iron cage'.[1711] Tu's corrective is real, but tough:

> Our true 'unity' emerges when each individual follows her own spiritual calling, one which is not extrinsic to self, family, nation and all under Heaven, but rather wedded to the idea that ultimate meaning resides in the truthfulness to existence of ordinary people. This path, however, is arduous in the extreme, as general inertia, physical limitations and our ever-present capacity for self-deception all threaten progress.[1712]

Tu's oft-repeated tweak on mainstream Christian theology - namely that 'Heaven may be omnipresent and omniscient, but it cannot be omnipotent'[1713] - implies that our own autonomous efforts are somehow required by the universe itself; we shouldn't be overly reliant on grace from above, either in the political sphere or in our everyday lives: 'In order [positively] to transform the cosmos, the minimum condition is the cultivation of a critical self-consciousness, a sense of individual responsibility which is a precondition for any talk of a "global community" [which

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[1708] Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 493.

[1709] Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 493.

[1710] Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 494.

[1711] Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 494.

[1712] Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 494.

[1713] Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 494.

transcends the logic of *realpolitik*].'[1714] Confucian dialogues with India and the Islamic world in particular are once again highlighted by Tu as part of the response - 'on a philosophical level'[1715] - to the global dominance of secular humanism; beyond intercivilisational dialogue, however, there is 'a duty to enhance and complete the universe via our direct participation in it. This implies a dialogical relationship with Heaven, not the idea that man is the measure of all things.'[1716] Tu's insistence on 'the intimate relationship between the source of the universe and human self-understanding' is not a 'romantic vision' or tired anachronism, but rather 'an entirely new conviction', a creative rupture which, by its very nature, is a loyal extension of the Enlightenment spark itself: human society requires a 'new sense of community'[1717] - at the moment it is a non-existent abstraction - so it is worth trying to 'pool our creative forces'[1718] to meet the challenge.

[1714] Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 494.

[1715] Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 495.

[1716] Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 495.

[1717] Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 496.

[1718] Tu, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity', p. 496.

20. 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos'

> *About what did Diderot harangue the empress? About the evils of serfdom, the need to do away with censorship, the centrality of law, the baleful effects of religion, the importance of education, in short, the standard Enlightenment program. He felt his message was getting across. The empress, he noted, 'loves the truth with all her soul, and although I have at times told truths that rarely reach the ears of kings, she has never been wounded.' Fascinated by him Catherine may have been, but he sensed that, as Andrew Curran puts it, 'she was not taking his ideas to heart.' […] After a five-month visit, which ended in March 1774, Diderot departed Russia, writing to his friend Madame Necker that 'I would be an ingrate if I spoke ill of it, and I would be a liar if I spoke well of it.'*[1719]
>
> Joseph Epstein

This article, translated into Chinese by Zhang Youyun from the 1998 'Family, Nation and World: The Global Ethic as a Modern Confucian Quest'[1720], covers ground I traversed in much more detail in *From Global Ethic to World Ethos? Building on Hans Küng's Legacy of Basic Trust in Life*. Küng's *Projekt Weltethos*, in short, was my life between the end of my doctoral studies in 2014 (of which Tu Weiming was an important part) and my arrival in Beijing from Küng's Tübingen in 2018; my subsequent anthology project - *Spiritual Humanism as a World Ethos?* - was a book-length attempt to compare and contrast Tu's approach to *quanqiu lunli* or 'global ethics' with Küng's pioneering efforts. The broad summary of these human and scholarly experiences reads as follows: the world needs an embodied 'ethos', not an abstract consensus list of ethical principles to which lip service can too easily be paid.

Tu's own view is slightly less clearcut than this; the negative formulation of the Golden Rule as found in the *Analects* ('do *not* do unto others…') is a recurring favourite, cited here as dozens of times elsewhere.[1721] The entire thrust of Tu's self-cultivation project, however, moves ethics away from the pithy slogan for public consumption and towards the literary realm of individual embodiment - not of precooked 'values', but of inspirational (and hence intrinsically creative) moral

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[1719] Joseph Epstein, 'A *Philosophe* in Full: Denis Diderot's Enlightenment', https://claremontreviewofbooks.com/a-philosophe-in-full/, Fall 2019 (accessed 26/12/2019).

[1720] Once again, I have deemed it more interesting to play with the Chinese translation - to see where such creativity can go - than to regurgitate the original, which already exists for readers to seek (Tu Weiming, 'Family, Nation and World: The Global Ethic as a Modern Confucian Quest', *Social Semiotics*, vol. 8(2-3), 1998, pp. 283-295).

[1721] See Tu Weiming, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos' ('*Jiating, Guojia yu Shijie: Quanqiu Lunli de Ruxue Tansuo*'), in Kong Xianglai and Chen Peiyu (eds.), *Tu Weiming Sixiang Xuejie Wenxuan*, (Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2014), p. 500.

energy. A 'new impetus'[1722] - rooted in respect for the dignity of the individual but extended to a 'comprehensive, integrated knowledge' derived from the Confucian emphasis on 'learning to be human' - is hence required for the flowering of a Global Ethic or World Ethos.[1723] This effectively transforms the *Projekt Weltethos* into a dynamic and endless process, well beyond shabby terminals of polite consensus; Tu's historian-of-ideas hat allows him to understand *quanqiu lunli* as an ongoing conversation rather than some once-and-for-all triumph of human communicative rationality.

The Enlightenment elephant, Tu stresses yet again here, nevertheless casts its rotund shadow over *Weltethos* proceedings; the world in general, and China in particular, is still coming to terms with the bewildering scale of its influence.[1724] The Jesuit presence in China may have echoed back through Europe as early as the 16th Century (when French, English, Italian and German intellectuals 'began to perceive the humanistic radiance of Chinese civilisation'[1725]), and Chinese influence on Enlightenment thought is itself a worthwhile area of study (one to which Tu himself has devoted many man hours, supporting research initiatives at Peking University and beyond), but unfortunately the 19th Century saw a narrowing of productive humanistic exchange between China and the West: by the time of May 4, 1919, the template for China's 'dialogue' with the world was essentially one of 'cultural survival' via a wholesale modernisation which ended up 'marginalising spiritual life'.[1726] Western liberal democratic ideals cut through 'feudal' Chinese family hierarchies, forcing a broad rethink - among intellectuals as diverse as Lu Xun, Ba Jin, Xiong Shili and even Kang Youwei - of the social structures required for individual human flourishing.[1727] Criticism of 'Confucian family ethics' only intensified in Maoist China; selective Chinese readings of Enlightenment history, heavy on scientism and materialism, sought to consign Confucian attitudes to human relationships in general to the 'dustbin of history'[1728].

Even in its most successful manifestations, however, the legacy of the Enlightenment is at best 'ambiguous': 'Its values cannot be linked together to form a comprehensive and coordinated ethical system' (witness, for example, 'the often irresolvable conflict between freedom and equality').[1729] Moreover, activists opposing 'environmental degradation, social dissolution and the unfair distribution of resources'[1730] are all performing their own critique of Enlightenment values. We cannot and should not, however - Tu could not be clearer on this - *undo* the

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[1722] Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 497.

[1723] See Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 497.

[1724] See Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 497.

[1725] Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 497.

[1726] See Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', pp. 497-498.

[1727] See Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', pp. 498-499.

[1728] See Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 499.

[1729] Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 499.

[1730] Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 499.

Enlightenment; we ought rather to 'seek out spiritual resources which expand the scope of the Enlightenment program, deepen its sensitivity to virtue' and 'creatively alter its intrinsic limits in order fully to realise its potential as a worldview for humanity as a whole, […] a new kind of ethics for a global society.'[1731] As it stands, 'the Enlightenment project lacks a concept of 'community' *tout court*, let alone a global one'[1732]; the *fraternité* of the French revolution remains both underexplored and underrealised. Squeezing the entire 'Global Village' into our daily individual lives, however, is an ongoing creative and imaginative challenge; Tu insists yet again here, unpersuasively in my view, on the heuristic value of the Golden Rule in the negative ('however defined, an antidote to selfishness'[1733]), but the broader point is well made: 'The lifestyles we most readily cherish do not necessarily suit our neighbours. Admitting this is the first step towards grasping the beauty of others.'[1734] The more 'positive' Confucian formulation of this ethos - 'establishing others in order to establish oneself, and enlarging others in order to enlarge oneself' - is a long way from the *homo economicus* of contemporary neoliberalism, but also many miles from the *homo sovieticus* of a defunct Communism: 'From a Confucian point of view, neither communism nor capitalism (equal and opposite manifestations of the Enlightenment spirit) has adequately addressed the question of human relationships.'[1735] With their 'abstract universalism', both communism and capitalism struggle to provide an explanation of the 'complexity and diversity' of the 'Global Village'; instead of reducing culture to a tradable commodity or a direct manifestation of material power relationships, the 'broad humanism' of the Confucian tradition offers 'rich resources' for the maintenance of a diverse spiritual ecosystem (i.e. a healthy artistic and creative culture).[1736]

From the perspective of Western liberal democracy, Confucianism appears to undersell promises of individual rights and freedoms; an important part of the Enlightenment's creative challenge to Confucianism is to force it to articulate its defence of individual dignity more clearly than it has, or at least than it did in the Qing era. Nevertheless, traditional Confucian emphasis on 'learning for the self' and ceaseless self-cultivation via the enlargement of others will surely 'help to build a stable foundation for any democracy'[1737]. Confucian political philosophy may, over its history, have failed to articulate concepts of freedom, human rights, privacy and due legal process to a degree we would today consider acceptable, but Confucian emphasis on the responsibility of elites to mitigate inequalities (structural or otherwise) is still urgently needed in our 'complex modern world'.[1738] Confucianism

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[1731] Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 499.

[1732] Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 500.

[1733] Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 500.

[1734] Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 500.

[1735] Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 500.

[1736] See Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 500.

[1737] Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 501.

[1738] See Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 501.

has also historically lacked 'formal mechanisms for keeping dictatorship in check'[1739]; the East Asian tigers have done a decent job of importing comparatively flexible economic and political institutions from the West, but the antitotalitarian spirit of these institutions have not, Tu admits, always filtered down into people's daily lives.[1740] Although the democratic ideal has a kind of 'universal applicability', English, French, German and American models emerged out of specific historical experiences; East Asia's distinct 20th-century national histories, especially when set against the backdrop of traditional Confucian emphasis on self-cultivation and family relationships, offer important experiments in 'democracy with Confucian characteristics'.[1741] This open laboratory of ongoing critique of Western models may help to reinvigorate Confucianism (and democracy) in East Asia and beyond, but it won't be enough 'simply to parrot old Confucian doctrines'[1742]; first and foremost, East Asia must free itself from the 'shackles' of its 'nepotism, authoritarianism and male chauvinism.'[1743] Confucians, in short, must 'engage creatively with Enlightenment values' if they hope to offer a credible critique of the 'excessive individualism, ethos of zero-sum competition, and legalistic tendencies'[1744] which together characterise the contemporary worst of Western governance models.

Tu returns again and again to 'the problem of the rootedness of a global society'[1745]: 'Can a community which fails to inculcate a sense of responsibility in its individuals be prosperous and stable?'[1746] he asks rhetorically, before rehashing the turbulent history of China since the Opium Wars and the enormous waves of disruptive migration - internal as well as foreign - which it caused.[1747] Such crises, however, can be a source of opportunity as well as tragedy:

> We are not at the end of some blind dialectical process, but always at the start of a chapter of history of our own making. From a comparative cultural perspective, a 'new' chapter can now only be dialogical, not confrontational. […] We need to find an attractive development model for the prosperity of humanity as a whole - one with ethical and spiritual foundations.[1748]

We can't 'overcome' or 'liberate ourselves from' the enabling constrants of our unique situations; concentric Confucian circles of caring imply 'a foundation of

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[1739] Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 501.

[1740] See Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', pp. 501-502.

[1741] See Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 503.

[1742] Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 505.

[1743] See Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 503.

[1744] Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 503.

[1745] Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 505.

[1746] Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 505.

[1747] Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', pp. 504-505.

[1748] Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', pp. 505-506.

respect for human dignity' which impels us to act locally - starting, always, in our own families - even as we seek the higher spiritual union which a 'World Ethos' promises. Even the Earth and the vast human community, however, are not enough for us on their own; Tu's Confucian humanism locates 'the entire meaning of human beings […] in their harmonious union with Heaven, not anthropocentrism.'[1749] This is not to reduce human beings to the status of means to Heaven's end, but precisely to offer a common and universal 'root' for self-cultivating individuals everywhere to fix and elevate their local strivings; this is 'the self-transcendent spirit of Confucianism' shared by Tu's friends and colleagues from all civilisational backgrounds.[1750] The 'Enlightenment mentality' on its own, by contrast, lacks an awareness of such *tianrenheyi*, *heerbutong* aesthetic commonality: 'The embodied experience of learning for the self could become a starting point for a new World Ethos.'[1751]

[1749] Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 506. Anwar Ibrahim and Huston Smith are the examples cited here.

[1750] Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 506.

[1751] Tu, 'The Confucian Quest for a Universal Ethos', p. 506.

21. 'Dialogue Among Civilisations in an Age of Globalisation'

> *What I propose is a sum of appreciations that includes an appreciation of their interdependence: a new humanism. […] [This] humanism [isn't] in the separate activities; [it is] the connection between them.*
>
> Clive James, *Cultural Amnesia*

The Enlightenment, then, has long gone global; it is, for Tu, 'perhaps the single most powerful ideology in the long winding history of human civilisation'.[1752] Any attempt to do 'dialogue' in the 21st Century must take proper account of this; we are not stuck in some geostrategic boardgame of discrete theocratic continents, but rather floating in a new, postmodern, partially postcolonial phase of human development where information and population flows have multiplied exponentially to create the chaos and opportunity of the Internet Age. The global 'liberation of the individual'[1753] promised by the 'ideology of the Enlightenment mentality' may have originated in the West, but non-Western peoples have not 'Westernised' wholecloth as they have adopted it; 'modernisation' is an uneven, dialogical process. In this 2004 lecture at Shenzhen University (and is there a city in the world more symbolic of such 'modernisation' than Shenzhen?), Tu seeks to remind his audience of the humanistic stakes in play.

From 'Westernisation' to 'Modernisation'

The growing preference for the temporal over the spatial metaphor in 20th-century academic discourse reflects the universal and inexorable progressivism of Tu's 'Enlightenment mentality' itself, according to which 'human civilisation has passed through phases of superstition and speculative metaphysics to arrive at rationality - a graduation from religion to philosophy to science.'[1754] This broad trend of secularisation - separation of church and state and *de facto* privatisation of humanistic spirituality - may have begun in preindustrial Western Europe and North America, but the globalist communism and capitalism of the Cold War were essentially twin offshoots of it. Still, this 'ideology' has encountered different and specific resistance as it has spread around the world (not least in the 'West' itself); to observe such hostility is not to subscribe to any form of 'cultural determinism' or inevitable chemical outcome of such contact, but rather to reflect on the meaning of

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[1752] Tu Weiming, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations in an Age of Globalisation' ('*Quanqiuhua yu Duoyuanhua zhong de Wenming Duihua*'), in Kong Xianglai and Chen Peiyu (eds.), *Tu Weiming Sixiang Xuejie Wenxuan*, (Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2014), p. 548.

[1753] Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations in an Age of Globalisation', p. 548.

[1754] Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations in an Age of Globalisation', p. 549.

‘culture’ as an autonomous sphere of human striving in the first place.[1755] If various examples in East Asia show that ‘modernisation can take more than one cultural form’, they also remind us that ‘the relationship between modernity and tradition is intrinsically complicated’[1756]; even in the West, modernisation took different concrete forms in different countries and at different stages.

‘Multiple Modernities’

> *Tu dis : « Cette pensée est à moi. » Non mon frère,*
> *Elle est en toi, rien n'est à nous.*
> *Tous l'ont eue ou l'auront. Ravisseur téméraire,*
> *Au domaine commun bien loin de la soustraire,*
> *Rend-la comme un dépôt : Partager est si doux !*
>
> *(You say this thought is yours alone. No*
> *My brother, it is in you; nothing belongs*
> *To us. […] Instead of thus subtracting, oh*
> *Impatient ravisher, from the common*
> *Good, pledge all lavishly as song.)*
>
> Henri-Frédéric Amiel

Tu’s repeated insistence on the public nature of our best thoughts is the very opposite of a totalitarian nightmare; it expresses the condition of possibility of voluntary shared meaning, and is subtly hostile to an ‘Enlightenment mentality’ - a straw man perhaps, but a useful point of reference - which insists on the fuckoff sovereignty of the individual as the final solipsistic goal of modernity. Enlightenment-derived values and human rights protections are best understood, in Tu’s idiom, as necessary but insufficient ‘enabling constraints’ which free us from the burdens imposed on dialogue by unfair feudal and imperial structures; far from representing the Fukuyaman *endpoint* of human history, these liberal internationalist ideals merely get us to the starting line for a New Axial Age of global dialogue among citizens of free and equal nations. To insist on a one-size-fits-all development model for humanity is to miss the point of what ‘modernity’ itself is for: the liberation of individuals who are themselves not islands, but ‘centres of relationships’ whose bonds with the world are woven through with tradition and the contours of local geography.

Instead of asking which superpowers will define the human destiny as economic and cultural globalisation proceed apace, Tu invites his audience to consider whether the emergence of a global ‘longing for identity and reattachment

[1755] See Tu, ‘Dialogue Among Civilisations in an Age of Globalisation’, pp. 550-551.

[1756] Tu, ‘Dialogue Among Civilisations in an Age of Globalisation’, p. 552.

to spirituality'[1757] might not be the more interesting phenomenon. The sweeping, disruptive change wrought by mass immigration, the spread of English[1758] and the growth of the Internet may not have created a spiritual vacuum as such, but they have played havoc with the complex local relationship bonds which, as Tu has spent a lifetime reminding us, are more constitutive of our identities than an overinfluential 'Enlightenment mentality' typically allows us to admit. If much of this change - hummus and sushi in Western supermarkets, MacDonald's in Beijing - is broadly palatable[1759] (and a vast improvement on the dull provincialism and protectionism of the 1970s), other developments - Muslim headscarves in French schools[1760], the spread of Western sexual *mores* in East Asia, and so on - are less easily digested by bewildered local populations. The outcome of all these unpredictable micro-interactions 'will not be homogenisation, but the [acceleration of the] process of multilocalisation'[1761] in which all cultural creativity and vitality has ever consisted. 'China' itself is a product of centuries of such exchange among dozens of ethnicities, languages, religions and regions, not a monolithic Han behemoth[1762]; if the risks of spiritual alienation and disorientation in this brave new world of 'multiple modernities' are very real, so too are the opportunities for new and enriching forms of nourishment. As parents and children alike lose themselves in their 5G phones at the family dinner table just a generation after the family huddled together around a single boring television channel, humanistic education looms as exponentially more important than it ever used to be: there is far, far more that *can* be easily shared, but it is harder than ever to persuade people of the humanities' 'authority'.

'The Spirit of the Humanities and a Dialogical Concept of Culture'

> *Criticism survives not in its verdicts but in the vividness of its language, in the way it preserves in prose an ephemeral art form. […] A critic may become widely read by ridiculing, […] but he will be remembered for what he loves. For in conjuring greatness in descriptive writing that rises to the occasion, he is borne aloft by the art he has rescued from the abyss. […] To practice criticism is to teach us how to live more deeply through art. Self-scrutiny is a prerequisite for the job. […] To what end [is such] learning placed? A critic is assigned to appraise and compare, to set down official verdicts. But that is not the ultimate task. Criticism requires more*

[1757] Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations in an Age of Globalisation', p. 553.

[1758] See Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations in an Age of Globalisation', pp. 553-554.

[1759] See Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations in an Age of Globalisation', p. 554.

[1760] See Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations in an Age of Globalisation', p. 554.

[1761] See Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations in an Age of Globalisation', p. 555.

[1762] See Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations in an Age of Globalisation', p. 555.

humanity than connoisseurship. The mask of superiority must fall off for true authority to flow.[1763]

Charles McNulty

Tu is deeply worried about humanity's survival, 'not until 2050 or so, but beyond that'[1764]; the Enlightenment mentality, with its anthropocentric and rationalistic 'arrogance'[1765], appears to have pushed us hard against the limits of what our planet can keep doing for us when we take an excessively extractive and short-term instrumental attitude towards it. But there is a deeper, more spiritual issue at stake when we overromanticise rationality:

> There is this idea of the universe as a house; when we call forth the light [of rationality], every corner of the house is gradually lit up: everything in the universe can in principle be known by us. Scientists from the 17th to the early 20th Century were driven by this goal: the outward expansion of the human race, comprehensive understanding of the cosmos, less and less darkness to worry about. Now it is the other way round: […] the more we learn, the more clearly we see what we *should* know, but don't. Knowledge and ignorance spread at an equal and opposite rate. Top scientists today tend to be extremely humble; they realise they have nothing in particular to be arrogant about.[1766]

Nevertheless, the influence of the 'Enlightenment mentality' persists, even as its progressivist, positivist optimism has gradually given way to a more Socratic epistemological humility among global intellectual élites. Tu's position on secular humanism in the early 21st Century is hence comparable to Nietzsche's on God in the late-19th: the body is dead, but the shadow remains, and may even lengthen before finally disappearing. Armies of *kexuezhuyizhe*, misleadingly translatable as 'scientists' but really denoting 'social engineers', policy wonks and corporate placeholders of all kinds who remain ideologues of a know-it-all, holier-than-thou scientism, remain to thwart the emergence of a culture of humanistic dialogue.[1767] If the word 'Auschwitz' ought to be enough on its own to remind us of the risks of such cheap and hasty rationalisations[1768], we are still collectively groping for the

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[1763] Charles McNulty, 'Commentary: John Simon, Clive James and the future of criticism in our culture', https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2019-12-23/what-deaths-of-critics-john-simon-clive-james-say-about-future-of-criticism, 23/12/2019 (accessed 8/1/2020).

[1764] Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations in an Age of Globalisation', p. 555.

[1765] See Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations in an Age of Globalisation', p. 556.

[1766] Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations in an Age of Globalisation', p. 556.

[1767] See Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations in an Age of Globalisation', p. 556.

[1768] See Tu, 'Dialogue Among Civilisations in an Age of Globalisation', p. 557.

‘spiritual resources’ which might ‘lead us out of our current predicament’[1769]: ‘If globalisation can lead us to mutual flourishing, it can lead us to totalitarianism just as well; dialogue is the only thing that stands in the way of such a descent. […] The real battleground of the 21st Century is neither economic nor military; it is over the concept of culture.’[1770] It matters little, in other words, which empires rule, as long as there are still empires ruling; the 21st Century offers an unprecedented chance for humanity to transcend the exhausting savannah logic of predator and prey, but only if it can graduate to a dialogical conception of humanistic endeavour. Among other prerequisites, the ‘arrogance’ of a still widespread ‘Enlightenment mentality’ - and who does not encounter it daily, often redoubled, in her corporate and bureaucratic dealings with a globalised world? - must somehow be creatively challenged.

[1769] Tu, ‘Dialogue Among Civilisations in an Age of Globalisation’, p. 557.

[1770] Tu, ‘Dialogue Among Civilisations in an Age of Globalisation’, p. 558.

22. 'Religion and Reality'

> *In my mind I often returned to a private metaphor—possibly corny—about a river. The idea was to wade out to its deep middle, where your feet no longer found bottom, where forces, forms and bodies were absorbed in the pressured density, where water had flowed since forever, its line through the land holding irrespective of flood and drought. That was the place from which I wanted to work. (That one might drown there was the risk and perhaps the point.) This became my figure for how the lone voice might relate to the voices in which it had found a model. The individual talent should try to operate not traditionally, but within the stakes of a tradition, where the kind of originality that surpassed mere newness might be possible. Eventually it was clear that to think of the aim as "originality" was to misread somewhat the metaphor's internal logic.*
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> *The modes of personhood respected by the rest of life are undermined in poetic making. A logic inhering in the material begins to suggest itself: the rudiments of soul and mind are already common property, the truth of one's life is a tangle of known tropes. The terrain of imagination is hatched with backroads between private drives and collective form. In practice the poet toggles constantly between resisting and admitting the voices of others. Perhaps it becomes hard to know the difference. Extreme and contradictory instincts live in proximity: compared with what I love I am almost nothing; there is nothing that has ever been thought or said which does not in some respect belong to me, or I to it. To learn the voice's capacity is to learn to inherit. […] It is for us to finish our own moment, to cull from the air live tradition, to learn, always as though anew, how to do things with words. The voice the dead have is one's own.*[1771]
>
> Brandon Kreitler

The old 'What counts as religion?' chestnut is utterly uncrackable; Confucianism's 'long march towards the gates of freedom', to cite Peking University Press's choice of title for an anthology of articles from Tu's 'Berkeley decade' (1971-1981)[1772], is as much as anything a process of liberation from such dull, Eurocentric academic exercises. Western civilisation itself cannot make up its mind where 'religion' ends and 'philosophy' begins; the dialogue between Athens and Jerusalem has, in Tu's

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[1771] Brandon Kreitler, 'Sorrows and Influence: Poetic Education and Harold Bloom', https://thepointmag.com/examined-life/sorrows-of-influence-harold-bloom/, 8/1/2020 (accessed 10/1/2020).

[1772] Tu Weiming, *Maijin "Ziyou zhi Men" de Rujia: Bokeli Shinian (1971-1981)*, (Peking University Press, 2013).

eyes, 'never really come to full fruition.'[1773] What civilisations capable of dialogue *do* share, however - call these respective traditions 'religious' if you like - is a 'concern for reality'[1774]; the final appendix to Tu's 2014 *Ershiyi Shiji de Ruxue (Confucianism in the 21st Century)* views human spirituality in all its best forms as the opposite of superstition. The cheap logic of a shortcut moral formula for eternal life is in any case explicitly avoided by all such civilisations; if some 'religions' are more susceptible than others to abuse by charlatans, the 'paradigmatic individuals' at the heart of all great civilisations - Tu quotes Jaspers here[1775] - reject the very idea of permanent 'self-help' recipes. Confucius, for example, argues in the *Analects* that we 'can't know about death without knowing about life'[1776]; if anthropologists have seen in the practice of Confucian ritual a proclivity for cultish ancestor worship[1777] and corresponding obliteration of the individual's sense of her own discrete mortality, others have understood the Confucian individual's relationship to tradition in a more urgent and personalised way: Tu quotes Elias Canetti's verdict that 'I know of no sages who took death as seriously as Confucius did'[1778]; Song-Ming neo-Confucians from Zhu Xi to Wang Yangming and Lu Xiangshan also understood that their lives, and hence their deaths, were unique and unrepeatable events in the flow of human history.[1779] There is, for Tu's Confucius, 'simply no connection between death and supernatural beings'[1780]; meaning is always to be constructed in life first. In Montaigne's famous idiom, it is 'philosophy' which teaches us how to die; for Tu, this is what all humanistic spirituality or 'religion' at its best does, not by offering us impossible paranormal lifelines, but by tethering us to reality itself in stable and trusting bonds of attachment. This requires both a sense of belonging to a living tradition which transcends oneself, but also the freedom to use one's one-off life to contribute creatively to this tradition, to add something unique, unrepeatable and irreplaceable to existing reality through one's own critical and dialogical labours.

Confucian 'knowing life', then, involves both an awareness of one's own powers (*zili*) and a sense of destiny (*ming*) beyond one's direct control.[1781] Heaven may not be fully and finally knowable, but 'life' offers us a dialogical relationship with it, an ongoing conversation which entails the mutual curiosity and gratitude in which all friendship consists. 'We can never know the comprehensive meaning of

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[1773] Tu Weiming, 'The "Is Confucianism a Religion?" Question' ('*Rujia de Zongjiaoxing Wenti*'), in *Ershiyi Shiji de Ruxue*, (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2014), p. 274.

[1774] Tu Weiming, 'Religion and Reality' (*Zongjiao de Xianshi Guanhuai*'), in 'Confucianism and the Question of Religion', p. 275.

[1775] See Tu, 'The "Is Confucianism a Religion?" Question', p. 274.

[1776] See Tu, 'Religion and Reality', p. 276.

[1777] See Tu, 'Religion and Reality', p. 276.

[1778] See Tu, 'Religion and Reality', p. 277.

[1779] See Tu, 'Religion and Reality', p. 277.

[1780] Tu, 'Religion and Reality', p. 277.

[1781] See Tu, 'Religion and Reality', pp. 277-278.

Heaven,'[1782] Tu says in his characteristic style, any more than we can exhaust the moral resources which sustain *any* living bond: in religion, as in friendship, 'greatness transcends instrumentality.'[1783] Far from offering the solution to all our problems, the transcendent dimension of reality promises us unexpected surprises and opportunities for growth which we are unable to imagine or desire in advance. This 'magic' can and should filter down into our everyday lives; part of what Confucianism offers is a series of rituals (*li*), refined over centuries, which allow us to dynamise otherwise static aesthetic categories. Tu nevertheless shares Herbert Fingarette's broad view that *li* without *ren* - a ritualised Confucianism devoid of the dialogical benevolence and spontaneity of friendship - lacks the 'transformative power' proper to mature spirituality[1784]; he quotes Marx on the revolutionary role of 'philosophers' again at this point[1785]: whereas a certain type of Marxist thinker has an *a priori* historicist view of the 'changes' she wants to see in the world, Tu is continually willing to be surprised, by both Heaven and his friends.

'The Ruptures and Continuities of Existence'

This 'transcendental breakthrough'[1786] to a vision of dialogical harmony with a creative force at the heart of world takes many forms in Axial and non-Axial civilisations alike (God, Heaven, *Logos*, *Dao* etc.[1787]), but viewed together, these 'discoveries' represent a humanistic revolution in our consciousness: with them, the years and decades of our lives assume the status of a moral whole, thereby allowing us to mitigate the blind struggle for animal survival which our quite literally 'prehistoric' ancestors endured one day at a time over dozens of millennia in a world of hostile, incomprehensible and alien polytheistic forces. Confucianism reminds those steeped in a certain kind of Abrahamic theology in particular that we need not (and indeed ought not) think of our dialogue partners - whether kin, friends, foreigners, aliens, nature, or even Heaven itself - as 'wholly other'[1788]; Max Weber's thesis that only 'religions of extrinsic transcendentality' could 'provide the necessary energy for thoroughgoing transformative change in the world' - and hence compete in the cultural marketplace of modernity - is, Tu argues, 'disproven by the examples of Confucius and Mencius'[1789], who embody a 'faith' which (as the etymology of the English word 'religion' likewise suggests) constantly 'ties them

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[1782] Tu, 'Religion and Reality', p, 278.

[1783] Tu, 'Religion and Reality', p. 278.

[1784] Tu, 'Religion and Reality', pp. 279-280.

[1785] See Tu, 'Religion and Reality', p. 280.

[1786] Tu, 'The Ruptures and Continuities of Existence', in 'The "Is Confucianism a Religion?" Question', p. 280.

[1787] See Tu, 'The Ruptures and Continuities of Existence', p. 280.

[1788] See Tu, 'The Ruptures and Continuities of Existence', pp. 280-281.

[1789] Tu, 'The Ruptures and Continuities of Existence', pp. 281-282.

back’ to reality instead of offering the mirage of escape into falsely consoling superstitious or ‘self-help’ dogma.

23. 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person'

> *What made Hungary's "Three Ts" policy so effective was that it encouraged self-censorship: there were privileges associated with slavishly following party doctrine and punishment for being openly defiant, but the real trick was the nebulous middle ground of 'tolerated', what the writer Miklós Haraszti called 'the velvet prison'. Afraid of losing its relative comforts by treading into prohibited territory, artists slowly backed away toward the center; after a while, they'd look down to discover that they were simply toeing the line.*[1790]
>
> Rachel Wetzler

This 1995 essay represents the sum of a decade of sustained reflection by Tu on the legacy of Mencius for the modern world.[1791] The Chinese word *jiazhi* is a post-industrial import[1792]; Mencius was less interested in measuring the 'value' or 'values' of the intellectual class than in insisting that 'from the emperor to the common man, *all* must take self-cultivation as the root.' The question of the role of 'intellectuals' is hence not reducible to debates about the division of labour, which is an obvious necessity for any advancing society; Mencian 'egalitarianism'[1793] was revolutionary, however, for its willingness to 'critique power in the name of virtue.'[1794] The various Chinese formulations of the ideal of the outstanding individual (*shi*, *junzi*, *daren* and so on), summarised in my translation here as 'the gentle person', are for Mencius all 'tied to moral excellence rather than social position'[1795]; in other words, if technological and vocational training are by definition the realm of specialists, there is a parallel, humanistic sphere of education and endeavour to which we all, in principle, deserve equal access. Such learning neither impels uniformity nor absolves individuals of their responsibility to contribute to the common weal, but it does challenge the iron law of modernity which states that people will only 'work' if they see material gain for themselves. Rather than understanding human beings as animals with higher aspirations, the 'Enlightenment mentality' assumes the worst of us; Mencius, by contrast, was famous for his

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[1790] Rachel Wetzler, 'The Fox News Theory of Art', https://thebaffler.com/outbursts/the-fox-news-theory-of-art-wetzler, January 2020 (accessed 11/1/2020).

[1791] Tu Weiming, 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person' ('*Mengzi: Shi de Zijue*'), in Kong Xianglai and Chen Peiyu (eds.), *Tu Weiming Sixiang Xuejie Wenxuan*, (Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2014), p. 207.

[1792] See Tu, 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person', p. 208.

[1793] Tu, 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person', p. 210.

[1794] Tu, 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person', pp. 211-212.

[1795] Tu, 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person', p. 211.

renxingbenshan[1796] confidence: 'Human nature is essentially good,' if only such goodness can be cultivated.

The end goal of Mencian humanistic education is 'awareness' or 'consciousness' of one's own 'subjectivity'[1797] - the opposite of an imposable formula. And yet there is a freedom beyond relativism and solipsism in such neverending self-discovery; the 'gentle person' enjoys a sense of 'ultimate concern' which is coterminous with existence itself.[1798] Nothing is beyond the purview of her moral imagination; the Mencian insistence on the fundamental goodness or perfectibility of human beings, our ability to 'distinguish between meaning and profit', reflects 'the essence of what it means to be human, the spark that culture offers, and the soul of morality.'[1799] The hard work - *gongfu* in Chinese (more commonly known in its '*kungfu*' transliteration) - is that of 'gathering up' or 'concentrating'[1800] meaning; this 'freedom' is available to anyone 'no matter how tragic her destiny is.'[1801] Mencius inherited the *weijizhixue* of Confucius and his disciples[1802], but he gave it his own creative twist, showing in new ways how 'moral sensitivity [was] the gateway to self-awareness.'[1803] Without ever 'defining away the contents of the self', Mencius nevertheless attributes 'self-consciousness', ''self-discipline', 'autonomy' and 'independence of spirit' to his 'gentle person'[1804]; the richness of our relationships should not be measured in short-term popularity or the evolutionarily hardwired dopamine kicks we receive when we please the powerful, but rather always 'dictated by our own private sense of them.'[1805]

The gentle person's capacity to 'learn for herself' is hence proportional to her ability to 'walk an independent path'[1806], free from the value judgments of others. Economic independence from these others would seem to be a prerequisite for spiritual autonomy, but the history of such sagehood suggests the opposite: the Confucian burden is 'heavy' in part because speaking truth to power can be expensive, whether in the form of annoying opportunity costs or even, *in extremis*, the outright sacrifice of one's life. But once the individual's self-awareness as a 'centre of relationships' has transcended the narrow survival politics of her tribe, she feels she has no choice; her network of terrestrial ties and her dialogue with Heaven are dearer to her than the favours that any alpha male or postmodern

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[1796] Tu, 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person', p. 207.

[1797] Tu, 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person', p. 212.

[1798] See Tu, 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person', p. 213.

[1799] Tu, 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person', p. 213.

[1800] Tu, 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person', p. 214.

[1801] Tu, 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person', pp. 214-215.

[1802] Tu, 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person', p. 215.

[1803] Tu, 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person', p. 215.

[1804] Tu, 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person', p. 216.

[1805] Tu, 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person', p. 216.

[1806] Tu, 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person', p. 217.

corporate equivalent might bestow on her for efficient compliance. *This* Confucianism is a hard sell everywhere from Wall Street to Tiananmen Square, for it establishes humanistic culture as the realm of permanent, authentic critique of power; an individual willing to die, or at least to get fired, in order to preserve the purity of her own relationship with herself cannot be coopted by any collective project with even the slightest totalitarian or exploitative shade, for she will more or less bravely resist it. And yet - oh the eternal paradox - these whistleblowers, if they are truly principled in their whistleblowing, may be the very sorts of exemplary and charismatic people that make the best leaders, and that big organisations from Amazon to Boeing to the Chinese Communist Party would genuinely like to win to their ranks. There is by definition no algorithm or personality test, however, to test for the gentle person's 'self-awareness'; if a multi-billion-dollar headhunting industry to identify such talent, and an even bigger self-help industry to 'cure' problems in the talent pool ranging from low motivation to counterproductive and uninspiring habits, have swollen up like giant mushrooms in recent decades, then it is because these modern plagues are symptoms of a global shortage of humanistic wisdom, a wholesale capitulation to the instrumental reasoning of scientism, and a general inability to recognise the ancillary relationship between 'profit' and 'meaning': the former makes the latter easier, *ceteris paribus*, but that is all it does.

The self-awareness of the Mencian 'gentle person', unlike the self-interest of the social climber, is filtered through 'a rich plenitude of cultural resources'[1807]; in other words, the humanistic learning of others - their art, literature, philosophy, music, and so on - enhances her relationship with herself, giving her a sense of belonging to a living tradition to which she owes a spontaneous debt of gratitude and responsibility: not to parrot her teachers, but to create something valuable and vital out of her contact with them. Mencian Heaven is reached via 'inner transcendence'[1808] of our own solitude: the transformative power of 'dialogue', in other words, accrues inside ourselves; we can only transmit this power once we have collected and distilled it, but we do so by creatively transforming, and hence 'authenticating', what we have learned from others. Some will make much of a very thin cultural education, and others will waste myriad opportunities for growth; 'the problem of evil', however, as posed in Western theology and philosophy ('How can God exist if He allows such suffering in the world?'), does not arise for Mencius[1809]: *everything* - even injustice - is an opportunity for the self to achieve 'inner transcendence' via creative transformation of the gifts of others, and in turn to bequeath her freedom - inherited, but also earned - to those lucky enough to encounter and creatively internalise it in the future. The 'critical spirit'[1810] of the Mencian 'intellectual' or 'gentle person' is the natural corollary of such aestheticised perfectionism: you are ashamed of what you see in the world not primarily on your own self-interested behalf, but above all for the giants on whose shoulders you stand and the great unborn who may one day stand on yours, and who cannot see

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[1807] Tu, 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person', p. 220.

[1808] Tu, 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person', p. 221.

[1809] See Tu, 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person', p. 222.

[1810] Tu, 'Mencius: The Self-Awareness of the Gentle Person', p. 224.

what you, alone in your present moment but flanked by the ghosts of those with an invisible share in your fate, can now see.

I have of course skipped over the surface of Tu's treatment of Mencius here; for a start, my classical Chinese is not nearly good enough to engage with the nuances. But what Tu above all transmits, in this essay as elsewhere, is the conviction that the Confucian tradition which owes so much to Mencius must itself be creatively transformed for a world - billions of individual selves - in need. This requires learning (of language for a start), but humanistic education transcends the dusty corners of neglected libraries. Those better placed - trained Sinologists and Chinese philosophers - will do deeper philological justice to Mencius than I have mustered in these brief and frankly underinformed pages, but lack of expertise does not absolve the amateur of the broader responsibilities of dialogue: Tu invites people like me to consider that there is an entire tradition which they were educated to know nothing about, and that they might be improved by further contact with it.

24. 'Individuals, Their Communities, and the Way of Heaven'

> *Ce n'est pas un poème, ni même un poète qui changera le monde, mais la succession des oeuvres poétiques qui sont la colonne vertébrale d'une culture, d'une civilisation.*
>
> *(It is not a single poem or poet that will change the world, but rather the chain of poetic works which together form the spine of a culture, the backbone of a civilisation.)*
>
> Gilles Hénault

It is perhaps fitting that we end with another creative retread of an English article translated (this time by Hu Zhihong) into Chinese. The subtitle of Tu's 1996 'Body, Body Politic and the Way: The Emergence of a Communal Critical Self-Awareness in the Classical Age' reflects a specific interest in the genesis of the Confucian intellectual cohort to which Tu claims contemporary allegiance; if everyone 'from the emperor to the common man' should take humanistic self-cultivation equally seriously, it is nevertheless true that leadership in this sphere is possible, and remains necessary. 'The model Confucian thinker has a profound sense of history,'[1811] Tu begins, but she is also different from her more hermit-like Greek, Jewish, Indian, Buddhist and Christian counterparts insofar as she 'takes an active part in social life, throws herself into politics, and [crucially] devotes significant energy to the creation of thisworldly culture.'[1812] This concept of the Confucian intellectual - 'one eye on politics, two feet in society, and a whole heart for art'[1813] - took shape over many winding centuries; her '*tianrenheyi* humanism'[1814] is a precious and fragile civilisational achievement, not an accident. 'We can define Confucian education via truly voluntary persuasion as a ritualised and condensed embodiment of the sustained human exchange we need for our own development,'[1815] Tu wordily concludes; in other words, the *junzi*'s spiritualised and aestheticised 'sense of ultimate concern' for the universe and everything in it, and the reduction of shifting environmental factors to 'background noise' in her 'inner quest to complete her destiny'[1816], mark a fundamental shift, modern *par excellence*, from communal to individual life. What Tu is describing, then, is the global republic of letters envisaged by the likes of Goethe, H.M. Posnett and other

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[1811] Tu Weiming, 'Individuals, Their Communities, and the Way of Heaven' ('*Geren*, *Shequn yu Dao*'), in Kong Xianglai and Chen Peiyu (eds.), *Tu Weiming Sixiang Xuejie Wenxuan*, (Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2014), p. 560.

[1812] Tu, 'Individuals, Their Communities, and the Way of Heaven', p. 560.

[1813] Tu, 'Individuals, Their Communities, and the Way of Heaven', p. 560.

[1814] Tu, 'Individuals, Their Communities, and the Way of Heaven', p. 562.

[1815] Tu, 'Individuals, Their Communities, and the Way of Heaven', p. 564.

[1816] Tu, 'Individuals, Their Communities, and the Way of Heaven', p. 565.

19th-century pioneers of Comparative and World Literature: freedom from the bloody immediacy of the tribe, but without the loneliness of alienation from the community of the best which has been thought and said in the world. The *shequn* ideal - more like a voluntary club than a clan which punishes deserters - is characteristically defined by Tu as 'transcending both collectivism and individualism'[1817]: it is the sweetspot of the English pub or Viennese café, the space where we can realise our highest selves in free and creative exchange with other selves. We can't go to the pub with Mencius, but thanks to the power of the written word and the charisma of living teachers, he can still inspire us.

Disagreements over human nature are a part of this intergenerational 'community'; Xunzi may take a bleaker view than Mencius, but he agreed that 'people can improve their situations through their own efforts of self-cultivation'[1818], especially if they can access a steady stream of 'different voices'[1819] as they do so. This is true not just of individuals, but of entire cultures as well; Confucianism was not only 'challenged', but ultimately *improved* by contact with Daoist and Buddhist influences. Even Confucius himself was ultimately pulled back to the community by the very force of the arguments of those who encouraged him to abandon his social responsibilities in the name of purer ascetic ideals; this 'unusual choice'[1820] - namely to establish the Way of Heaven not on a lonely mountaintop but by engaging in the culture of the community - reflects the Confucian commitment to a humanistic sphere of inquiry which is 'public' in the fullest possible sense: *everyone* is invited to join it. While no two contributions to this conversation will be perceived as identical (or as possessing the same value), equal opportunities for personal growth are nevertheless offered to those who, upon contact with such a cultural canon, put in the effort with themselves. Tu argues vigorously for the insertion of traditional Confucian voices into global humanities curricula, but these voices were themselves the products of dialogue with non-Confucians of all sorts.

No community or canon - or at least no living one - is static: implicit in the meaning of its existence is an invitation to you and me to join it via critique and creativity. If totalitarians demand obedience, humanists respect authenticity; this implies 'a living conscience' and 'a maintenance of dignity and self-confidence'[1821] in the face of power. It is not weakness to suggest that we muster such courage from the inspiration of others; without a sense of the heavenly ideal, embodied in various stories from the past and present, we are alone, trapped not only in the narrow politics of our tribe, but in the tribal consciousness which prevents the self - that great Axial breakthrough - from emerging at all. The 'most brilliant' of all Mencian insights, Tu argues, is his definition of the *raison d'être* of his own profession:

[1817] Tu, 'Individuals, Their Communities, and the Way of Heaven', p. 567.

[1818] Tu, 'Individuals, Their Communities, and the Way of Heaven', p. 567.

[1819] Tu, 'Individuals, Their Communities, and the Way of Heaven', p. 568.

[1820] See Tu, 'Individuals, Their Communities, and the Way of Heaven', p. 568.

[1821] Tu, 'Individuals, Their Communities, and the Way of Heaven', p. 569.

> Although she doesn't till the fields, do other manual work or engage in trade in any professional capacity, the Confucian intellectual is nevertheless an indispensable member of society. […] More than a mere functionary, she represents the people in the courts of the powerful. […] She does not abandon the responsibilities of moral leadership. Though she belongs, in a sense, to the governing class, she retains organic ties, in both theory and practice, to the people as a whole. […] She is both a student and a transmitter of the humanistic spirit.[1822]

Tu regards the Mencian evocation of such 'cultural heroes' as 'extremely moving and meaningful'[1823]: the task of professionally convincing everyone 'from the emperor to the common person' - via the sheer charisma of one's own personal example - to 'take self-cultivation as the root' is even more arduous than the business of self-cultivation itself. Retaining a seat at the top table of the human conversation without selling out to stay there: *this* is the superhumanly burdensome Confucian challenge that Tu Weiming set himself.

[1822] Tu, 'Individuals, Their Communities, and the Way of Heaven', pp. 570-571.

[1823] Tu, 'Individuals, Their Communities, and the Way of Heaven', p. 570.

Afterword: The Confucian Helicopter

> *In culture there is never an innovation that does not spring from a tradition, because the interweaving of innovation and tradition is what culture is.*
>
> Clive James

Clive James (1939-2019) passed away at the age of 80 as I was preparing this book for Tu's 80th; my thoughts turned, naturally but urgently, to comparison. James's 2007 *Cultural Amnesia* in many ways represents the contemporary Western counterpart to Tu's voracious dialogical humanism; James's renowned 'catholicity of taste', however, barely extended to China, largely because Chinese was not one of the languages (German, Italian, Russian and so on) that he taught himself. And this is perhaps the central point that *this* book wishes to illustrate: talking about Chinese culture in English - accurately enough, but above all interestingly and creatively - is extremely hard work; the Chinese native with a half-decent grasp of English will tend to underplay the context and nuance that a non-Chinese reader will require if she is to be enthused, while the foreign Sinologist - amateur or professional - constantly risks overplaying her linguistic hand, missing the point of the original, or else disappearing down the rabbit-hole of specialist scholarship. There are of course millions of more or less bilingual 'foreign-born Chinese', and now the odd 'foreign' kid with a Chinese upbringing as well, but even for the most ideal candidate, the business of translating between Chinese and English (or any other Indo-European language for that matter) is fraught with difficulty. Tu Weiming himself avoided doing it.

Nevertheless, Tu's colossal investment in learning English - to the point that he was able to lecture charismatically and write persuasively in it and thereby share his beloved Confucian heritage with the outside world - could scarcely be overvalued. If pioneers before him (Wing-tsit Chan et al.) had already landed in the West, Tu advanced the 'discourse' to the point of creating a fresh idiom which freed the English reader from the convenient, broadly racist misconception that Confucianism was little more than a boring ancient recipe for kowtowing subordination. And yet one is free to try to improve wherever one can on Tu's formulations; the otherwise unconventional decision to retranslate quotations from some of Tu's English articles back into English from their Chinese translations was really - as well as a fun creative exercise - a reminder to non-Chinese readers that the Tu Weiming they may know in English is a slightly pale, second-language version of himself. My translations may be liberal to breaking point in some places, but the Chinese Tu Weiming and the English Tu Weiming are not the same author either; the translations of Tu's English articles by Chinese scholars confirm this in much the same way: they have a completely different feel to them than Tu's distinctive Taiwanese-American inflection transmits in the Chinese original.

Beyond his services in English, indeed, Tu has also offered a James-style reminder to Chinese readers of at least some of what they lost in the Cultural Revolution. James's use of the word 'amnesia' is of course ambiguous; what he

really means by citing his 100 ‘forgotten’ cultural figures is that we should have known them all along - a rhetorical device which pushes us to discover them for the first time. The current book was clearly not intended as a *tiki* tour through Chinese intellectual history - our focus was Tu’s vision of ‘dialogue *among* civilisations’ - but we hope at least to have evoked that forest with a few well-placed leaves here and there. Tu’s attachment to Chinese tradition, absorbed mainly in Taiwan between 1949 and 1962, generated the energy for dialogue that characterised his ‘helicopter years’ at Harvard as the omnipresent chief spokesman for Confucianism on the global stage. It is not quite correct to say that it might as well have been another tradition - there are Confucian resources which are utterly unique, and hence infinitely valuable in their own right - but it was Tu’s discovery of such value in his own tradition which gave him the optimism and confidence to seek further enrichment elsewhere.

And seek it he did. Tu may have hugged the Academy more lovingly than James, who instinctively preferred the café and bar to the university library (Tu’s didactic and comparatively humourless style in part reflects his lifelong commitment to reform World Philosophy institutionally from within), but on the question of fidelity to humanistic dialogue itself - an open end worth preserving, not a means to anything else - it is hard not to see Tu and James as allies in the same broad antitolitarian resistance. Readers who get to the end of this book and pick up *Cultural Amnesia* will be rewarded by seeing exactly what I mean.

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What, exactly, has Tu spent his life resisting? James Pogue gives us a contemporary sense of the enemy:

> The power of book-to-film […] is in how it sits at the edge of the consciousness of every writer, editor, and podcast producer, a dark energy of the entertainment market that drives wealth and reward. You just have to tell a gripping story and leave the powers-that-be unnamed. […] This can extend all the way to the commodification of your own personal existence. “You have a look and a story,” a producer once told me when I told him I felt uncomfortable tailoring my writing to the needs of tech and media companies. “Maybe the IP you should be selling is you.” And what’s wrong with shading content a bit toward the needs of a production company looking for neo-Westerns, or to the “brand values” of Ford and Google, if they’re willing to pay money for it that a publisher will not? […] We have a perfectly good word for the kind of writing and reporting this all encourages: trash. Trash is how we once thought of work designed above all to fit commercial demands and generic narrative forms. The imperative to produce it isn’t going away soon. But I don’t think we have to accept it. […] And we can name the trash this system encourages for what it is. […] Writers have always had to work with and against a marketplace designed by the rich and powerful. But I personally can’t help feeling alarmed and enraged by the ways writers are now driven by incentives to fill the needs of creative executives working in Amazon’s film studio. It feels wildly dispiriting

> to see how much my friends and I casually accept the idea that we should craft our work to fit a commercial imperative—the entire system of our writing and reporting now being market-tested and data-driven and robbed by financial forces of much of its lasting value. There is a part of me that wants to grab all the rewards that come from this system, but it's the part of me good writing is meant to kill.[1824]

The Chinese equivalent which Tu (and his graduating doctoral students) have faced in the last decade is of course the Chinese Communist Party. If a truly humanistic 'culture' begins where pecuniary and security incentives end, then if one organisation holds an effective monopoly over these incentives (whether via the exercise of economic and/or political power), then it is hard to see a true culture of 'dialogue among civilisations' getting off the ground, even (and perhaps especially) if the official ideology embraces it (as Xi Jinping Thought now does[1825]). And yet humanism has only ever sprouted in tyranny's shadow; Confucius was arguably the greatest 'remonstrator' of all time, a genius who found ways to hold the ears of the influential without the slightest trace of sycophancy. Though they met once (briefly), Tu has certainly not become Xi's court philosopher; if it is hard to avoid the general sense that Tu regards his last decade in China as a failure, one understands the genesis of his ambition to try (and his determination to keep on trying, long after he could have comfortably retired): the *guoxue* or 'National Studies' endeavour, and the Party's general 21st-century reembrace of Confucianism, represent both a huge risk and a giant opportunity for humanists. A stable-because-dynamic sense of one's own identity is a prerequisite for dialogue; a smashed, semicolonised Chinese people needs to recover a proportional sense of its own humanistic glories, but these glories are still common human property, and no nationalistic us-and-them agenda should be allowed to obscure that fact. Maintaining control of such a large and unequal society is no mean feat - and it would be utterly absurd to compare the infinitely more humane CCP of 2020 to the CCP in 1970 - but the question whether Tu is actively welcomed, reluctantly tolerated or cynically instrumentalised by Chinese authorities has been more or less answered by now: thanks for coming, but your agenda of dialogue rooted in self-cultivation and self-critique is at best tangential to our stated social and educational policy goals. Tu understands, however, that this is about as good as true 'Confucian intellectuals' ever get it, whether in China or anywhere else. Remonstrators gotta remonstrate.

It is not fair, however, to ask an 80-year-old man struggling with his health to front this endless struggle forever. As the obituaries for Tu's contemporaries keep rolling in, Douglas Murray's moving tribute to Roger Scruton (1944-2020) reminds me of some of my own feelings for my present subject: 'He believed in - and lived in - the spirit of a different age. One in which he encouraged his readers to share. That is a spirit of gratitude for what you have received, and forgiveness for what

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[1824] James Pogue, 'They Made a Movie Out of It', https://thebaffler.com/salvos/they-made-a-movie-out-of-it-pogue, January 2020 (accessed 11/1/2020).

[1825] See, for example, Xi's speech at the Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations in Beijing in May 2019: https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201905/15/WS5cdb6296a3104842260bba28.html (accessed 23/12/2019).

you have not.'[1826] One of Tu Weiming's great gifts to me personally was a liberation to regard my geographically obscure origins in a new light: adolescent frustrations have given way to a sense of an overdue date with my own New Zealand heritage. And yet even that only makes sense as part of something universal: I must do what I am uniquely placed to do. It is not some mad unshifting superstition that makes me feel this way: it is a full-body sense of purpose which grows from day to day as my contacts with the world enrich it. Before he wrote so badly, James's *bête noire* Edward Gibbon[1827] did indeed write well, and in French: his 1761 *Essai sur la littérature* proves it, and makes my final point as I take the liberty of translating it:

> It is a veritable *essay* that I have produced here. I would like to know myself. […] Should I be limited to collecting and citing the words and deeds of my predecessors? Can I hope to add something of my own to the common treasure of truths, or at least of ideas? […] The advancement of art is more important to me than any glories I might receive as an artist. […] The ancients have left models for those who would dare to emulate them, [from which we can] draw principles of good taste. When we fill our leisure hours with the study of such precious productions, the truth is beautified with all the treasures of the imagination.[1828]

The word 'leisure' here is misleading: nothing could be less frivolous. In his Foreword to the 1761 edition, Frenchman M. Maty explains the stakes:

> There is nothing more shameful than hating one's own language. But does one show love for it by excluding all others? […] It is rare that a foreigner manages to write undiscovered in a language not her own. But why does it even matter if she gives herself away? […] When one is monolingual, one is wholly reliant on translation if one wants to grow acquainted with foreign authors. […] The first step we must take if we are to achieve any sort of harmony is to work hard to understand each other. You offer a fine example here, Monsieur Gibbon. Just as your [English] guns are triumphing over us, you have honoured the literature of your [French] enemies: this is nobler than any military victory. May it become a general and reciprocal phenomenon, and the time come when, scattered members of the same family, rising above the tribal distinctions 'English', 'French', 'German', Russian' and so on, we will deserve the name 'humanity'. I have the honour here of dwelling with sentiments which transcend climates and centuries.[1829]

[1826] Douglas Murray, 'Roger Scruton: A Man Who Seemed Bigger than the Age', https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2020/01/roger-scruton-a-man-who-seemed-bigger-than-the-age/, 12/1/2020 (accessed 22/1/2020).

[1827] See Clive James, *Cultural Amnesia*, (London: Picador, 2007), pp. 261-270.

[1828] Edward Gibbon, *Essai sur la littérature*, (London: T. Becket & P.A. De Hondt, 1761), https://books.google.co.nz/books/about/Essai_sur_l_étude_de_la_littérature.html?id=n8wTAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed 22/1/2020), pp. ix., 16, 159.

[1829] M. Maty, in Gibbon, *Essai sur la littérature*, pp. xxiv, xxxi.

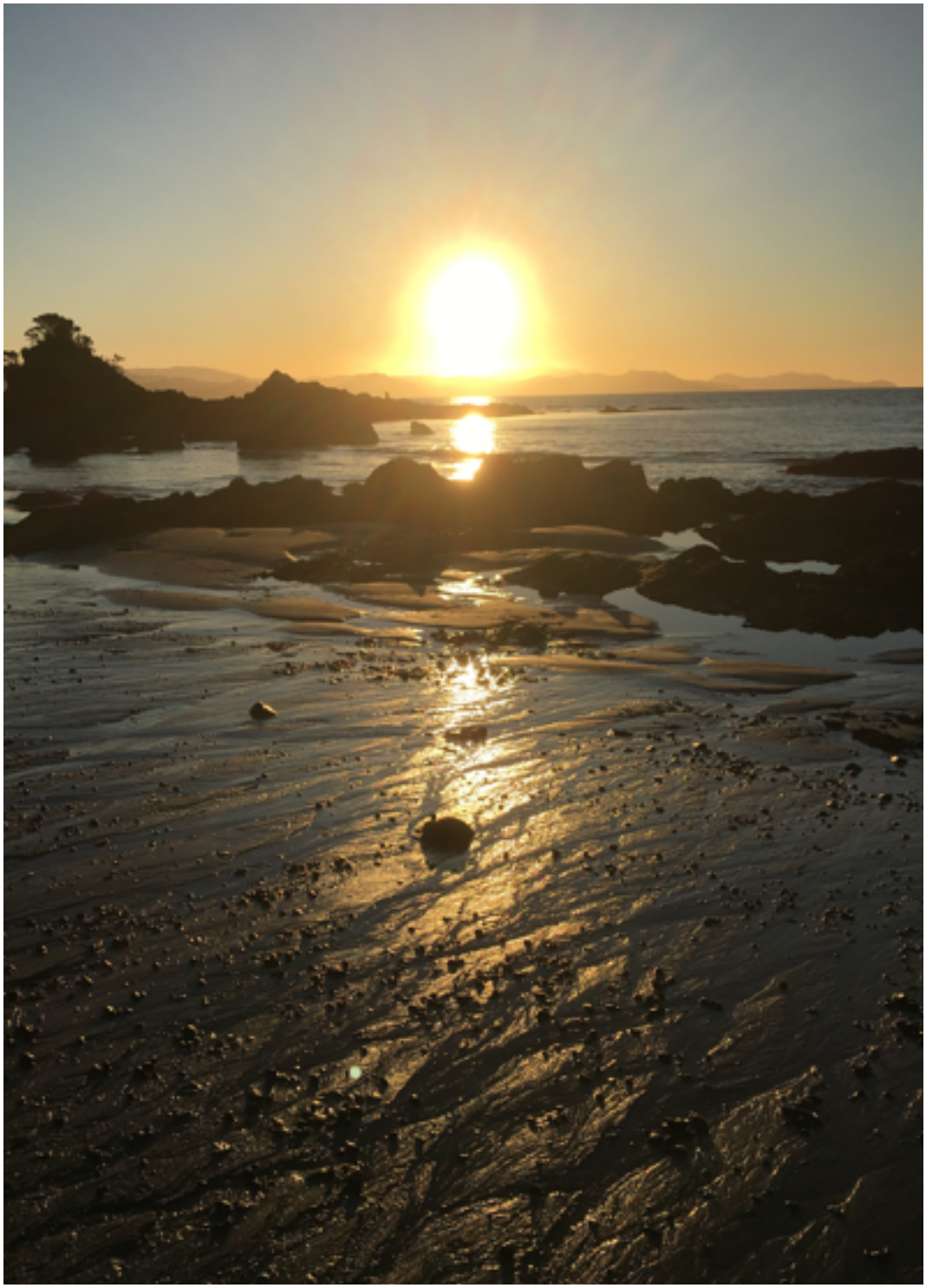
A similar liberation from spatio-temporal constraint is offered by Tu's relentless invitation to join the ranks of Confucian culture; also promised, however, is a 'rebinding' to the 'enabling constraints' - family, language, health etc. - of one's own situation. If this sense of identity is not 'religious', and if you don't like the word 'spiritual' either, then it is at least 'humanistic' insofar as it is a joint achievement: your own efforts of self-cultivation plus the efforts of your teachers to cultivate themselves and offer you the nourishment of their example. Of course it is not as boring or straightforward as that; we learn from mistakes and disasters (our own and those of others) at least as readily as we learn from paragons of virtue. I have hence offered less than a hagiography of Tu Weiming here, even as I have dwelled (most of the time) on his achievements rather than his shortcomings and compromises. But there is an antidote to loneliness in Tu's work whether you are Chinese, American, Kiwi or anyone else: the barriers to entry to Chinese civilisation have been considerably lowered by this man's lifelong *jihad*.

There is a geopolitical urgency to this whole business: it clearly matters for the rest of us whether burgeoning Chinese power gives its contemporary Confuciuses - Chinese or otherwise - breathing space to offer the kind of humane critique that any civilisation needs from its thinking and drinking classes. It could clearly be much worse - Tu's stint at Peking University proves it - but it could also be much better - as Tu's tactful marginalisation at Peking University also proves. Rather than dwelling on the inner machinations of an opaque Party machine, however, 'foreigners' in China and abroad should take pains not to exacerbate the most toxic forms of Chinese nationalism by neglecting to claim for themselves the universal elements of Chinese culture, even as the weight of 'you'll-never-be-one-of-us' exclusion from this culture bears down on them daily in their dealings with Chinese people and institutions. It is not China's fault that it has not had half a century of mass immigration from all over the world, as countries like James's Australia or my own New Zealand have; citizens of multicultural societies, even and especially small ones, have responsibilities to the huge Han majority in China to remind them, as constructively and persuasively as we can, that the 'tradition' they claim does not belong exclusively to them, and that unlike political power, dialogical culture can have no centre.

Indeed, while China will inevitably assume ever greater regional and global leadership, perhaps it is the smaller, more fully cosmopolitan cities of the Pacific Rim - Sydney, Melbourne, Auckland, Vancouver - which, in their hungry search for educated migrants from all over the world (and without the direct baggage of lost imperial leadership), are more likely to embody Tu's quest for a dialogical 'beyond' of the Enlightenment mentality, and of European and American imperialism, in the coming decades. The cafés of Vienna, the pubs of London, and even the streets of New York may not be what they once were, but Beijing and Shanghai will struggle to create vibrant, universal equivalents as long as they do no more than pay polite lip service to Tu Weiming's achievements. The *de facto* segregation of Chinese and non-Chinese by race, language and culture - whether on Chinese soil or abroad - can only devolve into resentment and parallel solitudes unless the curiosity which has driven Tu Weiming's quest for shared meaning is piqued on both sides by charismatic teachers.

NOT BY SCIENCE OF ANY KIND

The Economics of Spiritual Humanism



Jonathan Keir

Cover: Kuaotunu, New Zealand

It is a strange fact. Your modern American society is the first one in history whose members do not want to die.

George Steiner

Obstinately the masters take one view of the matter; obstinately the operatives another; and no political science can set them at one. It would be strange if it could, it being not by science of any kind that men were ever intended to be set at one.

John Ruskin

Men have looked upon the desert as barren land, the free holding of whoever chose; but in fact each hill and valley in it had a man who was its acknowledged owner and would quickly assert the right of his family or clan to it, against aggression. Even the wells and trees had their masters, who allowed men to make firewood of the one and drink of the other freely, as much as was required for their need, but who would instantly check anyone trying to turn the property to account and to exploit it or its products among others for private benefit. The desert was held in a crazed communism by which Nature and the elements were for the free use of every known friendly person for his own purposes and no more.

T. E. Lawrence

There are those men who say to repay evil with kindness. But I say, how then are we to repay kindness? Repay kindness with kindness, but repay evil with justice. […] Fix your mind on truth, hold firm to virtue, rely on loving kindness, and find your recreation in the Arts. […] Even if people do not know what real kindness is, they nonetheless have it within them.

Confucius

Acknowledgements

To Jazz and Cam, whose parents made the journey from the Cook Islands to Tokoroa to work in the forests, and who lifted the spirits of those around them just by being themselves during the global pandemic of 2020. May their daughters inherit all that is good in them.

To my cousin Shaun - a maniac conspiracy theorist, but a tremendous ally in a variety of trenches.

To the family which provided the ‘enabling constraints’ for my journeys in the world.

Genesis

The birth of this book, though sad, was at least pleasing in its serendipity. Barred from reentering China during the Coronavirus outbreak of January 2020, I was forced to extend indefinitely the burden on my mother's New Year hospitality. Visiting an aunt in an Antipodean parody of the original, I discovered that the antique bookstore on the main street of her posh old frontier town bore some of the learning of the actual Cambridge: Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and its colonial ilk were on display in the shop window; Alan Mulgan's *The Making of a New Zealander* was at least there to remind the visitor which country, if not which century, she was in.

My browsing eye first landed, however, on John Ruskin's *Unto This Last: Four Essays on the First Principles of Political Economy* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1901(1862)). Vague in my apprehension of an overdue date with Ruskin, I skimmed the Preface of this unpromisingly subtitled book to find that I had chanced on the Victorian polymath's self-proclaimed *magnum opus*:

> The four following essays were published 18 months ago in the 'Cornhill Magazine', and were reprobated in a violent manner, so far as I could hear, by most of the readers they met with.
>
> Not a whit the less, I believe them to be the best, that is to say, the truest, rightest-worded, and most serviceable things I have ever written; and the last of them, having had especial pains spent on it, is probably the best I shall ever write.[1830]

I finished all four before gauging the various degrees of their influence: on Gandhi (strong), the founders of the British Labour Party (moderate), and the course of 20th-century world history (modest to non-existent). It is usually a good thing to read a book on its own terms, uncoloured by any intervening reception. Unsure that it is quite such a good idea to *write* one in the same spirit, I have nevertheless launched into it, quite deliberately, on very little background reading: my goal is therefore not to contribute to Ruskin 'scholarship' in any real way, but to take the text at face value and tackle a 21st-century problem from the convenient basecamp Ruskin provides.

Ruskin moaned about 'modern political economy' - what we today just call 'economics' - 150 years ago; his critiques and analyses were of course eclipsed by the waxing celebrity of his contemporary, Karl Marx, and by the outstanding contributions to aesthetics for which he himself is principally known. Why on Earth, then, did Ruskin insist on regarding *Unto This Last* as his greatest achievement? Seeking to re-aestheticise or respiritualise human society in a disenchanted era bewildered by change, Ruskin started with his own Victorian Britain: if the Industrial Revolution had changed the world of work, tearing as it did at the frayed fabric of Christian society, then a new humanist synthesis was required which could rescue justice from its modern enemies. Adam Smith may have stressed the importance of

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[1830] John Ruskin, John Ruskin, *Unto This Last: Four Essays on the First Principles of Political Economy*, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1901(1862)), p. 9.

the ‘moral sentiments’, but Smith’s readers preferred the get-rich magic of his ‘invisible hand’ to the harder work of self-cultivation; imperial attitudes to the wealth of nations were unleashed in new and highly destructive forms in 19th-century Europe.

21st-century China finds itself in a position analogous, in at least one sense, to Britain in 1862: deadly viruses aside, its rise to the status of global superpower is unquestioned; unlike Victorian Britain, however, its further rise is unstoppable. I made a conscious decision to move to China to take part - or try to take part - in the country’s intellectual debates; if the Industrial Revolution (and later two World Wars) placed untenable stress on the Christian institutions which had previously held Britain (and her Empire) together, Chinese ‘faith’ in Confucianism had been even more violently shattered by events between 1840 and 1976. A demolished country and culture, patiently engaged in ‘Reform and Opening Up’ for the last four decades, now affords itself the luxury of asking itself who it is and what it stands for: what it more or less racistly does *not* want to become is any version of Britain or the United States. China’s One Belt One Road initiative, and President Xi Jinping’s *prima facie* admirable emphasis on dialogical modes of international interaction, are a clear attempt to place daylight between contemporary China and the Western empires of the recent past; Confucius is even invoked (unthinkable 50 years ago) to offer a cultured Sinic alternative to these barbarian tyrannies.

A few brave barbarians, however, opposed Western imperialism all the way along; Chinese intellectuals have no monopoly on the moral high ground. The most cosmopolitan living Confucian, Tu Weiming, has begun speaking of ‘Spiritual Humanism’ as a global alternative to the influential and destructive ‘Enlightenment mentality’ which, though born in the West, now dominates the world in general, and China in particular, with its ‘instrumental rationality’. Progressive Chinese business schools - or business schools with an interest in looking progressive (my jury of one is still out on this) - are seeking to promote research on such lofty ideals as a ‘New Business Civilisation’ which might one day transcend philistine profiteering, but these endeavours are likely to collapse into dull nationalism unless both Chinese and non-Chinese alike learn to see themselves as part of a single moral community - some alchemy in our present moment of pandemic panic and general slow-burn distrust and disinterest in one another’s heritages.

The epic goal of a unifying World Ethos which preserves and enhances our various local treasures without blandly amalgamating them (‘harmony without uniformity’ or *heerbutong* in Tu Weiming’s Confucian dictionary), is reachable, Ruskin reminds us, ‘not by science of any kind’. His frames of reference are firmly Christian and Victorian, but that ought not to prevent us from rerunning his humanist experiments - for this is exactly what his ‘essays’ are - in our shrinking world. Like Tu Weiming, Ruskin wants to defend the idea of the human spirit (what he calls the Soul) against its beancounting enemies: business ethics cannot simply be tacked onto existing MBA programs as a cheap and unnourishing garnish; the core business of business is *justice*, and education for it should reflect this humanistic fact before it starts measuring anything else. If Ruskin’s assault on the mountain of human spirituality failed, by his own admission, to win public recognition in 1862, perhaps our own climb can benefit from his forgotten forays, and avail itself of the resources left behind at his precious campsite.

The New Zealand Turn

One flirts with charlatanism when neologising: 'Spiritual Humanism' is a term laden with the dual baggage of (secular, anti-religious) 'humanism' and (cheap, New Age) 'spirituality'; *Spiritual Economics* is already the title of a 1983 Eric Butterworth self-help manual characteristic of the genre in its preference for easy, saleable answers over honest, difficult questions. Even good friends of Tu Weiming confide their doubts whether 'Spiritual Humanism', borrowed from Indian philosopher R. Balasubramanian, is the least corrupted or misleading term he could use for his idea of a dialogical ethos transcending individual religious creed. I have covered this terrain in a 24-chapter anthology project (*Spiritual Humanism as a World Ethos?*) and a critical summary of Tu's take on 'dialogue among civilisations' (*The Dialogical East Asian: Tu Weiming's Quest for Shared Meaning*), and do not wish to retake these specific journeys here in the third volume of a loose 'Spiritual Humanism Trilogy', rewarding though these first two forays both were. I ended the latter, moreover, by realising that my dates with Confucian humanism, and my eclectic forays into World Literature over two decades of earnest globetrotting, had finally prepared me for a long-overdue reckoning, not only with Ruskin discovered in a local bookshop, but with my own 'national' heritage. Economics is not the only art of managing scarcity; literary canons are equally a means of 'economising', and I certainly cut corners on my own country in the hope of acceding to something universal. But if I can't capture something of the unique value of my own New Zealand, I can forget the rest of the world; Tu Weiming himself has taught me that.

Spiritual Humanism and the Economic Dimension of Justice

Tu's 'Spiritual Humanism' is at odds with the excesses of what he calls the 'Enlightenment mentality'; he understood, however, that the Enlightenment also contained much worth preserving, not least the lion's share of the unprecedented technological advancement and economic growth of the last 200 years. One of Tu's lifelong concerns has been to debunk the sociological myth of a necessary link between Protestantism and a 'modern' (i.e. serious) work ethic by pointing, in the first instance, to the recent successes of the so-called Confucian Economic Sphere. Leaving to one side the question how 'Confucian' the 21st-century CES really is, it is clear that Tu, like Ruskin, is less interested in making business-case arguments (though he is not above them either) than he is in a certain for-its-own-sakism: whether economic growth in a polity of free self-cultivators is necessarily faster than growth in a ruthless dictatorship is beside the real point: people *will* still work - contrary to the scientistic dogmas of contemporary capitalism - for more than their own narrow gain. We may run all sorts of experiments to see whether and under what conditions, in fact, such 'self-motivators' are more or less 'productive' than their 'enslaved' counterparts, but this is so far beside the point as to be entirely beyond it: self-cultivation - which includes freely choosing my own vocation, independent of the temptations of unjust reward - is good and necessary for *me*; the derivative question for the *economics* of Spiritual Humanism is what effect such a humanistic orientation of mine has on *you*. If I work underpaid in a factory to

provide goods which you can (too) cheaply consume, then my utility to you, though invisible, is obvious; if, however, I bring you no net economic benefit, and if I ignore your traditions and make a home in others (perhaps even on land you think of as your own), what indirect profit can my life bring to yours? Is enmity between us - or worse, nothingness - inevitable? By what gesture of reconciliation and friendship can I meaningfully reach you? Questions of literary and economic justice, this book argues, are so intertwined as to be ultimately indistinguishable.

Kuaotunu, March 2020

Contents

1. John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*

'The Roots of Honour'

> *Assuming, not that the human being has no skeleton, but that it is all skeleton, [modern political economy] founds an ossifiant theory of progress on this negation of a soul; and having shown the utmost that may be made of bones, and constructed a number of interesting geometrical figures with death's-head and humeri, successfully proves the inconvenience of the reappearance of a soul among these corpuscular structures.*[1831]

The 21st-century reader of Ruskin is struck immediately by the *style*; refreshing assumptions about human possibility, quite different from our own, filter down to us through this prelapsarian, or at least pre-Darwinian, prose. Rather than deciding in advance (as it is polite for us to do) that our spirituality must be the outcome of some more or less boringly evolved physical process, Ruskin - writing just a year or so after the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (always worth quoting the full title) - is still able to understand his relationship with science the other way round: empirical investigations may add necessary colour and content (as well as convenience) to our lives, but they cannot in any way alter the subjective structures of our own experience, which are given to us as children before we can acquire any sense of where they might come from. Ruskin's sense of self predates, and hence triumphs over, any possible *theory* of self; Darwin's work, for example, is interesting and important, but 'I' was here first: it is this 'I' who must decide what aesthetic meaning to give to Darwin's insights. Denial of facts is absurd, but scientism - the abolition of the aesthetic or spiritual dimension of my life on the grounds that it is all an illusion, a spandrel or other chance product of natural selection - is the equally miserable equivalent of a slave wishing to become its master. Our responsibilities to investigate the world, and to understand our place in it, do not absolve us of our prior responsibilities to our own freely choosing moral selves. 'Honour,' in other words, is not a mirage; it is a real thing which we can still grasp, no matter how much (or indeed how little) science and learning we stand on, for it is the business of every minute, every hour: not the application of a theory, but the fresh sweat of difficult but intrinsically meaningful subjective choice.

The world of work throws up just such decisions all the time, starting with the question of which work to do, and which sort of professional relationships to maintain. Here as elsewhere, Ruskin assumes from the beginning that our responsibilities to ourselves transcend our own animal comfort:

> It is, indeed, always the interest of both [employer and employee, buyer and seller] that the work should be rightly done, and a just price obtained for it;

[1831] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, p. 4.

> but, in the division of profits, the gain of the one may or may not be the loss of the other. […] For no human actions were ever intended by the Maker of men to be guided by balances of expediency, but by balances of justice. He has therefore rendered all endeavours to determine expediency futile for evermore. No man ever knew, or can know, what will be the ultimate result to himself, or to others, of any given line of conduct. But every man may know, and most of us do know, what is a just and unjust act. And all of us may know also, that the consequences of justice will be ultimately the best possible, both to others and ourselves, though we can neither say what *is* best, nor how it is likely to come to pass.
>
> I have said balances of justice, meaning, in the term 'justice', to include affection, - such affection as one man *owes* to another. All right relations between master and operative, and all their best interests, ultimately depend on these.[1832]

Contrary to the claims of the multi-billion-dollar self-help industry, there is by definition no scientific formula for 'authenticity' or 'vulnerability', for manufacturing such convenient feelings as may help us to 'win friends and influence people'; even to suspect that one is being manipulated in this way is to make the business of trust impossible, because trust is the magnetic force attracting two autonomous and equal subjectivities. The 'objective' laws of supply and demand promised by modern economists (or 'political economists', as Ruskin calls them), and the exploitative techniques of modern 'management science' (which only really got going after Ruskin's time), can never hope to unlock the hidden power of the human worker's motivation:

> But he being, on the contrary, an engine whose motive power is a Soul, the force of this very peculiar agent, as an unknown quantity, enters into all the political economist's equations, without his knowledge, and falsifies every one of their results. The largest quantity of work will not be done by this curious engine for pay, or under pressure, or by help of any kind of fuel which may be supplied by the chaldron. It will be done only when the motive force, that is to say, the will or spirit of the creature, is brought to its greatest strength by its own proper fuel: namely, by the affections.[1833]

There is something biblical - that is to say, humanistic rather than scientific - in the dynamics of human attraction:

> The universal law of the matter is that, assuming any given quantity of energy and sense in master and servant, the greatest material result obtainable by them will be, not through antagonism to each other, but through affection for each other; and that if the master, instead of endeavouring to get as much work as possible from the servants, seeks rather to render his appointed and necessary work beneficial to him, and to forward his interests in all just and wholesome ways, the real amount of

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[1832] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 6-8.

[1833] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, p. 10.

> work ultimately done, or of good rendered, by the person so cared for, will indeed be the greatest possible.
>
> Observe, I say, 'of good rendered', for a servant's work is not necessarily or always the best thing he can give his master. But good of all kinds, whether in material service, in protective watchfulness of his master's interest and credit, or in joyful readiness to seize unexpected or irregular occasions of help.
>
> Nor is this one whit less generally true because indulgence will be frequently abused, and kindness met with ingratitude. For the servant who, gently treated, is ungrateful, treated ungently, will be revengeful; and the man who is dishonest to a liberal master will be injurious to an unjust one.
>
> In any case, and with any person, this unselfish treatment will produce the most effective return. Observe, I am here considering the affections wholly as a motive power; not at all as things in themselves desirable or noble, or in any other way abstractedly good. I look at them simply as an anomalous force, rendering every one of the ordinary political economist's calculations nugatory; while, even if he desired to introduce this new element into his estimates, he has no power of dealing with it; for the affections only become a true motive power when they ignore every other motive and condition of political economy. Treat the servant kindly, with the idea of turning his gratitude to account, and you will get, as you deserve, no gratitude, nor any value for your kindness; but treat him kindly without any economical purpose, and all economical purposes will be answered; in this, as in all other matters, whosoever shall save his life shall lose it, whoso loses it shall find it.[1834]

The first challenge of 'political economy', then, is how to treat people kindly *for its own sake*: this is as hard for bosses and sellers as it is for employees and buyers, because the short-term advantages of merely *pretending* to do so can be so enormous. The snake oil of modern economic 'theory' makes no distinctions at the level of subjective intention; oriented as it is toward measurable outcomes, it is utterly unable to register the possibility of a sweet spot of team spirit which is neither fascistic nor fake. It may be harder for modern global entrepreneurs to maintain such 'spirit' among their staff than it was for tribal bands fighting for survival, but that only makes the challenge of doing so more, not less, acute:

> Supposing the officer only desires to apply the rules of discipline so as, with the least trouble to himself, to make the regiment most effective; he will not be able, by any rules or administration of rules, on this selfish principle, to develop the full strength of his subordinates. If a man of sense and firmness, he may, as in the former instance, produce a better result than would be obtained by the irregular kindness of the weak officer; but let the sense and firmness be the same in both cases, and assuredly the officer who has the most direct personal relations with his men, the most care for their interests, and the most value for their lives, will develop their effective strength, through their affection for his person and trust in his character, to

[1834] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 11-13.

> a degree wholly unattainable by other means. This law applies still more stringently as the numbers concerned are larger: a charge may often be successful, though the men dislike their officers; a battle has rarely been won, unless they loved their general.
>
> Passing from these simple examples to the more complicated relations existing between a manufacturer and his workmen, we are met first by certain difficulties, resulting, apparently, from a harder and colder state of moral elements. It is easy to imagine an enthusiastic affection existing among soldiers for the colonel. Not so easy to imagine an enthusiastic affection among cotton-spinners for the proprietor of the mill. A body of men associated for purposes of robbery (as a Highland clan in ancient times) shall be animated by perfect affection, and every member of it be ready to lay down his life for the life of his chief. But a band of men associated for purposes of legal production and accumulation is usually animated, it appears, by no such emotions, and none of them are in any wise willing to give his life for the life of his chief.
>
> […] Now, as, under these contingencies, no action of the affections can take place, but only an explosive action of *dis*affections, […] how far [is] it possible that bodies of workmen may be engaged and maintained at such fixed rate of wages (whatever the state of trade may be), without enlarging or diminishing their number, so as to give them permanent interest in the establishment with which they are connected, like that of the domestic servants in an old family, or an esprit de corps, like that of the soldiers in a crack regiment?[1835]

We may rightly, in our post-feminist era, balk at the idea of the truly happy domestic servant, just as we may abhor the blindness of conscripted soldiers falling in love with their amoral missions, but Ruskin's point is that *something* in the purity of that spirit of service is worth maintaining, even as our modern guard against the manipulations to which (culminating in Auschwitz) it is prone remains firmly and permanently up. Unlike the dream of the hundred-million-in-five-years Silicon Valley startup, and despite the fact that 'the price of labour is always regulated by the demand for it'[1836], Ruskin prefers a military model of graded remuneration from the top to the bottom of society: 'The best labor always has been, and is, as *all* labor ought to be, paid by an invariable standard.'[1837] Rather than seeking to take advantage of gaps in the market to charge monopoly rates - as modern 'political economy' advocates - the true entrepreneur, like the professional soldier or physician (as opposed to the mercenary or quack), does her work of provision for the community for its own sake, and (so long as remuneration is adequate) not at all for any surplus riches on offer. The only challenge, therefore, is the redistributive question of 'adequate' remuneration independent of market fluctuations: 'I believe the sudden and extensive inequalities of demand, which necessarily arise in the mercantile operations of an active nation, constitute the only essential difficulty

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[1835] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 14-17.

[1836] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, p. 19.

[1837] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, p. 19.

which has to be overcome in a just organization of labor.'[1838] Motivation to engage in productive work for its own sake - a humanistic rather than scientific concoction, as Ruskin has just established - must nevertheless be coaxed in industrial quantities, and for the health of both individuals and human society, if 'justice' is to be achieved; a spirit of sacrifice - a voluntary foregoing of remuneration, even a reluctant willingness to face death *in extremis*, as and when our sense of vocation demands it - is hence a universal emergency element in any justly functioning global economy, even if it is not a fair or sustainable peacetime principle:

> I have already alluded to the difference hitherto existing between regiments of men associated for purposes of violence, and for purposes of manufacture; in that the former appear capable of self-sacrifice – the latter, not; which singular fact is the real reason of the general lowness in which the profession of commerce is held, as compared with that of arms. Philosophically, it does not, at first sight, appear reasonable (many writers have endeavoured to prove it unreasonable) that a peaceable and rational person, whose trade is buying and selling, should be held in less honour than an unpeaceable and often irrational person, whose trade is slaying. Nevertheless, the consent of mankind has always, in spite of the philosophers, given precedence to the soldier.
>
> And this is right.
>
> For the soldier's trade, verily and essentially, is not slaying, but being slain. […] No less is the respect we pay to the lawyer and physician, founded ultimately on their self-sacrifice. Whatever the learning or acuteness of a great lawyer, our chief respect for him depends on our belief that, set in a judge's seat, he will strive to judge justly, come what may. Could we suppose that he would take bribes, and use his acuteness and legal knowledge to give plausibility to iniquitous decisions, no degree of intellect would win for him our respect. Nothing will win it, short of our tacit conviction that in all important acts of his life justice is first with him: his own interest second.
>
> In the case of a physician, the ground of the honour we render him is clearer still. Whatever his science, we would shrink from him in horror if we found him regard his patients as subjects to experiment upon; much more, if we found that, receiving bribes from persons interested in their deaths, he was using his best skill to give poison in the mask of medicine.
>
> Finally, the principle holds with utmost clearness as it respects clergymen. No goodness of disposition will excuse want of science in a physician, or of shrewdness in an advocate; but a clergyman, even though his power of intellect be small, is respected on the presumed ground of his unselfishness and serviceableness.
>
> […] If, therefore, all the efficient members of the so-called liberal professions are still, somehow, in public estimate of honour, preferred before the head of a commercial firm, the reason must lie deeper than in the measurement of their several powers of mind.

[1838] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 20-21.

> And the essential reason for such preference will be found to lie in the fact that the merchant is presumed to act always selfishly. […] The merchant's first object in all his dealings must be (the public believe) to get as much for himself, and leave as little to his neighbour (or customer) as possible. Enforcing this upon him, by political statute, as the necessary principle of his action; recommending it to him on all occasions, and themselves reciprocally adopting it, proclaiming vociferously, for law of the universe, that a buyer's function is to cheapen, and a seller's to cheat, - the public, nevertheless, involuntarily condemn the man of commerce for his compliance with their own statement, and stamp him forever as belonging to an inferior grade of human personality.
>
> This they will find, eventually, they must give up doing. They must not cease to condemn selfishness; but they will have to discover a kind of commerce which is not exclusively selfish. Or, rather, they will have to discover that there never was, nor can be, any other kind of commerce; that this which they have called commerce was not commerce at all, but cozening; and that a true merchant differs as much from a merchant according to the laws of modern political economy as the hero of the 'Excursion' from Autolycus. They will find that commerce is an occupation which gentlemen will every day see more need to engage in, rather than in the businesses of talking to men, or slaying them; that, in true commerce, as in true preaching, or true fighting, it is necessary to admit the idea of occasional voluntary loss; that sixpences have to be lost, as well as lives, under a sense of duty; that the market may have its martyrdoms as well as the pulpit, and trade its heroisms as well as war.[1839]

The anatomy of such corporate sainthood, however, remains plausibly to be sketched; Ruskin offers something like a Confucian *shinonggongshang* guild breakdown for his Victorian readership:

> The fact is, that people have never had clearly explained to them the true functions of a merchant with respect to other people. I should like the reader to be very clear about this.
>
> Five great intellectual professions, relating to daily necessities of life, have hitherto existed - three exist necessarily, in every civilised nation:
>
> The Soldier's profession is to *defend* it.
> The Pastor's to *teach* it.
> The Physician's to *keep it in health.*
> The Lawyer's to *enforce justice* in it.
> The Merchant's to *provide* for it.
> And the duty of all these men is, on due occasion, to *die* for it.
> 'On due occasion', namely:
> The Soldier, rather than leave his post in battle.
> The Physician, rather than leave his post in plague.
> The Pastor, rather than teach Falsehood.
> The Lawyer, rather than countenance Injustice.

[1839] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 23-29.

> The merchant - what is *his* due occasion of death?
>
> It is the main question for the merchant, as for all of us. For, truly, the man who does not know when to die, does not know how to live.
>
> Observe, the merchant's function (or manufacturer's, for in the broad sense in which it is here used the word must be understood to include both) is to provide for the nation. It is no more his function to get profit for himself out of that provision than it is a clergyman's function to get his stipend. This stipend is a due and necessary adjunct, but not the object of his life, if he be a true clergyman, any more than his fee (or honorarium) is the object of life to a true physician. Neither is his fee the object of life to a true merchant. ***All three, if true men, have a work to be done irrespective of fee - to be done at any cost, or for quite the contrary of fee*** [italics mine]; the pastor's function being to teach, the physician's to heal, and the merchant's, as I have said, to provide. That is to say, he has to understand to their very root the qualities of the thing he deals in, and the means of obtaining or producing it; and he has to apply all his sagacity and energy to the producing or obtaining it in perfect state, and distributing it at the cheapest possible price where it is most needed.
>
> And because the production or obtaining of any commodity involves necessarily the agency of many lives and hands, the merchant becomes in the course of his business the master and governor of large masses of men in a more direct, though less confessed way, than a military officer or pastor; so that on him falls, in great part, the responsibility for the kind of life they lead: and it becomes his duty, not only to be always considering how to produce what he sells, in the purest and cheapest forms, but how to make the various employments involved in the production or transference of it most beneficial to the men employed.[1840]

If there is something uncomfortable for us in the willed servility of the butlers of old, there is an awkward truth in Ruskin's 'familied' understanding of the responsibilities of managers (to borrow the verb from Confucian scholar Roger Ames again) which cuts through the self-centred 'do-unto-others' Golden Rule of contemporary fame. This expedient distraction from morality which, as Erich Fromm was among the first

[1840] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 30-33.

persuasively to argue[1841], has underpinned the modern 'political economy' of unbridled capitalism against which Ruskin is railing, dodges the all-important question of 'affection': the real spiritual challenge is not always to treat others as one would wish to be treated, or to avoid treating them as one would not, but rather to imagine oneself into a network of family relationships with one's colleagues and customers; just as a good Confucian son (or employee) will show loyalty to his father (or boss) by bravely aiming to improve him, and by seizing 'unexpected or irregular occasions of help' instead of merely following orders, so too,

> in his office of governor of the men employed by him, the merchant or manufacturer is invested with a distinctly paternal authority and responsibility. In most cases, a youth entering a commercial establishment is withdrawn altogether from home influence; his master must become his father, else he has, for practical and constant help, no father at hand. In all cases the master's authority, together with the general tone and atmosphere of his business, and the character of the men with whom the youth is compelled in the course of it to associate, have more immediate and pressing weight than the home influence, and will eventually neutralise it either for good or evil; so that the only means which the master has of doing justice to the men employed by him is to ask himself sternly whether he is dealing with such subordinate as he would with his own son, if compelled by circumstances to take such a position. […] So, also, supposing the master of a manufactury saw it right, or were by any chance obliged, to place his own son, in the position of an ordinary workman: as he would then treat his son, he is bound always to treat every one of his men. This is the only effective, true, or practical RULE which can be given on the point of political economy.
>
> And as the captain of a ship is bound to be the last man to leave his ship in the case of wreck, and to share his last crust with the sailors in case of famine, so the manufacturer, in any commercial crisis or distress, is bound to take the suffering of it with the men, and even to take more of it for

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[1841] See Erich Fromm, Die Kunst des Liebens, (München: dtv, 1995 (1956)), pp. 201-202:

> 'I'll give you just as much as you give me,' whether of material goods or love: so runs the highest maxim of capitalist morality. One could even say that the development of this ethic of 'fairness' is the distinguishing ethical contribution [to humanity] of capitialist society.
>
> [...] This fairness ethic is easily assimilated to the Golden Rule: 'Don't do to others what you don't want them to do to you' can easily be interpreted as 'Be fair to others in your dealings with them.' The original folk formulation of the biblical Commandment, however, is 'Love thy neighbour as thyself'; in reality, the Judeo-Christian command to love one's neighbour is something utterly distinct from an ethic of fairness. To 'love one's neighbour' means to feel responsible for her and united with her, while a fairness ethic implies that one feels neither responsible nor emotionally invested, but rather separate and distant; it means that one respects one's neighbour's rights, but not that one loves her. It is no coincidence that the Golden Rule has become the most popular religious maxim of our day; since one can understand it in the sense of an ethic of fairness, it is the only religious maxim that everyone can understand and is ready to practise. But if one wants to practise love, one must understand the difference between love and fairness.

> himself than he allows his men to feel; as a father would in a famine, shipwreck, or battle, sacrifice himself for his own son.
>
> All which sounds very strange: the only real strangeness in the matter being, nevertheless, that it should so sound. For all this is true, and that not partially nor theoretically, but everlastingly and practically: all other doctrine than this respecting matters political being false in premises, absurd in deduction, and impossible in practice, consistently with any progressive state of national life; all the life which we now possess as a nation showing itself in the resolute denial and scorn by a few strong minds and faithful hearts of the economic principles taught to our multitudes, which principles, so far as accepted, lead straight to national destruction.[1842]

As we will see further, Ruskin understands that modern economics is *anti*-Christian rather than merely post-Christian; his extraordinary achievement was to diagnose the spiritual crisis of industrial modernity from within the belly of the beast - the 1860s Britain of Darwin and Dickens[1843] - and to regrasp the 'roots of honour' with the disease raging all around him. The bar he sets - treating strangers with the same *flavour* (if inevitably not the same concentration) of concern as one shows one's own kin - is an undeniably high one, but our 'affections' are, he insists, capable of such creative flights.

'The Veins of Wealth'

Without altogether denying the trickle-down comforts of modern economic growth, Ruskin offers an unfashionable definition of economics as peripheral to the unchanging spiritual parameters of a meaningful human life. The central error of modern 'political economy' is to assume that, even if robots may one day do all our chores, everyone can ever be equally 'rich':

> Pardon me. Men of business do indeed know how they themselves made their money, or how, on occasion, they lost it. Playing a long-practised game, they are familiar with the chances of its cards, and can rightly explain their losses and gains. But they neither know who keeps the bank of the gambling-house, nor what other games may be played with the same cards, nor what other losses and gains, far away among the dark streets, are essentially, though invisibly, dependent on theirs in the lighted rooms. They have learned a few, and only a few, of the laws of mercantile economy; but not one of those of political economy.
>
> Primarily, which is very notable and curious, I observe that men of business rarely know the meaning of the word 'rich'. At least, if they know, they do not in their reasonings allow for the fact that it is a relative word, implying its opposite 'poor' as positively as the word 'north' implies its

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[1842] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 34-36.

[1843] See Ruskin's footnote on Dickens in 'The Roots of Honour' (*Unto This Last*, pp. 13-14) for an illustration of the 'difference between the [tyrannical and properly paternal] modes of treatment, and between their effective material results.'

> opposite 'south'. Men nearly always speak and write as if riches were absolute, and it were possible by following certain scientific precepts, for everybody to be rich. Whereas riches are a power like that of electricity, acting only through inequalities or negations of itself. The force of the guinea in your pocket depends wholly on the default of a guinea in your neighbour's pocket. If he did not want it, it would be of no use to you; the degree of power it possesses depends accurately upon the need or desire he has for it - and the art of making yourself rich, in the ordinary mercantile economist's sense, is therefore equally and necessarily the art of keeping your neighbour poor.[1844]

Beyond the satisfaction of our own legitimate material and spiritual needs, a greed lurks - sinful, as Christians would call it - which wants more than the leisure of a well-earned freedom:

> What is really desired, under the name of riches, is, essentially, power over men; in its simplest sense, the power of obtaining for our own advantage the labor of servant, tradesman, and artist; in wider sense, authority of directing large masses to various ends (good, trivial, or hurtful, according to the mind of the rich person). And this power of wealth of course is greater or less in direct proportion to the poverty of the men over whom it is exercised, and in inverse proportion to the number of persons who are as rich as ourselves, and who are ready to give the same price for an article of which the supply is limited. If the musician is poor he will sing for small pay as long as there is only one person who can pay him; but if there be two or three he will sing for the one who offers him most. And thus the power of the riches of the patron depends first on the poverty of the artist, and then on the limitation of the number of equally wealthy persons who also want seats at the concert. So that, as stated above, the art of becoming 'rich', in the common sense, is not absolutely nor finally the art of accumulating much money for ourselves, but also of contriving that our neighbours shall have less. In accurate terms, it is 'the art of establishing the maximum inequality in our own favour.'[1845]

This ignoble bartering, exploitative in its nature regardless of the ends to which it may subsequently be turned, is destructive of the very fabric of human society: 'All morbid local action of riches will be found ultimately to involve a weakening of the resources of the body politic.'[1846] Inequalities of outcome may have both just and unjust causes - Ruskin, as we will see, is in any case completely against the 'socialist' idea of blanket egalitarian redistribution - but as soon as any individual actor abandons 'the roots of honour' and starts seeking her own advantage and relative power for its own sake, a rot sets in which must be stopped - not primarily by law, but rather by aesthetic and moral education.

[1844] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 38-39.

[1845] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 43-45.

[1846] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, p. 48.

Ruskin asks his reader to imagine one man promising future labour to a neighbour in exchange for present help: 'In the instance before us, one of the men might from the first have deliberately chosen to be idle, and to put his life in pawn for present ease, or he might have mismanaged his land, and been compelled to have recourse to his neighbour for food and help, pledging his future labour for it,'[1847] Ruskin admits, but he may just as equally be the victim of bad brute luck. The law may make it technically possible for his neighbour to take advantage of his plight, but this would be dishonourable:

> There might not, from first to last, be the least illegality (in the ordinary sense of the arrangement); but if a stranger arrived on the coast at this advanced epoch of their political economy he would find one man commercially Rich; the other commercially Poor. He would see, perhaps with no small surprise, one passing his days in idleness; the other laboring for both, and living sparely, in the hope of recovering his independence at some distant period.[1848]

A clearer example yet of the spiralling potential for economic injustice in modern human societies is offered when one extends the thought experiment from two people to three:

> Suppose that three men, instead of two, formed the little isolated republic, and found themselves obliged to separate, in order to farm different pieces of land at some distance from each other along the coast: each estate furnishing a distinct kind of produce, and each more or less in need of the material raised on the other. Suppose that the third man, in order to save the time of all three, undertakes simply to superintend the transference of commodities from one farm to the other; on condition of receiving some ***sufficiently remunerative share*** [italics mine] of every parcel of goods conveyed, or of some other parcel received in exchange for it.
>
> If this carrier or messenger always brings to each estate, from the other, what is chiefly wanted, at the right time, the operations of the two farmers will go on prosperously, and the largest possible result in produce, or wealth, will be attained by the little community. But suppose no intercourse between the landowners is possible, except through the travelling agent; and that after a time this agent, watching the course of each man's agriculture, keeps back the articles with which he has been entrusted until there comes a period of extreme necessity for them, on one side or other, and then exacts in exchange for them all that the distressed farmer can spare of other kinds of produce: it is easy to see that by ingeniously watching his opportunities he might possess himself regularly of the greater part of the superfluous produce of the two estates, and at last, in some year of severest trial or scarcity, purchase both for himself and maintain the former proprietors thenceforward as his labourers or servants.

[1847] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, p. 53.

[1848] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, p. 52.

> This would be a case of commercial wealth wealth acquired on the exactest principles of modern political economy. But more distinctly even than in the former instance, it is manifest in this that the wealth of the State, or of the three men considered as a society, is collectively less than it would have been had the merchant been content with juster profit.[1849]

Gross Domestic Product is hence a hopeless way of measuring the real, spiritual health and wealth of a society, because it tells us nothing of opportunity costs:

> The whole question, therefore, respecting not only the advantage, but even the quantity, of national wealth, resolves itself finally into one of abstract justice. It is impossible to conclude, of any given mass of acquired wealth, merely by the fact of its existence, whether it signifies good or evil to the nation in the midst of which it exists. […] One mass of money is the outcome of action which has created, - another, of action which has annihilated - ten times as much in the gathering of it; such and such strong hands have been paralysed, as if they had been numbed by nightshade: so many strong men's courage broken, so many productive operations hindered; this and the other false direction given to labour, and lying image of prosperity set up, on Dura plains dug into seven-times-heated furnaces. That which seems to be wealth may in verity be only the gilded index of far-reaching ruin; a wrecker's handful of coin gleaned from the beach to which he has beguiled an argosy; a camp-follower's bundle of rags unwrapped from the breasts of goodly soldiers dead; the purchase-pieces of potter's fields, wherein shall be buried together the citizen and the stranger.
>
> And, therefore, the idea that directions can be given for the gaining of wealth, irrespectively of the consideration of its moral sources, or that any technical law of purchase and gain can be set down for national practice, is perhaps the most insolently futile of all that have ever beguiled men through their vices. So far as I know, there is not in history record of anything so disgraceful to the human intellect as the modern idea that the commercial text, 'Buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest', represents, or under any circumstances could represent, an available principle of national economy. […] You sold your bread well today: was it to a dying man who gave his last coin for it, and will never need bread more; or to a rich man who tomorrow will buy your farm over your head; or to a soldier on his way to pillage the bank in which you have put your fortune?
>
> None of these things you can know. One thing only you can know: namely, whether this dealing of yours is a just and faithful one, which is all you need concern yourself about respecting it. […] And thus every question concerning these things merges itself ultimately in the great question of justice.[1850]

Ruskin then seeks to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate desires for influence in the world: something in the just person's social engagement reflects an

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[1849] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 53-55.

[1850] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 56-60.

authentic dialogical bent; real wealth and power consist not in the ability to pull the marionette strings of the hungry and desperate, but in an equal and opposite willingness to teach and to learn:

> Power over human beings is attainable by other means than by money. As I said a few pages back, the money power is always imperfect and doubtful; there are many things that cannot be reached with it, others which cannot be retained by it. Many joys may be given to men which cannot be bought for gold, and many fidelities found in them which cannot be rewarded with it.
>
> Trite enough - the reader thinks. Yes; but it is not so trite - I wish it were - that in this moral power, quite inscrutable and immeasurable though it be, there is a monetary value just as real as that represented by more ponderous currencies.
>
> […] In fact, it may be discovered that the true veins of wealth are purple, - and not in Rock, but in Flesh, - perhaps even that the final outcome and consummation of all wealth is in the producing as many as possible full-breathed, bright-eyed, and happy-hearted human creatures. Our modern wealth, I think, has rather a tendency the other way; - most political economists appearing to consider multitudes of human creatures not conducive to wealth, or at best conducive to it only by remaining in a dim-eyed and narrow-chested state of being.
>
> Nevertheless, it is open, I repeat, to serious question, which I leave to the reader's pondering, whether, among national manufactures, that of Souls of a good quality may not at last turn out a quite leadingly lucrative one? Nay, in some faraway and yet undreamt-of hour, I can even imagine that England may cast all thoughts of possessive wealth back to the barbaric nations among whom they first arose; and that, while the sands of the Indus and adamant of Golconda may yet stiffen the housings of the charger, and flush from the turban of the slave, she, as a Christian mother, may at last attain to the virtues and the treasures of a Heathen one, and be able to lead forth her Sons, saying: 'These are MY jewels.'[1851]

Ruskin is emphatically *not* advocating Stalinist soul-engineering or the weaponisation of art by the state here; on the contrary, he argues, 'the veins of wealth' flow first and foremost through our relationships with ourselves and our own private senses of purpose and meaning, not through outward influence over others.

'*Qui Judicatis Terram*'

> *Imagine making the following proposal in the 1950s: Give for-profit firms the freedom to develop highly addictive painkillers and to promote them via sophisticated, aggressive, and very effective marketing campaigns targeted at doctors. Had one made this pitch*

[1851] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 60-64.

> *to the bankers, the lawyers, and the hog farmer on the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve back then, they would have rejected it outright. If pressed to justify their decision, they surely would not have been able to offer a cost-benefit analysis to back up their reasoning, nor would they have felt any need to. To know that it is morally wrong to let a company make a profit by killing people would have been enough.*[1852]
>
> Paul Romer

Ruskin, a Christian seeking fresh foundations for his faith beyond the tired theologies exploded by the Enlightenment, goes back past Jesus in his search for roots:

> Some centuries before the Christian era, a Jew merchant, largely engaged in business on the Gold Coast, […] left among his ledgers some general maxims concerning wealth, which have been preserved, strangely enough, even to our own days. […] Of late years these writings have fallen into disrepute, being opposed in every particular to the spirit of modern commerce. Nevertheless I shall produce a passage or two from them here, partly because they may interest the reader by their novelty, and chiefly because they will show him that it is possible for a very practical and acquisitive tradesman to hold, through a not unsuccessful career, that principle of distinction between well-gotten and ill-gotten wealth. […] He says, for instance, in one place: 'The getting of treasure by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death'; adding in another, with the same meaning (he has a curious way of doubling his sayings), 'Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but justice delivers from death.' Both these passages are notable for their assertions of death as the only real issue and sum of attainment by any unjust scheme of wealth. If we read, instead of 'lying tongue', 'lying label, title, pretence, or advertisement', we shall more clearly perceive the bearing of the words on modern business. The seeking of death is a grand expression of the true course of men's toil in such business. We usually speak as if death pursued us, and we fled from him; but that is only so in rare instances. Ordinarily he masks himself - makes himself beautiful - all glorious; not like the King's daughter, all glorious within, but outwardly: his clothing of wrought gold.[1853]

Echoing the Platonic sentiment that justice, if worth anything, is worth it for its own sake, Ruskin's 'Jew merchant' makes the startling transcendental claim that such nobility of spirit saves, or elevates, our souls, freeing them from the animal

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[1852] Paul Romer, 'The Dismal Kingdom: Do Economists Have Too Much Power?', https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/review-essay/2020-02-11/dismal-kingdom, March/April 2020 (accessed 12/2/2020).

[1853] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 65-67.

constraints of the jungle, and hence quite literally 'delivering us from death'. Con artists remain trapped in a dog-eat-dog circle of morbidity; true 'life' for Ruskin begins where this survivalist logic ends:

> Again, the merchant says: 'He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, shall surely come to want.' And again, more strongly: 'Rob not the poor because he is poor; neither oppress the afflicted in the place of business. For God shall spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.'
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> This 'robbing of the poor because he is poor' is especially the mercantile form of theft, consisting in taking advantage of a man's necessities in order to obtain his labour or property at a reduced price. The ordinary highwayman's opposite form of robbery - of the rich, because he is rich - does not appear to occur so often to the old merchant's mind; probably because, being less profitable and more dangerous than the robbery of the poor, it is rarely practised by persons of discretion.
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> But the two most remarkable passages in their deep general significance are the following:
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> 'The rich and the poor have met. God is their maker.'
>
> 'The rich and the poor have met. God is their light.'
>
> […] That is to say, as long as the world lasts, the action and counter-action of wealth and poverty, the meeting, face to face, of rich and poor, is just as appointed and necessary a law of that world as the flow of stream to sea, or the interchange of power among the electric clouds: - 'God is their maker.' But, also, this action may be either gentle and just, or convulsive and destructive: it may be by the rage of devouring flood, or by lapse of serviceable wave; - in blackness of thunderstroke, or continual force of vital fire, soft, and shapeable into love-syllables from far away. And which of these it shall be, depends on both rich and poor knowing that God is their light; that in the mystery of human life, there is no other light than this by which they can see each other's faces, and live; - light, which is called in another of the books among which the merchant's maxims have been preserved, the 'sun of justice', of which it is promised that it shall rise at last with 'healing' (healthgiving or helping, making whole or setting at one) in its wings. For truly this healing is only possible by means of justice; no love, no faith, no hope will do it; men will be unwisely fond, vainly faithful, unless primarily they are just: and the mistake of the best men through generation after generation, has been that great one of thinking to help the poor by almsgiving, and by preaching of patience or of hope, and by every other means, emollient or consolatory, except the one thing which God orders for them, justice. But this justice, with its accompanying holiness or helpfulness, being even by the best man denied in its trial time, is by the mass of men hated wherever it appears.[1854]

Justice for Ruskin is a much more complex and embodied business than our image of scales and blindfolded ladies suggests: it is nothing less than a lifelong process of moral self-cultivation, no meek surrender to the gravitational pull of competing

[1854] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 67-71.

emotions, but also no capitulation to the hardened quantitative logic of modern meritocracy:

> The popular economist thinks himself wise in having discovered that wealth, or the forms of property in general, must go where they are required; that where demand is, supply must follow.
>
> […] The necessity of these laws of distribution or restraint is curiously overlooked in the ordinary political economist's definition of his own 'science'. He calls it, shortly, the 'science of getting rich'. But there are many sciences, as well as many arts, of getting rich. Poisoning people of large estates was one employed largely in the middle ages; adulteration of food of people of small estates is one largely employed now.
>
> […] So that it is clear that the popular economist, in calling his science the science *par excellence* of getting rich, must attach some peculiar ideas of limitation to its character. I hope I do not misrepresent him, by assuming that he means *his* science to be the science of 'getting rich by legal or just means'. In this definition, is the word 'just', or 'legal', finally to stand? For it is possible among certain nations, or under certain rulers, or by help of certain advocates, that proceedings may be legal which are by no means just. If, therefore, we leave at last only the word 'just' in that place of our definition, the insertion of this solitary and small word will make a notable difference in the grammar of our science. For then it will follow that in order to grow rich scientifically, we must grow rich justly; and, therefore, know what is just; so that our economy will no longer depend merely on prudence, but on jurisprudence - and that of divine, not human law. Which prudence is indeed of no mean order, holding itself, as it were, high in the air of heaven, and gazing for ever on the light of the sun of justice; hence the souls which have excelled in it are represented by Dante as stars forming in heaven for ever the figure of the eye of an eagle; they having been in life the discerners of light from darkness; or to the whole human race, as the light of the body, which is the eye; while those souls which form the wings of the bird (giving power and dominion to justice, 'healing in its wings') trace also in light the inscription in heaven: 'DILIGITE JUSTITIAM QUI JUDICATIS TERRAM.' 'Ye who judge the earth, give' (not, observe, merely love, but) 'diligent love to justice': the love which seeks diligently, that is to say, choosingly, and by preference to all things else. Which judging or doing judgment in the earth is, according to their capacity and position, ***required not of judges only, nor of rulers only, but of all men*** [italics mine]: a truth sorrowfully lost sight of even by those who are ready enough to apply to themselves passages in which Christian men are spoken of as called to be 'saints' (i.e. to helpful or healing functions); and 'chosen to be kings' (i.e. to knowing or directing functions); the true meaning of these titles having been long lost through the pretences of unhelpful and unable persons to saintly and kingly character; also through the once popular idea that both the sanctity and the royalty are to consist in wearing long robes and high crowns, instead of in mercy and judgment; whereas all true sanctity is saving power, as all true royalty is ruling power; and injustice is part and parcel of the denial of such power, which 'makes

> men as the creeping things, as the fishes of the sea, that have no ruler over them.'
>
> Absolute justice is indeed no more attainable than absolute truth; but the righteous man is distinguished from the unrighteous by his desire and hope of justice, as the true man from the false by his hope and desire of truth. And though absolute justice be unattainable, as much justice as we need for all practical use is attainable by all those who make it their aim.
>
> We have to examine, then, in the subject before us, what are the laws of justice respecting payment of labour - no small part, these, of the foundations of all jurisprudence.[1855]

Ruskin's 'Spiritual Humanism' demands that every single person cultivate herself by building her capacities for (not merely love, but) 'diligent love'; an advanced economy will hence be populated by such wise and caring 'judges'. There is, from our vantage point, nothing specifically Christian about Ruskin's vision; at the very least, this transcendental concept of justice is a feature common to all Axial civilisations, and surely most indigenous traditions as well. Ruskin may not have Confucianism, Buddhism, Islam, Polynesian mythology, or modern riffs on existentialism in his mind as he writes, but he is effectively presenting, or trying to present, a detheologised account of human spirituality which might one day be understood everywhere. If he sprinkles his text with mainly Jewish, Christian and British references, that does not in and of itself imply a colonial or imperial project; it is in any case *our* job, not his, to translate his creativity into our languages, and to extend it with our own critical flourishes.

The question of just payment of labour, then, is identified by Ruskin as the primary concern of an enlightened economics. He sees a fundamental problem with 'judging' the value of labour in terms of supply and demand:

> In practice, according to [these] laws, when two men are ready to do the work, and only one man wants to have it done, the two underbid each other for it; and the one who gets to do it is underpaid. But when two men want the work done, and there is only one man ready to do it, the two men who want it done overbid each other, and the workman is overpaid.
>
> […] The abstract idea, then, of just or due wages, as respects the labourer, is that they will consist in a sum of money which will at any time procure for him at least as much labour as he has given, rather more than less. And this equity or justice of payment is, observe, wholly independent of any reference to the number of men who are willing to do the work. I want a horseshoe for my horse. Twenty smiths, or twenty thousand smiths, may be ready to forge it; their number does not in one atom's weight affect the question of the equitable payment of the one who *does* forge it. […] The worth of the work may not be easily known; but it has a worth, just as fixed and real as the specific gravity of a substance, though such specific gravity may not be easily ascertainable when the substance is united with many others.[1856]

[1855] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 71-78.

[1856] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 79, 82-83, 85.

Relying on the invisible hand to guide pricing decisions in the labour market is hence 'unjust'; as Ruskin says further on, 'phenomena of price, therefore, are intensely complex, curious, and interesting'[1857], primarily because they cannot be decided by an impersonal mechanism, but only by a whole community of 'diligent and loving judges'. Ruskin refuses to acknowledge that monopolies of demand for labour - otherwise known as large firms - are the fair outcome of bursts of scarce entrepreneurship; although such enterprises may create jobs which did not exist before, 'the insufficient payment of the group of men working for one places each under a maximum of difficulty in rising above his position. The tendency of the system is to check advancement.'[1858] If the true vocation of a 'merchant' - or by extension, of a modern entrepreneur, influencer, or app-developer - is to 'provide' for her community (and be willing to sacrifice herself in the process), as per Ruskin's definition, then the moral costs of obtaining underpaid labour (e.g. by outsourcing to underdeveloped economies) outweigh the advantages of staying alive in a cutthroat marketplace: you are robbing Peter to pay Paul, or at least to pay yourself; this is no foundation for a humane economy.

On the one hand, then, from the point of view of 'professional' mastery, 'the best work never was, nor ever will be, done for money at all'[1859]; but on the other, payment for services rendered should always (notwithstanding the true professional's willingness to endure emergency bouts of underpaid or unpaid work) in the long run be 'just'. Ruskin favours a military or bureaucratic model of fixed payscales; the reward for the good worker is to be 'chosen' or promoted: 'The moment people know they have to pay the bad and good alike, they will try to discern the one from the other, and not use the bad.'[1860] This does not, as Ruskin admits, solve the problem of unemployment, but it does solve the prior problem of *underpayment for labour*, which is a spiritual disaster for *everybody*:

> So also unnecessary taxation oppresses them, through destruction of capital; but the destiny of the poor depends primarily always on this one question of dueness of wages. Their distress (irrespectively of that caused by sloth, minor error, or crime) arises on the grand scale from the two reacting forces of competition and oppression. There is not yet, nor will yet for ages be, any real overpopulation in the world; but a local overpopulation, or, more accurately, a degree of population locally unmanageable under existing circumstances for want of forethought and sufficient machinery, necessarily shows itself by pressure of competition; and the taking advantage of this competition by the purchaser to obtain their labour unjustly cheap, consummates at once their suffering and his own; for in this (as I believe in every other kind of slavery) the oppressor suffers at last more than the oppressed, and those magnificent lines of Pope, even in all their force, fall short of the truth:

[1857] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, p. 132.

[1858] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, p. 91.

[1859] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, p. 92.

[1860] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, p. 92.

> Yet, to be just to these poor men of pelf,
> Each does but HATE HIS NEIGHBOUR AS HIMSELF:
> Damned to the mines, an equal fate betides
> The slave that digs it, and the slave that hides.[1861]

What, then, of the problem of unemployment in a society of 'judges' which, hard on exploitation as a matter of spiritual principle, thwarts many lucrative but unjust avenues of mercantile growth? Ruskin asks his reader to trust the redistributive power of a spontaneous and widely dispersed Christian charity:

> Lest, however, the reader should be alarmed at some of the issues to which our investigations seem to be tending, as if in their bearing against the power of wealth they had something in common with those of socialism, I wish him to know, in accurate terms, one or two of the main points which I have in view.
>
> Whether socialism has made more progress among the army and navy (where payment is made on my principles) or among the manufacturing operatives (who are paid on my opponents' principles), I leave it to those opponents to ascertain and declare. […] My principles of Political Economy were all involved in a single phrase spoken three years ago at Manchester: 'Soldiers of the Ploughshare, as well as Soldiers of the Sword'; and they were all summed up in a single sentence in the last volume of 'Modern Painters': 'Government and cooperation are in all things the Laws of Life; Anarchy and competition the Laws of Death.'
>
> And with respect to the mode in which these general principles affect the secure possession of property, so far am I from invalidating such security, that the whole gist of these papers will be found ultimately to aim at an extension in its range; and whereas it has long been known and declared that the poor have no right to the property of the rich, I wish it also to be known and declared that the rich have no right to the property of the poor.
>
> […] I said in my last paper that nothing in history had ever been so disgraceful to human intellect as the acceptance among us of the common doctrines of political economy as a science. I have many grounds for saying this, but one of the chief may be given in few words. I know no previous instance in history of a nation's establishing a systematic disobedience to the first principles of its professed religion. The writings which we (verbally) esteem as divine, not only denounce the love of money as the source of all evil, and as an idolatry abhorred of the Deity, but declare mammon service to be the accurate and irreconcilable opposite of God's service.[1862]

Property, then, is a necessary precondition for a fully human existence, but it is not a self-sustaining goal; a society of wise, self-cultivating 'judges' will ensure that

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[1861] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 95-96.

[1862] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 97-100.

everyone has a necessary minimum of material possessions, but the existence of such a welfare state - good and necessary - does not have any bearing on the question of 'dueness of wages'; if one person cannot work, or is not 'chosen' to work, or simply does not want to work, these externalities do not license the underpaying of those others who *do* work on any given day. Ruskin's austere moralism could hardly be described as 'business-friendly' by contemporary standards - and in a world of scarce resources, is it even possible to pay everyone 'justly'? - but between Pyongyang and Pudong, Ruskin argues that there is a Third Way for humanity - not specifically 'Christian', but undeniably transcendental - if only we are able to pool what Tu Weiming calls our common 'spiritual resources' and build relationships with ourselves which transcend our own material advantage.

'*Ad Valorem*'

Almost inevitably, the last of Ruskin's four essays in *Unto This Last*, built up in his Preface as the best of the lot, is a bit of a disappointment; parts of it, nevertheless, survive in robust shape into our day. Ruskin wants to distance himself from both Marx and Mill[1863] in his understanding of 'value' (even if he still thinks the latter in particular has much to say which is true and important[1864]); but since neither communism nor utilitarianism can fully account for the spiritual dimension of individual human existence, they are unable to build a humanistic, or more broadly *biophilic*, economics:

> It were to be wished that our well-educated merchants recalled to mind always this much of their Latin schooling - that the nominative of *valorem* (a word already sufficiently familiar to them) is *valor*; a word which, therefore, ought to be familiar to them. *Valor*, from *valere*, to be well or strong, - strong, *in* life (if a man), or valiant; strong, *for* life (if a thing), or valuable. To be 'valuable', therefore, is to 'avail towards life'. A truly valuable or available thing is that which leads to life with its whole strength. In proportion as it does not lead to life, or as its strength is broken, it is less valuable; in proportion as it leads away from life, it is unvaluable or malignant.
>
> The value of a thing, therefore, is independent of opinion and of quantity. Think what you will of it, gain how much you may of it, the value of the thing itself is neither greater nor less.
>
> […] The real science of political economy, which has yet to be distinguished from the bastard science, as medicine from witchcraft, and astronomy from astrology, is that which teaches nations to desire and labour for the things that lead to life; and which teaches them to scorn and destroy the things that lead to destruction. And if, in a state of infancy, they supposed indifferent things, such as excrescences of shellfish, and pieces of blue and red stone, to be valuable, and spent large measures of the labour which ought to be employed for the extension and ennobling of life, in diving or digging for them, and cutting them into various shapes, - or if, in

[1863] See Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 105-113.

[1864] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, p. 105.

> the same state of infancy, they imagine precious and beneficent things, such as air, light, and cleanliness, to be valueless, - or if, finally, they imagine the conditions of their own existence, by which alone they can truly possess or use anything, such, for instance, as peace, trust, and love, to be prudently exchangeable, when the markets offer, for gold, iron, and excrescences of shells - the great and only science of Political Economy teaches them, in all these cases, what is vanity, and what substance; and how the service of Death, the Lord of Waste, and of eternal emptiness, differs from the service of Wisdom, the Lady of Saving, and of eternal fulness; she who has said, 'I will cause those that love me to inherit SUBSTANCE; and I will FILL their treasures.'[1865]

Ruskin's understanding of 'life' is of course closer to Christ's 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life' than it is to the competitive cruelty of Darwinian natural selection or (to cite another contemporary) Tennyson's 'nature red in tooth and claw'; the concept of *biophilia*, thus abstracted away from the realities of the animal kingdom to which we inevitably belong, risks collapsing into meaninglessness unless we are able to give it some transcendental meat. The key ingredient in Ruskin's higher, humanistic conception of 'life' is the individual's ability to cultivate a free and individualised spirit of service to a collective beyond herself - easier against a sustaining backdrop of 'just' remuneration, but possible for the bravest heroes even without one:

> And our definition of Wealth, expanded, becomes: 'The possession of useful articles, *which we can use*.' This is a very serious change. For wealth, instead of depending merely on a 'have', is thus seen to depend on a 'can'. […] And what we reasoned of only as accumulation of material is seen to demand also accumulation of capacity.
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> So much for our verb. Next for our adjective. What is the meaning of 'useful'?
>
> The inquiry is closely connected with the last. For what is capable of use in the hands of some persons is capable, in the hands of others, of the opposite of use, called commonly 'from-use' or 'ab-use'. And it depends on the person much more than on the article whether its usefulness or ab-usefulness will be the quality developed in it. Thus wine, which the Greeks, in their Bacchus, made rightly the type of all passion, and which, when used, 'cheereth God and man' (that is to say, strengthens both the divine life, or reasoning power, and the earthy, or carnal power, of man); yet when abused becomes 'Dionusos', hurtful especially to the divine part of man, or reason. And again, the body itself, being equally liable to use and to abuse, and when rightly disciplined serviceable to the State, both for war and labour; but when not disciplined, or abused, valueless to the State, and capable only of continuing the private or single existence of the individual (and that but feebly) - the Greeks called such a body an 'idiotic' or 'private' body, from their word signifying a person employed in no way directly useful

[1865] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 113-115.

to the State, whence finally our 'idiot', meaning a person entirely occupied with his own concerns.

Hence it follows that if a thing is to be useful, it must be not only of an availing nature, but in availing hands. Or, in accurate terms, usefulness is value in the hands of the valiant; so that this science of wealth being, as we have just seen, when regarded as the science of Accumulation, accumulative of capacity as well as of material, - when regarded as the Science of Distribution, is distribution not absolute, but discriminate; ***not of every thing to every man, but of the right thing to the right man. A difficult science, dependent on more than arithmetic*** [italics mine].

Wealth, therefore, is 'THE POSSESSION OF THE VALUABLE BY THE VALIANT.' […] Whence it appears that many of the persons commonly considered wealthy are in reality no more wealthy than the locks of their own strong boxes are, they being inherently and eternally incapable of wealth; and operating for the nation in an economical point of view, either as pools of dead water, and eddies in a stream (which, so long as the stream flows, are useless, or serve only to drown people, but may become of importance in a state of stagnation should the stream dry); or else, as dams in a river, of which the ultimate service depends not on the dam, but the miller; or else, as mere accidental stays and impediments, acting not as wealth, but (for we ought to have a correspondent term) as 'illth', causing various devastation and trouble around them in all directions; or lastly, act not at all, but are merely animated conditions of delay (no use being possible of anything they have until they are dead), in which last condition they are nevertheless often useful *as* delays, and 'impedimenta', if a nation is apt to move too fast.

This being so, the difficulty of the true science of Political Economy lies not merely in the need of developing manly character to deal with material value, but in the fact, that while the manly character and material value only form wealth by their conjunction, they have nevertheless a mutually destructive operation on each other. For the manly character is apt to ignore, or even cast away, the material value; whence that of Pope:

> Sure, of qualities demanding praise
> More go to ruin fortunes, than to raise.

And on the other hand, the material value is apt to undermine the manly character; so that it must be our work, in the issue, to examine what evidence there is of the effect of wealth on the minds of its possessors; also, what kind of person it is who usually sets himself to obtain wealth and succeeds in doing so; and whether the world owes more gratitude to rich or to poor men, either for their moral influence upon it, or for chief goods, discoveries, and practical advancements. I may, however, anticipate future conclusions, so far as to state that in a community regulated only by laws of demand and supply, but protected from open violence, the persons who become rich are, generally speaking, industrious, resolute, proud, covetous, prompt, methodical, sensible, unimaginative, insensitive, and ignorant. The persons who remain poor are the entirely foolish, the entirely wise, the idle,

> the reckless, the humble, the thoughtful, the dull, the imaginative, the sensitive, the well-informed, the improvident, the irregularly and impulsively wicked, the clumsy knave, the open thief, and the entirely merciful, just, and godly person.[1866]

Ruskin runs a dangerous gauntlet to our eyes - a century on from the emergence of fascism - but his attempt to ground human spirituality, and hence the human economy, in authentically *voluntary service* to a higher ideal is as urgent and necessary as always; without it, structural reforms are worthless, and even with it, difficult distribution decisions remain for even the wisest leaders:

> One man by sowing and reaping turns one measure of corn into two measures. That is profit. Another, by digging and forging, turns one spade into two spades. That is profit. But the man who has two measures of corn wants sometimes to dig; and the man who has two spades wants sometimes to eat: They exchange the gained grain and the gained tool, and both are the better for the exchange; but though there is much advantage in the transaction there is no profit. Nothing is constructed or produced.
>
> […] Profit or material gain is attainable only by construction or by discovery, not by exchange. Whenever material gain follows exchange, for every *plus* there is a precisely equal *minus*.
>
> Unhappily for the progress of the science of Political Economy, the plus quantities, or - if I may be allowed to coin an awkward plural - the pluses, make a very positive and venerable appearance in the world, so that every one is eager to learn the science which produces results so magnificent; whereas the minuses have on the other hand a tendency to retire into back streets, and other places of shade; or even to get themselves wholly and finally put out of sight in graves; which renders the algebra of this science peculiar, and difficultly legible; a large number of its negative signs being written by the account-keeper in a kind of red ink, which starvation thins and makes strangely pale, or even quite invisible ink for the present.[1867]

Prior to the already taxing political problem of 'justly' remunerating unproductive (or rather, only indirectly productive) 'merchants', as well as other functionaries and facilitators of the 'productive' economy (police, schoolteachers, nurses etc.), there is the cultural problem of holding together a self-restraining society in the face of a permanent temptation - 'serpentine' in Ruskin's Christian idiom - to defect by making an unfair and unpunished buck:

> If I can exchange a needle with a savage for a diamond, my power of doing so depends either on the savage's ignorance of social arrangements in Europe, or on his want of power to take advantage of them, by selling the diamond to anyone else for more needles. If, farther, I make the bargain as completely advantageous to myself as possible, by giving to the savage a needle with no eye in it (reaching thus a sufficiently satisfactory type of the

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[1866] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 118-123.

[1867] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 124, 126-127.

> perfect operation of catallactic science), the advantage to me in the entire transaction depends wholly upon the ignorance, powerlessness, or heedlessness of the person dealt with. Do away with these, and the catallactic advantage becomes impossible. So far, therefore, as the science of exchange relates to the advantage of one of the exchanging persons only, it is founded on the ignorance or incapacity of the opposite person. Where these vanish, it also vanishes. It is, therefore, a science founded on nescience, and an art founded on artlessness. *This* science, alone of sciences, must, by all available means, promulgate and prolong its opposite nescience; otherwise the science itself is impossible. It is, therefore, peculiarly and alone the science of darkness; probably a bastard science - not by any means a *divina scientia*, but one begotten of another father, that father who, advising his children to turn stones into bread, is himself employed in turning bread into stones, and who, if you ask a fish of him (fish being not producible on his estate), can but give you a serpent.
>
> The general law, then, respecting just or economical exchange, is simply this: There must be advantage on both sides (or if only advantage on one, at least no disadvantage on the other) to the persons exchanging; and just payment for his time, intelligence, and labour to any intermediate person effecting the transaction (commonly called a merchant); and whatever advantage there is on either side, and whatever pay is given to the intermediate person, should be thoroughly known to all concerned. All attempt at concealment implies some practice of the opposite, or undivine science, founded on nescience. Whence another saying of the Jew merchant's: 'As a nail between the stone joints, so doth sin stick fast between buying and selling.'[1868]

Ruskin does not entirely abandon the metaphor of struggle for his biophilic creed, but again, the 'labour' of life begins where its scientific givens end, in a spiritual rather than physical *jihad*:

> Labour is the contest of the life of man with an opposite; the term 'life' including his intellect, soul, and physical power, contending with question, difficulty, trial, or material force.
>
> Labour is of a higher or lower order, as it includes more or fewer of the elements of life; and labour of good quality, in any kind, includes always as much intellect and feeling as will fully and harmoniously regulate the physical force.[1869]

This may be an outdated dualistic formulation, but Ruskin's insistence on the spiritual or humanistic nature of true 'life', which begins precisely where 'science', so interesting and useful, ends, at least allows us to understand that he is making a normative rather than descriptive claim about the nature of 'work':

[1868] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 127-129.

[1869] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 132-133.

> Labour of the best quality may be various in aim. It may be either constructive ('gathering', from *con* and *struo*), as agriculture; nugatory, as jewel-cutting; or destructive ('scattering', from *de* and *struo*), as war. It is not, however, always easy to prove labour, apparently nugatory, to be actually so; generally, the formula holds good: 'he that gathereth not, scattereth'; thus, the jeweller's art is probably very harmful in its ministering to a clumsy and inelegant pride. So that, finally, I believe nearly all labour may be shortly divided into positive and negative labour: positive, that which produces life; negative, that which produces death.[1870]

This is not even an argument; it is a naked appeal to the conscience of the reader, a nudge that she knows, if she stops to think honestly about it, which side of the ledger - net positive or net negative - her own trade is on. And yet this is still only one half - the production side - of economics; consumption has its own sublime ethics too: 'Economists usually speak as if there were no good in consumption absolute. So far from this being so, consumption absolute is the end, crown and perfection of production; and wise consumption is a far more difficult art than wise production.'[1871] Ruskin sounds like a veritable ayatollah when denouncing the 'Ixionic'[1872] sterility of European capitalism ('capital which produces nothing but capital is only root producing root, bulb issuing in bulb, never in tulip, seed issuing in seed, never in bread; the Political Economy of Europe has hitherto devoted itself wholly to the multiplication, or - less even - the aggregation, of bulbs'[1873]); but even this rot is only a symptom of a deeper malaise:

> Consumption is the crown of production, and the wealth of a nation is only to be estimated by what it consumes.
>
> The want of any clear sight of this fact is the capital error, issuing in rich interest and revenue of error among the political economists. Their minds are continually set on money-gain, not on mouth-gain; and they fall into every sort of net and snare, dazzled by the coin-glitter as birds by the fowler's glass; or rather (for there is not much else like birds in them) they are like children trying to jump on the heads of their own shadows; the money-gain being only the shadow of the true gain, which is humanity.
>
> The final object of political economy, therefore, is to get good method of consumption, and great quantity of consumption; in other words, to use everything, and to use it nobly; whether it be substance, service, or service perfecting substance.[1874]

As my great Francophile teacher Álvaro Manuel Machado stressed to me in his Lisbon office in 2007, the real point of humanistic education - which early French

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[1870] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 136-137.

[1871] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, p. 138.

[1872] See Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 140-141.

[1873] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, p. 139.

[1874] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 144-145.

comparatists understood acutely well as they embraced the literature of their German neighbours - is the *formation du goût*, or the 'training of taste'. While we may be inclined to think of Ruskin's call to ethical consumption primarily in terms of vegan research projects and boycotts of predatory firms[1875], he is really pointing to a deeper aesthetic responsibility - less political than spiritual - to cultivate one's entire being for a higher mode of 'life' than the instrumental or animal:

> It is, therefore, the manner and issue of consumption which are the real tests of production. Production does not consist in things laboriously made, but in things serviceably consumable; and the question for the nation is not how much labour it employs, but how much life it produces. For as consumption is the end and aim of production, so life is the end and aim of consumption.
>
> […] THERE IS NO WEALTH BUT LIFE. Life, including all its powers of love, of joy, and of admiration. That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man is richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal, and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others.
>
> A strange political economy; the only one, nevertheless, that ever was or can be; all political economy founded on self-interest being but the fulfilment of that which once brought schism into the Policy of angels, and ruin into the Economy of Heaven.
>
> 'The greatest number of human beings noble and happy.' But is the nobleness consistent with the number? Yes, not only consistent with it, but essential to it. The maximum of life can only be reached by the maximum of virtue. In this respect the law of human population differs wholly from that of animal life. The multiplication of animals is checked only by want of food, and by the hostility of races; the population of the gnat is restrained by the hunger of the swallow, and that of the swallow by the scarcity of gnats. Man, considered as an animal, is indeed limited by the same laws: hunger, or plague, or war, are the necessary and only restraints upon his increase, - effectual restraints hitherto - his principal study having been how most swiftly to destroy himself, or ravage his dwelling-places, and his highest skill directed to give range to the famine, seed to the plague, and sway to the sword. But, considered as other than an animal, his increase is not limited by these laws. It is limited only by the limits of his courage and his love.[1876]

[1875] Ruskin was certainly capable of thinking along such lines too:

> It matters, so far as the labourer's immediate profit is concerned, not an iron filing whether I employed him in growing a peach or forging a bombshell; but my probable mode of consumption of those articles matters seriously. Admit that it is to be in both cases 'unselfish', and the difference, to him, is final, whether, when his child is ill, I walk into his cottage and give it the peach, or drop the shell down his chimney, and blow his roof off.
>
> The worst of it, for the peasant, is, that the capitalist's consumption of the peach is apt to be selfish, and of the shell, distributive. (Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, p. 147)

[1876] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 149-151.

What the ‘poor’ lack is not only food; they also - less urgently perhaps, but more importantly - lack the spiritual nourishment of humanistic education:

> Charitable persons suppose the worst fault of the rich is to refuse the people meat; and the people cry for their meat, kept back by fraud, to the Lord of Multitudes. Alas! it is not meat of which the refusal is cruellest, or to which the claim is validest. The life is more than the meat. The rich not only refuse food to the poor: they refuse wisdom; they refuse virtue; they refuse salvation. Ye sheep without shepherd, it is not the pasture that has been shut from you, but the Presence.[1877]

Property, as we have seen, is a necessary prerequisite for this (higher) ‘life’; the primary question of economics, for Ruskin, is how to share and multiply it justly for spiritual purposes:

> I am not taking up nor countenancing one whit the common socialist idea of division of property: division of property is its destruction; and with it the destruction of all hope, all industry, and all justice: it is simply chaos - a chaos towards which the believers in modern political economy are fast tending, and from which I am striving to save them. […] Neither is the socialist right in desiring to make everybody poor, powerless, and foolish as he is himself, nor the rich man right in leaving the children in the mire. […] Suppose it were your own son of whom you spoke, declaring to me that you dared not take him into your firm, nor even give him his just labourer’s wages, because if you did he would die of drunkenness, and leave half a score of children to the parish. […] They may be what you have said; but if so, they yet are holier than we who have left them thus.
>
> But what can be done for them? Who can clothe - who teach - who restrain their multitudes? What end can there be for them at last, but to consume one another?
>
> I hope for another end, though not, indeed, from any of the three remedies for overpopulation commonly suggested by economists.
>
> […] Again: If the ground maintains, at first, forty labourers in a peaceable and pious state of mind, but they become in a few years so quarrelsome and impious that they have to set apart five to meditate upon and settle their disputes; ten, armed to the teeth with costly instruments, to enforce the decisions; and five to remind everybody in an eloquent manner of the existence of a God - what will be the result upon the general power of production, and what is the ‘natural rate of wages’ of the meditative, muscular, and oracular labourers?[1878]

Ruskin is acutely aware that there is not yet - then as now - enough money in the world to go easily around; he therefore calls on a certain heroism in the face of the current facts. If we can cultivate a meaningful relationship with ourselves by using a

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[1877] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 153-154.

[1878] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 152-155, 158.

minimum of expensive material resources, then that is precisely what we should do, but never at the cost of clipping the wings of our own spirituality:

> As the art of life is learned, it will be found at last that all lovely things are also necessary, - the wild flower by the wayside, as well as the tended corn; and the wild birds and creatures of the forest, as well as the tended cattle; because man doth not live by bread only, but also by the desert manna, by every wondrous and unknowable work of God. Happy in that he knew them not, nor did his fathers know, and that round about him reaches yet into the infinite the amazement of his existence.
>
> Note, finally, that all effectual advancement towards this true felicity of the human race must be by individual, not public effort. Certain general measures may aid, certain revised laws guide, such advancement; but the measure and law which have first to be determined are those of each man's home. We continually hear it recommended by sagacious people to complaining neighbours (usually less well placed in the world than themselves) that they should 'remain content with the station in which Providence has placed them.' There are perhaps some circumstances of life in which Providence has no intention that people *should* be content. Nevertheless, the maxim is on the whole a good one; but it is particularly for home use. That your neighbour should or should not remain content with *his* position is not your business; but it is very much your business to remain content with your own. What is chiefly needed in England at the present day is to show the quantity of pleasure that may be obtained by a consistent, well-administered competence, modest, confessed, and laborious. We need examples of people who, leaving Heaven to decide whether they are to rise in the world, decide for themselves that they will be be happy in it, and have resolved to seek - not greater wealth, but simpler pleasure; not higher fortune, but deeper felicity; making the first of possessions, self-possession; and honouring themselves in the harmless pride and calm pursuits of peace.
>
> Of which lowly peace it is written that 'justice and power have kissed each other'; and that the fruit of justice is 'sown in peace of them that make peace'; not 'peacemakers' in the common understanding - reconcilers of quarrels (though that function also follows on the greater one) - but peace-Creators, Givers of Calm. Which you cannot give unless you first gain; nor is this gain one which will follow assuredly on any course of business, commonly so called. No form of gain is less probable, business being (as is shown in […] *venire*, *vendre*, and venal, from *venio* etc.) essentially restless - and probably contentious - having a raven-like mind to the motion to and fro, as to the carrion food; whereas the olive feeding and bearing birds look for rest for their feet. Thus it is said of Wisdom that she 'hath builded her house, and hewn out her seven pillars'; and even when, though apt to wait long at the doorposts, she has to leave her house and go abroad, her paths are peace also.
>
> For us, at all events, her work must begin at the entry of the doors; all true economy is 'Law of the House'. Strive to make that law strict, simple, generous; waste nothing, and grudge nothing. [… Insist,] in all doings, on

> perfection and loveliness of accomplishment; especially on fineness and purity of all marketable commodity, watching at the same time for all ways of gaining or teaching powers of simple pleasure; and of showing [that] the sum of enjoyment [depends] not on the quantity of things tasted, but on the vivacity and patience of taste.
>
> And if, on due and honest thought over these things, it seems that the kind of existence to which men are now summoned by every plea of pity and claim of right may, for some time at least, not be a luxurious one, consider whether, even supposing it guiltless, luxury would be desired by any of us if we saw clearly at our sides the suffering which accompanies it in the world. Luxury is indeed possible in the future, innocent and exquisite; luxury for all and by the help of all; but luxury at present can only be enjoyed by the ignorant; the cruelest man living could not sit at his feast unless he sat blindfold.[1879]

From the coltan in our iPhones to the meat in our supermarkets, we know this to be as fundamentally true today as it was in 1862 - and perhaps even truer, as globalisation paradoxically makes 'ignorance' easier than ever before; the challenge of keeping 7.5 billion lives alive in our heads is in any case well beyond the moral imagination of any mortal. If perfect economic justice - a liberation for mass self-cultivation - requires three or four times more money than the world currently has, let that be no obstacle to perception of the ideal, no immovable impediment to progress. Like Tu Weiming and his New Confucian colleagues, Ruskin turns the problem of 'justice' back in on itself, and away from the 'justice for *me* first' of identity politics: self-cultivation (what Ruskin here calls 'self-possession') is the foundation stone of any truly humane economics, because it ends up demanding justice for all.

[1879] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, pp. 161-163, 166-167.

2. Alan Mulgan's *The Making of a New Zealander*

I like what Stanley Cavell says is the critic's job – to point at the thing and say, "do you see/hear/feel that?" The quoting is the pointing. Of course, it's an essential element of the re-imagining or re-telling that brings the work alive: you plunge the reader into the text via quotation. But it's also an essential part of making a rational argument. Indeed, I'd say that precisely because the critic's task isn't quite propositional – because we don't deal in proofs – our rhetorical or persuasive argumentation has to be as scrupulously quote-heavy as the reader can bear. Just because there is wide latitude in what can be plausibly said about a text, doesn't mean that the forms of rationality are suspended: on the contrary, we make arguments, and we adduce evidence (i.e., quotes) to support those arguments. That's a rational procedure, if not the movement of a scientific argument beyond doubt.

There's something more, perhaps, something almost ethical: I like the selflessness of quotation, the modesty, the absurdly beautiful, almost-tautological ideal that the work of criticism (as Walter Benjamin apparently dreamed) might be made up only of quotation and would thus just be the entire original text, written out word for word, or rather re-written word for word. We have that quasi-tautological experience sometimes, don't we, when we are copying out a long quotation, and following the syntax of someone else's prose like a car following a road. I suppose memorization is the same gesture: the move away from self toward someone else, the "humanism of the other."[1880]

James Wood

Ernesto Sábato (1911-2011) usefully distinguishes between *el pensamiento lógico* and *el pensamiento mágico* - not pseudoscientific wish-thinking, but a certain oniric remedy for the 'spiritual crisis' of modernity. The novel, for Sábato, is both one of the principal means of expression of this crisis and one of a handful of possible paths towards full-bodied 'salvation'; a life of 'carnal participation' at the forefront of contemporary scientific research (as a nuclear physicist) helped Sábato gradually to confirm this diagnosis: the Promethean urge to dominate the world of things - equally manifest on both sides of the Iron Curtain - had culminated in humanity's own transformation into just another object of study and profitable manipulation. By the 1970s, young people in 'economically and technologically advanced countries'

[1880] James Wood, in 'James Wood On How Criticism Works', https://aestheticsforbirds.com/2020/10/14/james-wood-on-how-criticism-works/#comments, 14/10/2020 (accessed 1/12/2020).

no longer protested primarily 'for better salaries', but were rather stuck in a mire which, in Sábato's eyes, was 'spiritual rather than economic'.[1881]

Tu Weiming offers a lifeline back to Confucius and the Song-Ming neo-Confucian tradition, which likewise stress the value of full-bodied self-cultivation over petty instrumental profiteering. The ongoing challenge for such a humanism, however, is not how to write *about* it; it is how to write it into existence as something more than a dry, technical 'process' - or in other words, how credibly to *embody* it. The constraints of Anglophone academic discourse (the convention of an introduction, main argument, and conclusion, or even the Cartesian *thèse-antithèse-synthèse* system preferred in France) promise little in this regard; we certainly need not write (about) novels in this way - unless, of course, we are motivated by economic considerations of tenure in an academic system which rewards conformity to its own modernistic and scientistic parameters. The best literary criticism is literature of its own.

After a couple of books on Tu Weiming and his Spiritual Humanism, I was overcome, as I have said, by a need to write something from the perspective of my own country, rather than to continue hiding behind a veil of rootless cosmopolitanism. Alan Mulgan's *The Making of a New Zealander* (1958) - undersold as a series of autobiographical impressions, really a full-blown novel - has a natural and special worth for me (for a start, the author was an old boy of my own high school), but it would be less valuable if its value were *only* mine; I hence share its highlights and invite the reader to discover it as I did: by chance and too late, but better late than never. There will be arguments about economics along the way too - not to placate consumers who believe our subtitle 'entitles' them to such advertised content, but because these themes arise naturally out of Mulgan's own life experience.

'Frontier Background'

> *This story of mine is of a New Zealander who was born in New Zealand and has lived all his life in this country, save for a few months in England and a short visit to Australia. I tell it because it is thought to have interest as a record of a New Zealander's development, and of changes in the society in which he has lived.*[1882]

The Making of a New Zealander may have been commissioned as a series of broadcasts for a local radio audience, but Mulgan's real public is the eternal literary one of all willing nations and ages. A spiritual dialogue with an assumed (and benevolently curious) foreign interlocutor is the salient feature of Mulgan's prose; he

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[1881] Ernesto Sábato, 'La crisis del hombre de hoy' (1977), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8ZZSPJ60TE, 9/5/2011 (accessed 24/2/2020.

[1882] Alan Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, (Wellington: A.H. and A.W. Reed, 1958), p. 11.

wants to map his own spiritual terrain not just as private therapy for himself, but ultimately as a gift to everyone else.

Born in 1881 in an Ulster Unionist 'plantation' in the North Island of New Zealand, Mulgan would face all the second-generation alienation and guilt proper to high colonialism:

> My story is of a boy reared among elders who had been born in what everybody called the Old Country, or Home. In their particular case, Home was Ulster. These elders accepted New Zealand more or less cheerfully as their new home, and became New Zealanders - again more or less. They could not become New Zealanders in the sense that their children did, and still more their grandchildren. The tradition of the Old Country, the Irish-English tradition, was too strong. They worked in New Zealand and some did fairly well for themselves. All achieved a certain amount of happiness. The pull of the Homeland, however, was always there to influence their actions, colour their thoughts, and point their convictions and prejudices. […] The very Maori race was represented as doomed.
>
> […] As I grew older I corrected many of these impressions. I learned the history of my own country, New Zealand, and I came to know most of its landscape, from Kaitaia to Invercargill, absorbed its atmosphere, its flavour, its character. I was never persuaded that New Zealand could afford to cast adrift from the Mother Country, either in politics or culture, but I began to realise that New Zealand was different, that it must stand on its own two feet, and, no doubt with help, make its own path through the uncertain woods of destiny. It has its own sights and sounds and scents; its own streams and hills, trees and birds; its own raging seas; its own legends and folk-lore; its own way of looking at the problems of life; its own soul. It fell to my lot to describe the features of my own country, and to record its history. I tried to interpret its spirit, but with changes of view as the years passed and experience widened.[1883]

Born 101 years later on the same island and raised on the same isthmus, it would be easy for me to fault Mulgan by the standards of our time for his patronising attitude to those his parents had forced off their land, but in fact, he pays Maori civilisation the highest compliment he can by offering it a platform with his beloved Tennyson:

> Tauranga, which I was to visit at intervals in my teens, was a beautiful little town, and is still beautiful, though more sophisticated. It has the sea on two sides, and across the smaller inlet lies Otumoetai, one of the loveliest of place-names in the full-vowelled Maori tongue. The name, so I was to learn many years later from James Cowan, means 'Full tide asleep', which recalls Tennyson's 'such a tide as moving seems asleep, too full for sound and foam'. Tauranga wears the print of war with the Maori; the site of the Gate Pa battle; graves in the mission cemetery; and the Monmouth Redoubt, called after the 43rd Monmouthshire Light Infantry and preserved

[1883] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 11-12.

> as a memorial. The Mission House, 'The Elms', stands as it did a century ago, rich in relics. When I was a child the grass in that locality bore plainly the circular marks of military tents. That there was little or no talk of such things among my elders was a factor in my bringing-up to which I shall refer.[1884]

Mulgan's book, however, contains not a hint of explicit apology for these naked land grabs; it is little wonder that a culture in search of shortcuts to a postcolonial message of racial harmony would excise men like Mulgan from its curricula and leave me to find them, decades later, in a remote antique bookstore. In fact, I would not have uncovered Mulgan at all if one of my good high school friends had not chastised me, a few days prior, for not having heard of *John* Mulgan's depression-era frontier novel *Man Alone*; I first mistook the dedicatee of *The Making of a New Zealander* - whose death in Cairo in 1945 hangs over the book in retrospective shadow - for the author my friend had been so enthusiastic about. But how, indeed, could Alan have been expected to mention his own son's suicide as part of anything constructive?

<u>'Ulster Plantation'</u>

> *At Trinity College, Dublin, Vesey Stewart took honours in classics and won prizes in French, German and Spanish. When he came to negotiate with the New Zealand Government and the Auckland Provincial Government for his land settlement, a difficult and tedious business, he was helped by the fact that the Minister of Lands and Immigration in Wellington was also a Trinity College man - George Maurice O'Rorke, afterwards Speaker of the House. These 'two kindred spirits' settled the details 'over a warm fire and a convivial bottle'. Learning is not the only benefit to be obtained from a famous university.*[1885]

Ugly colonial politics aside, Mulgan reminds his reader that he, too, is the product of a family of strugglers; his grandfather, the 'right-hand man'[1886] of the aforementioned founder of Katikati's 'Ulster Plantation', is described as 'the most venerable-looking man I have ever seen'[1887]; Mulgan's grandmother, Mrs. Johnston, meanwhile,

> lost her infant at sea. She was to give birth to her fourteenth child shortly after she reached New Zealand, and day after day in her diary there is a

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[1884] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 14.

[1885] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 17-18.

[1886] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 19.

[1887] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 18.

> pathetic short entry about sickness. She could have taken little pleasurable part in the social life [onboard]. She had a good cabin in one of the best ships, and family and servants to help her. I think of the state of mothers similarly conditioned and perhaps also bereaved, in the 'tween-decks of smaller ships. If there was a hell there, it was for the women rather than the men. My fifty-year-long memory of my grandmother is of a short stout woman in a long black dress and a white lace cap; I never saw her in anything else. She was unselfish to a fault, and uncomplaining in facing the hardships of pioneering life after the smooth routine of life in Ireland. I have never known a woman with a sweeter nature, and I feel sure that this serenity (without weakness) helped her to live into her ninety-eighth year. Three years before she died she held my first grandchild on her knee.[1888]

Hardiness and virtue aside, the economic realities of the frontier settlement, and the colonial contours of a land whose invaders were not yet even a nation of their own, are never far from Mulgan's family story:

> My father's experience was very significant. Young, strong and energetic, he tried to farm his father's land. The old man, naturally enough, had given it up and gone to Auckland to take a parish. My father had great hopes of sending butter to Auckland, but when he had paid two freights and the auctioneer's commission, there was not much left out of the fivepence a pound he received. This was near the middle of New Zealand's first great depression, perhaps the worst it has known. In the mid-1880s more people were leaving New Zealand than came in. Seeing no prospects in farming, and with a wife and child to keep, he moved to Tauranga, worked in a store, edited the *Bay of Plenty Times*, and finally became a teacher, which meant he had to start at the bottom again. After doing in Katikati the three years' country service required, he moved to Auckland, took his university degree, and only twelve years after starting as a probationer was appointed an Inspector of Schools.[1889]

In spite of the obvious hardships of settlement life, a certain freedom from the sweatshop overcrowding of the Victorian motherland - a freedom for spiritual purpose rather than material luxury - was nevertheless achievable, even if more money would always have been nice:

> Life [in Katikati] was very simple. It was not considered necessary to go to town often; indeed, the journey was difficult. Poverty and isolation were mitigated by the community sense that belongs to such a special settlement. Everyone knew everyone else, and one helped another. I helped on many harvesting days at 'Hillside', but I remember little paid labour. Neighbours lent a hand and the Johnston boys went to them in turn. Socially there were class distinctions, but not on the harvest field. A basic difference between life in England and in New Zealand was expressed by a

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[1888] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 19-20.

[1889] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 21-22.

> doctor's wife who emigrated to Nelson with a large family in the forties: 'We can here afford one thing, which no one in England can do; we can afford to be poor.'
>
> The first economic lift came when the Waihi mine developed on the other side of the ranges, about ten miles from the northern end of the settlement. Twenty-four millions in gold and silver came from that mine. I remember Waihi when it was one dingy street of raw-looking houses, with dust in summer and mud in winter. […] Mud has been a substantial factor in New Zealand life. […] Today a car or lorry covers the miles between Katikati and Waihi in under an hour, and a generation has arisen - especially in the towns - that does not know what a really bad road is like.
>
> Vesey lived to see a greater prosperity. Dairying for export, the greatest New Zealand economic development of this century, brought wealth to Katikati. […] I last saw Katikati on a summer day in 1944, and I thought again what a wonderful change had come over the place that is dearer to me than any. […] As Vesey grew old, grievances were forgotten. He was the most important guest at the annual agricultural show, greeted on all sides with respect and affection, and when he replied to the toast of 'The Founder', he would tell them that every promise he had made had been amply redeemed, and every fear had proved to be an impostor. He was eighty-seven when he died and had worked to the end. His last recorded words had to do with returned soldiers and the railway that was coming.[1890]

Again, the 21st-century sensibility is jarred by the unapologetic omission of Maori 'Land War' victims who made the Katikati 'Ulster Plantation' possible; but from the perspective of a family leaving Ireland with no real sense of their new country, New Zealand offered fertile ground for spiritual development, even if the stolen soil itself proved to be only as friendly as it needed to be. Getting the balance in this story right - as Mulgan, with some intergenerational generosity from us, almost does - involves facing the economic facts of life in apartheid New Zealand ('there was no intermarriage'[1891]), but also transcending them.

'Between Two Worlds'

With Maori squeezed well out of the spiritual picture by his elders, the 'two worlds' of Mulgan's childhood were firmly: Britain; and the Katikati Ulster Plantation, the 'material growth'[1892] of which conditioned his early intellectual and social development:

> [This was] a British community transplanted into a freer world. […] Yet the one or two Roman Catholic families in Katikati suffered not one whit on

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[1890] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 22-23.

[1891] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 30.

[1892] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 24.

> account of their religion. […] Old passions cooled a little in the freer colonial atmosphere.
>
> Community amusements were concerts and dances, meetings of the Mutual Improvement Society, and football and cricket. There is a lot of Victorian atmosphere and history in that name - Mutual Improvement Society. It was really a debating society, and my one memory of it is on Home Rule.
>
> […] Formal dances in the small hall began about eight, and in summer at any rate, went on till dawn. What was the good of going home in the dark when you were having a good time, and when few vehicles had lights? The music was piano by itself. My grandmother, Mrs. Johnston, used to provide nearly all of it. She played hour after hour. There were more waltzes than anything else, but the Lancers were very popular.
>
> At those dances there was never anything stronger than claret-cup to drink. Someone may have had a nip of hard liquor on the quiet, but I never saw a sign of it. For a man to drink at dances, or to come smelling of drink, was bad form. Tea was made from water boiled in kerosene tins on an open fire outside. I can still smell that tea-tree fire in the mystery of a velvet summer night. Unless it is the odour of crushed bush fern, no smell is so nostalgic to a New Zealander as that of burning tea-tree - especially the dry-heads. 'Scents are stronger than sounds or sights to make the heart-strings crack.' When my son John was at Oxford we sent him a parcel of tea-tree heads, and he gathered a number of other New Zealanders to enjoy the ritual of putting it on the fire and savouring the thrilling scent of home.[1893]

If Maori people and music do not figure at all in this transplanted vision, Mulgan does his feminist credentials no favour either by suggesting that, in fact, the settler men in these early days had it harder than the women:

> Hospitality was the primal law. My grandmother's diary of the earlier years shows that nearly every week a friend or relation arrived, or one of the family visited someone. Sometimes complete strangers turned in from the main road and were given a dinner and a bed. […] At Christmas time, while the house was full, there were picnics, perhaps by boat, and dances. A day at home was no hardship, with perhaps a book in a hammock under the trees, and peaches to eat, and creek pools to bathe in. This applied mostly to the women. The work of the farm went on, and men visitors were roped into it.[1894]

If there was no assumption that women should be paid for housework, Mulgan nevertheless had a nose for exploitation out on the farm itself:

> Mention of dances reminds me of the cadets. Some one should make a study of that colonial institution, the farm cadet, for socially and

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[1893] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 24-25.

[1894] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 27.

> economically he is a picturesque figure in our history. […] On one well-known sheep-station in Canterbury, it was the rule (and probably on others) that the cadets should dress for dinner every evening. The owner believed this kept them from growing slack away from the discipline of towns, and shall we say he was wrong? Naturally, however, the cadet system lent itself to abuse. The farmer did better than get labour for nothing; he was paid to employ it. A father in England might know little or nothing of a farmer in New Zealand to whom he was entrusting his son. Nowadays a cadet is paid a small wage to begin with.[1895]

Even the monthly post from England was an unfair economic event: 'It was a joy to me to be allowed to ride down for the mail. Letters came to settlers with news of relatives and friends left behind, of life in a deep-founded and well-ordered society; letters with remittances - and letters without.'[1896] Moreover, Katikati's severe isolation - logistical as well as economic - led to a natural ignorance of the reality of the rest of the country:

> To get out was a bit of an adventure. One party took twenty hours to go from 'Athenree' to Tauranga, thirty-five miles. There was little money for travel. Society was remote and self-contained. It was far away from Auckland, and much farther from Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. Indeed, Belfast and London were closer to the Katikati settler than our southern cities. He had seen Belfast, and if he had not seen London he had a pretty clear idea what it was like, whereas he had not seen our south and had only a shadowy picture of it. […] Also, I think, in that little community, English politics loomed larger than New Zealand.[1897]

Books provided some respite from the monotony of farm life, but even in the early stages, the sense was palpable of living in a culture of Chinese whispers passed down from the fading voices of 'Home'; and as Mulgan and educated New Zealanders since have gradually come to realise, these voices, overwhelmingly British, did not echo entire swathes of a much broader European or Western culture. Gnawed by a constant sense of distance, at once vague and powerful, from the mother source of civilisation, local politics and literature seemed quaint and pointless:

> There was a good deal of reading. Some of the homes had excellent collections of books, and there was a public library. The books read were decorous. Thomas Hardy's *Tess*, I imagine, was not approved, and if a copy of *Jude the Obscure* came into a settlement, it must have been kept hidden.
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> 'We asked no social questions - we pumped no hidden shame. We never talked obstetrics when the little stranger came.' We liked adventure

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[1895] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 27.

[1896] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 28.

[1897] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 28.

> and happy endings. […] We did our serious reading too, such as Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. I doubt, however, if anyone had heard of Karl Marx.
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> I had a free run of Victorian novelists, but I preferred boys' books of adventure. […] I was sure it must be the finest thing in the world to go to an English public school.
>
> […] The tendency of life in Katikati was to bind us to Britain and her established order: her politics, her Navy and Army, her Empire, her literature, her ways of thought. More or less, the rest of New Zealand was in the same state, though by the time I was ten the Liberal-Labour programme of social legislation was being launched by John Ballance, with Sir George Grey as its originating spirit. New Zealand was still bounded by narrow geographical and mental horizons. Take our little settlement in the Bay of Plenty, a small group of struggling farmers, with a handful of persons with private means, all of whom had recently come to this land. It would have been absurd to them to think of themselves as part of a nation. How could this new land, with its tiny population, make things that could compare at all with those of Britain? 'That's an English saddle,' one of my uncles would say, and I was completely impressed. How could it evolve ideas, write books, compose music? What had it to say worth saying? Romance was something that belonged to other countries. Rider Haggard, whose books were devoured, found it in Africa. Fenimore Cooper and Mayne Reid found it among American Indians. Those countries were different. We had no history worth writing about. We did not know that the deeds of American scouts and rangers had been paralleled in our own country, only a few years before our settlement was founded. I did not fully realise this myself till, years afterwards, I read the history of the Maori wars by my friend James Cowan.
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> In a vague way we knew there had been Maori wars. When the settlers arrived, there was a block-house on the territory, a relic of those wars. There were a few Maori villages in the settlement but we saw little of the original owners of the soil. There was no inter-marriage. We were taught no New Zealand history, at home or at school, and this was so also when I went to Auckland. Another significant thing was this: I was in Tauranga more than once in my teens, and no one thought of taking me to see the old Mission House, which is at one end of the town, or the site of the Gate Pa fight at the other.[1898]

While it would be perverse to compare the exploitation and neglect of human civilisations (and the individual human beings who compose them) to plants and trees in any direct sense, they do form a certain spiritual continuum; if Tu Weiming stresses the relationship between the individual human spirit and nature from a Confucian angle, Mulgan's sense of his native land emerges, or is at least enriched by, the first inklings of humanistic or dialogical contact with Maori culture:

[1898] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 29-30.

> Nor were we instructed in the wild life of the country-side - the birds and the trees. Nevertheless, the landscape made a deep and life-long impression on me. It helped me form my mind and ultimately coloured my writing. […] I have seen nothing in my life that I can see so plainly as that old Katikati landscape in the full tide of summer. The heartache it gives me to think of those days has something of the twin qualities of human love - 'All the sadness in the sweet; the sweetness in the sad.'
>
> The limitations, however, must be stressed. Our roots were in the soil, but they were not deep. The homesteads had their shelter belts of pines, inside which were gardens and orchards of English flowers and trees. […] The sheltering pines seemed to cushion these pioneers from the full influence of their adopted country. They did their daily work - the men especially - in a New Zealand environment; but one can imagine them retreating to the Old Country in most of their homes - English books and periodicals, English pictures, English letters, talk of England and Ireland. […] However, the progress of union was going steadily but surely. The old country was blending into the new. When, years later, I tried to put the Katikati settlement into verse, I wrote this: 'A new world touched with old, brave in the making, beautiful and bold.'
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> […] There was no striking material success in Katikati, but there was the excitement of a pioneering life and a sense of freedom. I should say New Zealand gave Vesey Stewart's farmers and their families a better life than Ireland - or the opportunity for making one. […] New Zealand society was cruder than Irish, but in it careers were more open to the talents. At any rate, it is a fact that once they have settled in immigrants as a rule do not return. As the years pass, there is no diminution in the wailing of Scottish pipes so far from Lochaber, nor in the fervour of toasts to Robert Burns, nor at St. Patrick's Day concerts are songs of the Old Land sung with any less feeling; but Scots and Irish dry their more happy than unhappy tears, and stay where they are.
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> So life in Katikati gave me deep feelings, but little accurate knowledge. I knew hardly any New Zealand history and could name few New Zealand trees or birds. In those long summer days a bird often sang. […] I did not find out till years later that it was the riro-riro, or grey warbler. I wrote some verses about the riro-riro, in which I described its song as 'half joy and half regret'. James Cowan, who was steeped in Maori poetry, told me that that description would have appealed to the Maori. That was a stage in my education as a New Zealander.[1899]

With their pioneer thrift and energy, Mulgan's Ulster family had given their boy a start in Katikati which was far from an ideal republic of letters, but, especially when coupled with a decent secondary education in Auckland, was just 'free' enough to allow the young man to begin the intergenerational task of spiritual growth - a 'correcting of prejudices' via shared aesthetic experience - in a new land, one in which his elders were not born, and for which he carried a unique and irreplaceable responsibility:

[1899] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 31-32.

> No one but myself could recapture my lost youth. No one else could people those hills and glens, those depths of pine groves and cool damp recesses of bush, with my own Mayne Reid and Kingston heroes, and my own dreams of fame and glory. My children, picnicking there with me by the stream, could not be expected to feel about the place as I did. The younger generation must make its own memories.[1900]

'When Auckland Was Growing Up'

> *My mother was the eldest of the Johnston family. She carried an indomitable spirit in a slight frame. For nearly twenty years after her marriage she had a pretty hard time. As I have said, it took my father some time to find his true bent, and though he rose rapidly, some years had to pass before he earned a good salary. My mother tackled the chores of a generally servant-less house (though she often had staying relations who helped) with vigour and resource. Ends met, but only just. She made a little pocket-money teaching the piano. However, she never really became a New Zealander. Educated on the continent, deeply imbued with a sense of family, and of an age, when she emigrated, to appreciate the pleasures of social life in a comfortable vicarage of county standing, she loved the old order of things, except now and then when some one ran down the colonies and things colonial. […] She had a quick, sharp, but rather flighty intelligence and exceptional wit. […] Even when she was poor she delighted in entertaining. She welcomed her family's friends to the house, and you could always be certain the party would go with a swing. She liked seeing people enjoying themselves, and she would play round games, or take part in a charade, with as much zest as she cooked for her guests. She was nervous and highly strung, the sort of person who might seize the reins when she was not driving. However, her enjoyment of life never flagged, and she lived to eighty-five, doing her own housework in the city flat she shared with a working sister, and at the end faced a grave operation with complete courage.*[1901]

Mulgan busily paints his emergence as a self-conscious 'New Zealander' from a family rich enough in material comforts but richer still in humanistic spirit:

> Thrift […] could do much. My father was thrifty; my mother was not. […] Yet we were comfortable and not unhappy. We had plenty of food, good beds to sleep on, books to read, amusements that cost little or nothing, and an

[1900] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 35.

[1901] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 36-37.

> affectionate home life. I had Katikati for my summer holidays, and for some years the run of the parsonage at Onehunga. […] Yes, I was fortunate. I experienced a good deal of unhappiness as a boy, and I have never cherished the belief that childhood is our happiest time. I had also much happiness, and none of my unhappiness sprang from lack of money. My parents must have worried; they always do in such circumstances. A child is happy, however, if it has the things I have mentioned, and he can easily be spoiled if he has too many of certain other things. For example, I had few toys, but they did not disappoint me. I could make do with simple things, as all children can if they are allowed to, and I had the world of my imagination, though, as I now feel looking back, a rather too large and sprawling world, which lacked the straight road of hard thinking and discipline. In those days, however, the visible world was a wider and more wonder-provoking place than it is today. There seemed to be surprise and romance round every corner.[1902]

Moving to Auckland in the middle of his childhood, Mulgan encountered a city less economically and socially advanced than Christchurch and Dunedin in the south, but aesthetically striking:

> Auckland's beauty […] is undeniable. The story goes that when Admiral of the Fleet, Lord Jellicoe, was Governor-General of New Zealand, he forgathered with two other admirals in Auckland, and they discussed the harbours of the world. […] They agreed that Rio was first, Auckland second, and Sydney third. In the earlier days of which I write, Auckland, at any rate seen as a panorama, was probably even more beautiful. Its hill-dotted isthmus, with blue forested hills to east and west, and the islanded gulf lying to the north and east, is a superb site for a city, and the commercial hand of man has not done its unaesthetic worst with the harbour front.[1903]

Foreshadowing an era of postcolonial dialogue among civilisations, Mulgan suggests that nature itself is a lens through which to evaluate civilisational exchange; the idea that New Zealand nature would have been better left untouched by foreign influences is as absurd as suggesting that local roots and traditions should ever simply be overrun:

> Let us love and cherish our evergreen flora, but gratefully accept the fact that English trees and crops have added greatly to the beauty and graciousness of our landscape. Think of the oaks about Symonds Street and in the Domain in Auckland; Hagley Park, Christchurch, in spring and autumn; the chequer-board of cultivation on the Canterbury Plains, once a waste of tussock and scrub; Lombardy poplars among South Island mountains, in autumn towers of gold against distant snow. Civilisation may

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[1902] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 38-39.

[1903] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 40-41.

> destroy, but it may also diversify. Our civilised landscape, like everything else in our society, is a marriage between two worlds.[1904]

If the 'civilised landscape' of contemporary globalisation is now a polyamorous or polylogical 'marriage of many worlds' - and if it is hence hopelessly outdated to think of New Zealand or any other country as a binary exchange mechanism between a single autochthonous population and a single colonising force, then this only makes the task of contemporary 'nation-building', or the fashioning of a 'global civil society', harder rather than easier; beyond postcolonial justice, there is the aesthetic challenge of harmonising or symphonising the cultural heritages of the entire globe. Architecture is one micrososm of this challenge; Mulgan lived long enough to see a certain progress in Auckland, but New Zealand as a whole could still be said to suffer from a preference for shortcutting functionality and a scepticism of specialist expertise traceable to the early colonial experience:

> [Auckland] is a city of poor architecture. Among large public buildings the Supreme Court, the Post Office in Shortland Street, St. Andrew's Church in Symonds Street, and the Bank of New Zealand in Queen Street, stood out in lonely distinction. We have suffered from a surfeit of bad Victorian design. The missionaries and some of the early pioneers had excellent taste: they knew the value of simplicity. [… But] we have never equalled the colonial homes of some of the American States. To the Victorian liking for over-ornamentation in the architecture and furnishing we have added some vile trimmings of our own. Narrow little-used verandas were decorated with scroll work probably made by the mile in factories. Architects were few, and to the mass of people their profession meant little or nothing. Long after my boyhood this attitude persisted and is still to be found. 'What d'you want an architect for? Get a builder - a practical man.' It is so typically a pioneering attitude that one wonders Martin Chuzzlewit should have been so confident of success even in the Eden of his dreams. Fortunately there has been a vast improvement in this field. For some years Auckland has had a flourishing University School of Architecture, and can show in the classical War Memorial Museum on Domain Hill, with a passage from Pericles cut into its front, a building that would be acclaimed anywhere.[1905]

One of the central tensions in Mulgan's book about becoming a true 'New Zealander', which he will patiently explore from several different angles, is between this do-it-yourself generalist spirit (a healthy feature of any humanism) and the ethos of professionalisation, specialisation and vocational training characteristic of the modern research university. 'Humanistic' and 'scientific' education are, Mulgan will show us, emphatically *not* the same thing, even if they influence each other in complex ways.

'Mud and Little Ships'

[1904] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 42.

[1905] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 42-43.

One pioneering figure who found an exemplary sweetspot between humanistic curiosity and professional research was James Cowan:

> In the 1880s and 1890s there were many stories to be picked up on the Auckland waterfront, and fortunately there was at least one man who kept his ears open and his pen ready. This was James Cowan whom I have mentioned, a young reporter on the *Auckland Star*, who had two dominant passions, the Maori and the sea. You will find in his book *Suwarrow Gold* not only thrilling tales of the Pacific, some of them collected in Auckland, but a brilliant description of the Island-trading ships that sailed in and out of Auckland, and the hard-bitten men who manned them.[1906]

Mulgan expresses reverence for the New Zealand DIY spirit (which he admits he was too academic and clumsy to share[1907]); it made good soldiers at a time when, as his son John himself wrote in his posthumous *Report on Experience* (1947), the world needed them: 'Perhaps to have produced these men for this one time would be New Zealand's destiny. Everything that was good from that small, remote country had gone into them - sunshine and strength, good sense, patience, the versatility of practical men. And they marched into history.'[1908] Yet history, and New Zealand, march on; the historical high-water mark of the all-weather handyman was perhaps indeed the battlefields of the Second World War. In an age of drones and general military-industrial sophistication, the instrumental value of bush and boat survival skills has surely gone down sharply in the last 75 years; Mulgan persists, however, in stressing the spiritual value of outdoor education in one form or other. Though he himself preferred (as I do) the abstract, chess-like, gentlemanly challenges of cricket, he also recognised that Auckland's other great summer pastime had character-shaping benefits of its own, from the hands-on to the contemplative:

> Cricket lovers used to lament the seduction of our summer sea, for how could you build up the game when so many young fellows went boating on Saturday? However, nothing makes a boy handier and more resourceful. The result of this was seen when in two world wars the Navy wanted all the good men it could get. […] But I would not confine to the Navy the benefits of this common knocking about in small craft and doing all manner of jobs oneself, sometimes with scanty material. It helped to mould the New Zealand soldier as well - to make him tough, enterprising, contriving.
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> […] You cannot picture clearly the Auckland of those days without understanding how much the city and the province depended on the sea for their transport. […] My own holiday voyage generally took me past Thames

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[1906] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 45.

[1907] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 12: 'Though I did some farm work as a boy, and have knocked about in boats and camped in tents, my unhandiness has been rather a joke in the family. I would not have made a good soldier.'

[1908] See Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 5.

> and up the river to Paeroa. No memory of my boyhood is clearer than an early summer morning on that river - looking out on to a mysterious world of bush and swamp, with an occasional light in a lonely farmhouse as its occupants stirred for the day, and the barking of a dog breaking the silence of dawn. The plume of smoke streaming far astern, the rhythm of the engines, and the glare from the opened furnace seen through the engine-room skylight, followed by the clink of the fireman's shovel - all this turned the tiny ship into a creature of power and beauty. She was not making a prosaic routine run, but raising new horizons, uncovering strange lands. […] On those mornings up the river the rose of the world seemed to unfold. To descend from that possessing entrancement of wonder to fact, what I was looking at on my right was the Piako swamp. It is now all dairy-farms, criss-crossed by excellent roads over which motor-cars move at a speed then beyond our dreams. In my day this was the edge of civilisation, where history was being made.[1909]

The turn of the century brought the wealth of cows to the north; soon, Auckland and its surrounding provinces had outstripped the sheep-farming south, and even the earlier gold rushes, to become 'the dairy-farm of the Empire'[1910]. 'Gold is a fickle mistress; farming a steady wife,'[1911] Mulgan concludes, but if there was suddenly more money to be made from cattle than sheep,

> there was less self-satisfaction in Auckland than the South imagined. Many of us in Auckland had a sense of inferiority. If we knew anything of New Zealand history, we were aware that Canterbury and Otago had been more regularly and solidly founded. We believed they were more cultivated in the farm and in the mind; this was certainly true of the farm.
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> […] In few small countries have geographical conditions affected political development and hampered unification to such a degree as New Zealand. One really has to see the country to realise this - its length and narrowness, mountain chains and rivers. […] It is only fair to the South Island to say that it had a great deal to do with the development of the North. Not only were numbers of its young men attracted northwards by the opening up of new land, but long before the great boom of this century, Southern energy, brains, and experience had begun to fertilise North Island farming. […] There was a similar movement in education. Otago and Canterbury were first with university institutions and teachers's training colleges. […] A stream of university graduates and trained teachers went north to raise educational standards. Now the problem is to redress the balance and colonise the South afresh.[1912]

[1909] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 46-49.

[1910] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 51.

[1911] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 51.

[1912] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 51-53.

These sorts of disruptive developments, Mulgan suggests, are a permanent feature of human economic life; in later generations the New Zealand 'Brain Drain' went global, but the spiritual parameters of individual life, and the call of justice, do not really change beyond a certain level of economic security; even in 1890s New Zealand, conditions for a full spiritual life were more or less in place:

> It [was] astonishing how much drama and music came to this very remote colony with its tiny population. It meant a journey across the world […] and rough travelling through the country. […] Altogether in New Zealand I have seen twenty of Shakespeare's plays done by professionals including *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Measure for Measure*, and *King John*. J.L. Toole was out here when I was small, and Janet Achurch with Ibsen. […] There were concerts by local talent. At these in the nineties the Victorian ballad reigned, as it had among my elders in the country. If we wallowed in sentiment, at least we did so to tunes that had some body in them. The Choral Society had a large and faithful public for oratorios and cantatas, and sacred songs were popular in concert programs and in the drawing room. It must be remembered, wrote Oliver Duff fifty years later in *New Zealand Now*, that New Zealand has always been Puritan; five out of six of its first generation were reared on the Bible. [… But] there was a great deal of music in the home, and more in town than country, because neighbours were closer. […] At musical evenings everybody did his or her bit. There was the young lady who couldn't really sing, she was much too nervous. Among all these people, she really couldn't! However, a little pressure sufficed. […] Whether it was good or bad the company was pleased; they smiled and said 'Thank you'. Even the poor performer of music felt she was helping things along.[1913]

Mulgan does not, however, want to go back to the past or oppose 'progress' understood in terms of possibilities for meaningful human (or humanistic) exchange:

> Women were expected to dress soberly, especially for the street. A woman who wore red ran the risk of being thought no better than she should be. Today a woman may wear anything she likes. […] Whatever they may be in spirit, men and women look younger than they did, and they dress with more colour. Among the social changes I have seen is the greater use of colour more generally. […] I find the change very pleasant.
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> I rejoice at the greater freedom women have won, and the franker and friendlier relations that have developed between the sexes, at the removal of certain old conventions, prejudices and inhibitions to everyday life. However, there is always a debit side to progress. Life was pleasanter in some ways. It was quieter and slower. We had more time to stand and stare. Manners may have been too formal at times, but they counted for a great deal. Despite all the legislation since then to improve the lot of the masses, there was far less class feeling, class bitterness, than there was in

[1913] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 53-55.

later years. It was a younger world, which with a bright eye of wonder saw frontiers on every horizon, and believed in the law of progress. Science had got into its stride, but its application to daily life was so limited that I did not use a telephone till I was grown up. The next fifty years, with their motor-cars, their radio, their aeroplanes, and their wars, were to dull that sense of youth and wonder a great deal, even to destroy it and replace it in some minds with cynicism and despair.

So I beg you not to pity the people of the nineties too much. It is a mistake we often make about the past. We are impressed by its hardships, or what we think of as hardships. Sometimes all that is involved is that people in those days lacked our comforts. Driving through the country with my wife one day, I remarked to her on the enormous convenience of the electricity service in New Zealand. What a change from the days of kerosene lamps and candles! 'Yes,' she replied, 'it used to take one of our family an hour a day to trim and fill the lamps and look after the candles. But the curious thing is that with all the time saved through electricity, and other improvements, we don't seem to have any more leisure.' Fifty years ago and farther back, people had resources which many of us lack today. Our grandparents did not go about bemoaning their lot; they did their daily jobs and enjoyed life. I think the people of the nineties were at least as happy as those of today, probably happier. They did not carry, visibly, the burden of their woes. In certain pictures that have come from the Left, of a people oppressed and unhappy, it is difficult to recognise one's country.[1914]

New Zealand may have achieved, between 1890 and 1960, some of the world's earliest progressive milestones - women's suffrage, labour legislation, social welfare policy, an exemplary Gini coefficient and so on - but these are presented by Mulgan as effects rather than causes of spiritual health; the idea that one can rely on such institutional safeguards at the expense of humanistic education is a dangerous illusion which only a hypermaterialist and identitarian Left could harbour. Economics condition much, but not everything, and only up to a certain point; once a person or family can 'afford to be poor', education matters more than money.

<u>'Spartan School Days'</u>

Mine was a Rawlings Scholarship, a private foundation, open to boys whose parents could not afford to send them to the Grammar School. The school fees were ten pounds a year. There were no free places in those days. The customary path of learning for the brightest boys and girls of the province was to enter the school as junior district scholars, win a senior district scholarship there, and go on to the University with a third scholarship. Many a New Zealand boy from town or country who made a mark in the world

[1914] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 56-57.

owed his start to this scholarship system. Ernest Rutherford and Richard Maclaurin were two.

[…] From first to last in these contests, girls were on the same footing as boys. New Zealand has an honourable record in higher education for women. At the old Grammar School, the boys were housed in one part and the girls in another, and at the school care was taken that 'never the twain shall meet'. Officially, they saw each other only at the annual prizegiving and sports. My wife went to the Grammar School with a junior scholarship the same year I did, and beat me in the race, for I fell at the junior university hurdle, and she cleared it. We did not meet till after our school days.[1915]

Auckland Grammar School changed a lot in the century between Mulgan's sojourn and my own, and has continued to evolve in the twenty years since; indeed, while fees are now much more egalitarian, other barriers to entry remain. The school, moreover, has (thanks to the largesse of its many successful Old Boys) become awash in 'amenities' of which Mulgan would, in one sense, have dreamed, even as he saw clearly how little they ultimately mean:

> For cricket we went to the Domain cricket-ground after school. There was no school library. There were no pictures on the walls. There was no massed singing. There was no tuck-shop. The present school has all these amenities and more. It was plain living with us, and I think I may say, there was some high thinking. However, while such amenities as came later may be very good for education, I doubt if they count for much in a boy's affection for his school. That affection comes mainly from the fundamental things: teachers and what is taught and how it is taught; association with other boys; games; the corporate life of the school. When I went there, the Grammar School was less than twenty-five years old. It was building up a tradition. Its old boys were distinguishing themselves at home and abroad. Our affection for the school has been just as warm as that of later generations.[1916]

A certain blindness or indifference to local economic conditions is a prerequisite for the emergence of any kind of humanistic universalism; to limit a student's horizons to existing local industries implies a hideous deformation of human possibility, one which Auckland Grammar School was keen, then as later, to avoid, even if the results of this policy, when pushed to the extreme, were absurd and counterproductive:

> The school was curiously and significantly academic. This might not have struck us at the time, but it does now. Looking through our curriculum (and that of other New Zealand schools), a foreigner might have said: 'Here is a country that lives on the land, by what the land produces, but I don't see

[1915] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 58-59.

[1916] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 59-60.

> any mention of it. You don't even teach your own history.' There wasn't any such mention. There was a faint beginning of a 'modern side'. Book-keeping was taught, and for would-be engineers there was mechanical drawing. Nearly the whole trend of our education was to prepare for the University or for 'white collar' jobs. The limelight was on scholarship boys and girls, and the success of the school was judged mainly by the number of university scholarships won and matriculation passes. Boys came from the country but were not expected to return there.
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> […] At prize-givings university and other honours won by old boys and girls were read out. Many years later there was a lively article in the *Auckland Star* commenting on the fact that such recitals in general did not mention the old boys who made two blades of grass grow where one, or none, grew before. My friend the late Earle Vaile was responsible for this pointed pleasantry. Earle Vaile was an old Grammar boy. At an early age he retired from business with a fortune, and to the astonishment and consternation of his friends, applied it to testing the despised pumice wilderness back of Rotorua. The story of his success may be read in his book *Pioneering the Pumice*. Today the value of these pumice lands is realised. I am not suggesting for a moment that boys destined to be farmers should be taught farming only. The verses of the young farmer-poet Donald McDonald, a pupil of the famous Fielding Agricultural High School, who died in the second war, may be cited in refutation of such foolishness. Here I am describing the condition of the time. Earle Vaile was a well-read man, and made gifts to libraries.[1917]

Mulgan then joins the infinite ranks of those who, in Robert Conquest's famous limerick, 'complain about their schooling'; of course, there were terrible *lacunae* (then as now) even at the country's best secondary institution:

> We learned nothing about the history of New Zealand. Indeed, in passing into the sixth form, lower and upper, we dropped English history and studied Roman. […] There were wall maps, but I do not remember them being used in the teaching of either geography or history. How vastly more interesting these subjects could have been made with the help of maps and pictures!
>
> I have always been glad I learned Roman history, but I think of the lessons from Hannibal's invasion of Italy that could have been pushed home to boys of a remote sea-girt British colony. […] However, one must not be too wise after the event. It seems certain that such opportunities were being missed in English schools as well.
>
> […] Our French lessons would have astonished teachers today. There was no conversational French. When I was in Brussels in 1926, I tried the lift-man at the hotel with the number of my room. Finally he came to my rescue: 'Say it in English, sir.' I said it. With one exception, I don't remember the class finishing a set French book. And how dull most of them were! I remember only too vividly *Eugenie Grandet* on cold mornings; it seemed a

[1917] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 60.

> question which was colder - the temperature or the story. I confess this experience gave me a lasting prejudice against Balzac. We did several of Shakespeare's plays, but we never read aloud. There were no school theatricals; self-expression was not encouraged.
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> We suffered, as apparently all schools did, from the practice of turning quite inexperienced men loose to teach.[1918]

Contemporary New Zealand education struggles against other, more modern obstacles - rampant vocationalism, political correctness, a hyperbureaucratised system of pointless paperwork, and a lack of credible salary incentives for talented graduates, to name just a few; it is hard not to look back on Mulgan's Auckland Grammar School with nostalgia. Though he regretted his inability to obtain University Entrance ('a university course would have done me good, […] curbed my romanticism, and trained me in hard thinking'[1919]), it is clear that the school prepared Mulgan well for his career as a journalist ('if a man is not interested in everything - or cannot work himself up to the mark temporarily - he had better keep out of that fascinating but exacting profession'[1920]). Auckland Grammar School also gave him, via association with exemplary teachers, the tools - both grammatical and spiritual - to be a more lasting writer:

> It was the custom in those days to employ some Englishmen on staffs. This exposed schools to the risk of engaging men who could not adapt to colonial conditions, and there have been some unfortunate choices. There was much to be said for it, however, and I am inclined to think there should be more such importations today. Men like [Owen] Ilbert and [W.J.] Morrell brought a breath of the great world into our tiny community.
>
> These two men taught English and Latin to the top forms on both sides. In the writing of English they insisted on direct approach, simplicity and clarity. They were death on jargon and the highfalutin phrase. I was not much good at Latin; sometimes, indeed, I used to get minus marks for Latin prose. At the same time, I sensed something of the quality of the language, and after I left school and wrote for a living, I appreciated this more and more. However much performance may have fallen short of desire, I have always been somewhat conscious of the order and terseness of Latin. Often I have looked at what I have written and judged it by Latin, and then set to work to lick it into shape. I am old-fashioned enough to believe strongly in the value of Latin as a school subject, at any rate for those who can take advantage of it. Unless it is Greek, of which I know nothing, no study helps so much in the mastering of English, and a person who cannot use his own language reasonably well is not educated. He should not be given a university degree of any kind. A knowledge of Latin is also excellent protection against the charlatans and humbugs of various kinds who beset us through life - men and women who, for insufficient cause, ask for our

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[1918] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 61-62.

[1919] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 63.

[1920] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 62.

sympathy, our money, and our vote. The Horatio Bottomleys of this world do not take in classical scholars.

We also had on our staff Mr (later Sir) James Hight, then in the early stages of a career that was to take him to the teaching of history and economics at Canterbury University College, the rectorship of that College, and a knighthood. Perhaps never in our history was an honour welcomed with such a volume of affectionate congratulations.[1921]

What, then, makes a great teacher? Not the 'amenities':

> What a mystery is this gift of keeping order! I have heard of a teacher in another New Zealand school for whom the greatest success might have been predicted. He was a young Englishman good at games, with the prestige attaching to a member of an exploring expedition. However, so I am told, the boys 'picked him in one', and before the end of his first lesson they were throwing things about the room.
>
> One of the personalities of the school was an Englishman named Harrison, familiarly known as 'Gussie'. He took middle forms, which needed a firm hand - and they got it. Harrison had an extraordinary knack of keeping the strictest discipline by a mixture of wrath and humour. Not only did he never cane anyone; rarely did he punish at all. His wrath, which I think was often assumed, was terrible, yet with our fear of him went worship. This sort of thing might happen: he was explaining one day that the ancients conceived the heavens as a sort of material dish-cover placed over the earth. 'You lift it up, and you dis(h)-cover the earth,' whispered Oliver Sinclair to his neighbour. 'Creature!' thundered Harrison, 'did you venture to speak?' 'Yes, sir.' 'What did you say?' No answer. 'Are you ashamed to say it?' No answer. 'Well, stand up on the form!' This was not a dignified position, and it would have been highly embarrassing if the Head had come in. One reason we liked Harrison was his complete honesty. I can see him now, taking us in Nesfield's *English Grammar* on a hot Auckland afternoon. Gussie ran his finger round the sharp edge of his stiff high collar and broke out: 'We've got to do this wretched stuff. I know you don't like it; neither do I. But we've got to do it.' And we did it.
>
> Thorough, honest, just, and understanding, Gussie was the ideal man for boys. He went back to England. Often during the years I have heard old boys ask: 'What happened to Gussie? Does anyone know?' No one seemed to know, which was a pity, for we should all have liked to tell him what we thought of him. 'Beyond the book his teaching sped.' This can be said of others, too. 'Better a dish of herbs where love is…' Better a teacher sitting on a log with a sense of wonder and a love of wisdom burning in him, than a dry old dog working in the most up-to-date and expensive building.[1922]

[1921] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 63-64.

[1922] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 65-66.

Perhaps above all, however, Auckland Grammar School offered Mulgan an environment free not from the economic realities of life or the pain of failure in competition (whether in exams or on the cricket field[1923]), but from the corruptions of entitlement:

> Yes, we had few luxuries in those days. The school was a reflection of the society in which it was set. In one respect it was superior to that society. The Grammar School was as free from snobbery and class distinctions as a school can be. All classes were represented. There were sons of the well-to-do, but they did not throw their weight about, and established no set. Many of the boys who went through with scholarships came from homes where there was little money. The school gave us a pretty good democratic shove-off into life.[1924]

Mulgan was also lucky enough to come of age with some talented classmates, with whom he was able to share the humbling force of drama:

> Some of us were stage-struck at school. We learned scenes from Shakespeare and other dramatists, and acted them before our suffering families. It turns me cold now to think of what they had to endure in the close quarters of a living-room, where it must have been agony not to laugh in the wrong place. It was our excuse that we were young and a little vain. Besides myself, there were four perpetrators. Casement Aickin became one of the leading surgeons in the country, and his integrity and skill are commemorated in an annual prize at Auckland University College. Reginald Prideaux was an English boy. When he chose librarianship as a regular profession, most New Zealanders were unaware there was such a thing. Prideaux was Librarian at the Reform Club in London for some years, and lecturer in his subject at the London University. Frederick Sinclaire, of the Rawlings Foundation, like myself (but how much more of a scholar!), did very well at Oxford, entered the Unitarian Church, preached and lectured in Australia, and returned to New Zealand as Professor of English at Canterbury University College. Fred was a worshipper of Chesterton, and, I should say, more like Dr Johnson than any other New Zealander has been. Maurice Gray took up accountancy, which may have concealed from many the fact that he had a fine literary taste, and knew the classical English novelists particularly well. 'Morry' was the only one of us who never left the country. That was not his fault. He was due to fill a life's desire and go 'Home', which would have included sitting in the sun at Lord's and watching his beloved game, but Hitler said 'No!' New Zealanders are a race of travellers. Some of the boys who went to school with me fifty years ago scattered far and wide - England, America, Australia, the East. It was the

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[1923] See Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 66.

[1924] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 67.

> same with other secondary schools. Opportunities for training and advancement in our small society were too few.[1925]

Something can be said for the power of such a remote school to offer its students the world; it does so, Mulgan argues, by charisma rather than convenience:

> At the annual prize-giving in the Old Choral Hall, the boys sat on one side of the chorus seats behind the platform, and the girls on the other. For many years these gatherings were memorable for the presence of the venerable and distinguished Chairman of the Board of Governors, Sir George Maurice O'Rorke, the friend and helper of George Vesey Stewart, founder of Katikati. Sir Maurice now carried the prestige of his most competent Speakership. There never was anyone more Irish. He looked Irish; at times he suggested the stage Irishman. The brogue in his deep, rich voice was unmistakable, and excitement intensified it. 'This is *wun* of of those occ*aa*sions.' His dignity, however, was unassailable. To hear him say formally at a meeting of the Grammar School Board, quite a small and tame body, 'Those in favour of the motion will signify the same in the usual manner', gave one a glimpse of his larger authority.
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> Part of the fun of prize-givings was watching for what Sir Maurice would be up to. 'As Shakespeare has so well said' - fumble among the papers for the quotation - 'as the immortal bard has so aptly expressed it' - another fumble - 'as the Swan of Avon has so splendidly written' - paper found and situation saved. He took a genuine interest in the prize-winners and their books. As a small boy I stood in a mist of nervousness before the great man to receive *Old Rome: A Handbook to the Ruins of the City and the Campagna*, by Robert Burn.
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> […] The greatest flutter Sir Maurice caused in my time was his hope that one day the school would present scenes from Shakespeare. 'Who knows but that there' - indicating the boys - 'we might find a Romeo, and there' - turning to the girls - 'a Juliet. "O that I were a glove upon that hand…!"' You may imagine the suppressed giggles among the carefully segregated sets of pupils. Sir Maurice was certainly an experience and an asset. He was one of a large company of men who brought learning and a love of learning to a young, raw society.[1926]

Mulgan was doubly lucky, however, that he had role models in his family too:

> While I was at school our family fortunes improved. My father graduated at Auckland University College, and from first assistant in a city school was appointed inspector. It took him four years instead of three to take his B.A. because he failed in one subject, economics. There were no lectures in economics, so he had to do his study unaided. […] It was the rule then that a student had to take his honours in the year following the B.A. My father's subject for honours was geology, which entailed laboratory work and a field

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[1925] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 67-68.

[1926] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 68-69.

> thesis. He obtained a first class. He was teaching all those five years, and his rapid promotion was proof that he did not scamp his school work. When I remember how hard he worked, denying himself many pleasures, I feel a good deal of sympathy for that despised type, the part-time student. Men and women who devote themselves to study as he did - and there have been many - deserve a good deal of consideration. The house of achievement may be more satisfying and useful if the road to it has been hard.
>
> I was most fortunate in my father. I have never met anyone with as strong a sense of justice. He never shrank from disagreeable tasks, but his integrity was matched by his kindness. To me he was as much an elder brother as a father. I shared his ambitions, and was admitted to his confidence. The result was that while I was still at school I began to take what became a life-long interest in university education. Edward Ker Mulgan lives in the history of New Zealand education for two things. He was largely responsible for the introduction of teachers' grading. Under the old system of appointment by Education Boards and School Committees, the door was wide-open to wire-pulling. It is contended that the grading system is too rigid, and encourages pot-hunting; that is to say, teachers are tempted to work not exclusively for the good of their pupils, but to please the inspector, and so win higher grading marks. Had he lived, my father would probably have admitted some disappointment. Secondly, he was the first, or one of the first, to break down the old conception of a school inspector as a visitor to be feared by pupils and teachers - rather an ogre. He put both parties at their ease, and quickly made teachers realise he was their friend and counsellor. He was more than liked; he was loved. A Protestant himself, he got on exceedingly well with the teachers in the Catholic schools he inspected. […] I believe he made history by obtaining permission for some of the teaching sisters in Christchurch to attend university classes in science. He spent much of his spare time writing to teachers who asked for advice. As a young man he had a splendid physique, but he died in his early sixties, and I feel sure that this was partly caused by devotion to duty.[1927]

Out of such a home and school life, the young Mulgan experienced the whole paradoxical pull of the humanities: the simultaneous broadening of horizons and deepening of ties synonymous with a critical adult spirituality:

> My father was Victorian in his trust in education as an instrument of progress. When he called at Colombo on a trip to England, he was shocked by this glimpse of the swarming and importunate East, and said he would like to put these people to school. I replied with Kipling's verses - 'a fool lies here who tried to hustle the East'. He was more right than I, because the East is hustling itself towards universal education. However, he died in 1920, when we were living in the glowing promise of peace after victory, so he did not have to face the deeper and more searching doubts about the

[1927] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 69-70.

old educational faiths and their fruits, which have marked the last thirty years.

My years at the Grammar School were the end of an era. The school was a colonial institution in a society that was more emphatically and visibly colonial than it is now. When I say 'colonial' I mean it in the frontier sense of the word. Our curriculum was English, but we were colonials and conscious of it. Not that our society was willing to accept everything British without demur. […] However, New Zealanders did accept English institutions and values with much less questioning than in later years. There was hardly any local literature, and what there was of it was little read.

[…] Had anyone prophesied that one day New Zealanders would fight at the Dardanelles and in the Pass of Thermopylae, he would have been put down as quite mad. In thought we were still travelling on the safe Victorian seas of progress - a law of nature. Before long history was to show that her capacity for surprise was endless.

Though, as I have said, New Zealand was not yet a nation, indeed scarcely conscious that she might or should be one, all the time influences were working within us. We could not see them then, but we can now - little things and big things. I have described that life in some detail, not only because the past is interesting in itself, but because it made the future. Landscape and little ships, reading, schooling, amusements, contacts with the outer world - my whole environment was enlarging my experience, and though I did not realise it, making me more and more a part of my own country. What happened to me must have happened to many others.[1928]

'Plunge Into Life'

In those days, with long hours and broken time, conditions for most of us were not conducive to mastering a subject. The general training, however, was good. Reporters were called on to do almost everything, and on the Star a man could go beyond his daily assignments. There was a column of humorous comment once a week, and we were encouraged - and indeed expected - to contribute to it.

[…] Pigs and poetry illustrate the range of journalism. It is not at all impossible for a journalist to be called on to deal with the two subjects on the same day. This fell to my lot when I was Supervisor of Talks in broadcasting. Despite my country upbringing, I could not tell a Tamworth from a Berkshire, but I was supposed to know something about putting the stuff across. I helped the Department of Agriculture lick pig production talks into shape. On the same day, more than once, I wrote a script on poetry, or edited one. Variety is the spice of life.[1929]

[1928] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 70-72.

[1929] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 84, 86.

Journalism is in many respects the 'profession' of all intellectuals; curiosity is generalised before it fixes on specific targets. The daily discipline of reporting and editing forced Mulgan to reconnect with life from multiple (and multiplying) angles:

> A reporter got about and saw people. There was a sense of being in the centre of things, of forming a link between events and public. […] A reporter might be asked to do anything and everything - courts of all kinds, local body meetings, church meetings, political meetings, accidents, fires, concerts, plays, agricultural shows, sports of all kinds. If you were ignorant, you had to learn.[1930]

If the *economics* of journalism have been changed beyond recognition by television and the Internet, the dirty *business* of it has not: though claiming to be prone to bouts of self-aggrandisement, Mulgan was in fact happier behind the scenes getting the work done - and drawing a fair salary - than engaging in pushy self-promotion:

> There had been little family discussion about my future; indeed I had not thought much about it myself. […] However, J.W. Tibbs, my headmaster, suggested journalism, and recommended me to the *Auckland Star*. He had observed my general interest in things, and I had won essay prizes. […] I had no knowledge of the world, and my difficulty in speaking was going to be awkward in a job where a man has to get about among men and talk to them. Moreover, as is common among persons who suffer from a sense of inferiority, I was inclined now and then to show off. I may confess here and now that I never lost my shyness in news-getting. I think I learned a good deal about the art and the value of news, but I never acquired the assurance of the good news-hound. I was happier in sub-editing, editing and writing articles than reporting.
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> […] In Sydney and in London I should have had short shrift, but the *Star* never sacked anyone. In those days this paternal attitude was pretty general in our newspaper world, and there is a touch of it still. We have not developed the ruthlessness of some proprietors and editors in the larger world. For one thing, newspaper competition has never been so fierce.
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> There were compensations for the kicks of life. There was salary - a whole golden sovereign for a week's work. To a youngster who had never had any money this was riches. It was more than some chaps got. One friend of mine started as an office boy on five shillings, and rose to be director of the firm. Many years later Sir Charles Statham, who had been Speaker of the House for a long period, gave me his forcible opinion of a statement by Mr Michael Joseph Savage, first Labour Prime Minister of New Zealand, that he had never known a man who liked work. 'Why,' said Sir Charles, 'I started on five shillings a week - and I worked!' It is a long

[1930] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 75-76.

> time since I saw a sovereign. Gold, I may say to the generation that never sees it, is more impressive than a note.[1931]

The initial shock of the real world, nevertheless, was almost too much for Mulgan to take:

> A newspaper man necessarily sees a good deal of the seamy and tragic side of life. To throw a boy into the rough and tumble of this calling may be worse than throwing a puppy into the water to teach him to swim. The puppy can swim by instinct. After a few weeks of reporting I was deeply depressed. I had been brought up in a sheltered circle. I had the Victorian attitude towards sex. Sudden contact with humanity in the raw, and the frank and somewhat cynical talk of the older men on the staff, shocked me. As often happens when a young fellow takes up a line of work, whatever it is, my seniors painted a doleful picture of the prospects. The result was that I thought of getting out.[1932]

Mulgan's sense of vocation had not yet fully formed: 'I must confess I often scamped my work. Even now, like the recollections of my failures in cricket, the thought of what I did or did not do, turns me cold. However, I think those offences arose as much from lack of experience as from original sin. Today I should be more assiduous and careful.'[1933] *Aesthetic* experience played a key role in expanding Mulgan's sphere of humanistic concern and sense of responsibility from the immediacy of news reporting to the eternal realm of literature:

> I was keen enough on games to recognise style when I saw it. Games make peaks in memory as other things do. […] They tried me on almost everything. Not much on music, and for a very good reason. You could pick up the rudiments of a game fairly easily, but music was different. However, I should like to describe an experience in music that was one of the formative things in my life - a turning-point. When I left school I had heard no good music, except a little of the lighter kind. I had been brought up on the contemporary drawing-room ballad, and I doubt if I had ever heard a first-class song. It was a joke in the family that when I escorted my mother to a Choral Society practice I read a book all evening. However, the Christmas after leaving school I had a mind to go to the annual performance of *Messiah* by the same Choral Society. It was a revelation. The prelude to the first solo, 'Comfort Ye', and then the solo itself, opened up a new world of beauty. The whole performance, my first contact with great music, moved me profoundly. I experienced an aesthetic and spiritual change that seemed to send me on in a great bound. That lovely opening of the strings, drifting into consciousness, as it were, from another existence, has been with me ever since. The performance was not only beauty in itself; it led me to many

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[1931] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 73-75.

[1932] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 74.

[1933] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 74.

> other manifestations of beauty in the same medium. My appreciation of good music is not nearly so wide or understanding as that of many of my friends, but I think it plumbs some depths. I owe my start in this to the *Messiah*, and a host of other people must have had a similar experience.[1934]

The connection between these peak experiences and intergenerational time - measured in decades and centuries rather than seconds and minutes - may only be implicit here (for whom is Mulgan writing if not for *us*, his future readers, both 'New Zealanders' and 'foreigners?), but Mulgan's account of the changes in New Zealand newspapers over his lifetime suggests that honest and responsible journalism can only be conducted by literary types with a correspondingly acute sense of history:

> The farther you go back in New Zealand journalism, and I think it is the same elsewhere, the more you are reminded of the young man who applied to John Morley for a job on the *Pall Mall Gazette*. What qualifications had he? 'Invective.' 'What sort of invective?' 'General invective.' This, for example, from a goldfields paper in the days of provincial government: 'We can hardly believe so influential a demonstration will be trifled with, even by the miserable shufflers who misgovern the province; but if an infatuated blindness to the consequences of their present conduct should lead them to disregard the just demands of the memorialists, we tremble when we anticipate the action of the insulted and maltreated people.' And here is the same paper, the *Tuapeka Times*, rebuking a reptile commentary: 'The editor of the *Bruce Herald*, harmless beldam that he is, shrieks more discordantly than ever this week…'
>
> That our newspapers are today more moderate in their comment may be because we are better mannered, but it may also be because we do not hold our convictions so strongly, or because journalists are more timid. Of recent years it has been said in the Labour Party that social legislation never had the support of the New Zealand Press. This has been part of an attempt to suggest that before 1935, when Labour took office, New Zealanders lived in misery. Persistent mention of the depression of the thirties by Labour candidates in the election of 1949 brought this comment from a contemporary of mine: 'What has become of our old New Zealand when most of us were certainly "poor beyond denying"? I was born during a terrible slump I believe, but my recollection is of high spirits, and independence, wit and gaiety. Money was never mentioned except when necessary.' The charge against the Press is a serious distortion of history, and is plain nonsense.[1935]

Mulgan is not denying the profound importance of economic *justice*, but he is arguing fiercely against the historicism, materialism and determinism of the hard, red Left; human happiness is possible with relatively little actual money. Exemplary individuals illustrate this:

[1934] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 76.

[1935] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 77.

Thomson Leys, editor of the *Auckland Star* for forty years, was an exceptionally able man with a high sense of public duty. […] Both he and Sir Henry Brett, principal proprietor of the *Star*, gave to the city liberally in money and personal service. Thomson Leys supplemented generously his brother William's endowment of the Leys Institute in Ponsonby, and watched over its growth for the rest of his life. His son, Sir Cecil Leys, and daughter, Mrs Selwyn Upton, carried on the good work after him. Mr Leys was a student to the end. He did much for the public libraries in Auckland and throughout New Zealand, helping to raise their standards and the status of librarians, and was for some years Chairman of the Auckland University College Council. He had the Scot's love of learning, and the Scot's freedom from snobbery. I owed him much, especially in my later years, when I was his editorial assistant.

[…] One of our senior reporters was James Cowan, whom I have mentioned in connection with shipping. Cowan was born on the Waikato frontier, actually on the site of the battle of Orakau, which gave New Zealand its best-known and most inspiring story of Maori courage and fortitude.

For some years after Orakau it was death for a white man to cross the frontier into 'King' territory. Armed constabulary were stationed there and settlers kept their guns ready. Cowan loved the Maori and knew him intimately. In later years he made a name for himself by his official history of the Maori wars, and other books. That history was undertaken at the suggestion of Mr Leys, another debt the community owed him.

[…] About the time I joined, the *Star* received a very remarkable recruit in Joseph Penfound Grossman, who was to be a leader-writer for many years. Grossman's father was a Polish Jew, and his mother a Cornish evangelical. In education he was a product of Christ's College, Christchurch, and Canterbury University College. Grossman took all knowledge for his sphere. I have known many versatile men, but never anyone his equal. He seemed to have read the whole of the world's best literature from the Greeks to the present day, but he would turn in the highest spirits from Plato or Schiller or Swinburne or Browning to quote Gilbert and Sullivan, P.G. Wodehouse, or the fables of George Ade. His memory matched his unquenchable enthusiasm. One day in the office during the first world war, I read him a letter in an English paper inquiring for the origin of a verse beginning, 'And ye shall die before your thrones be won.' With shining eyes and in a ringing voice he immediately recited two stanzas of 'The Pilgrims'. Many a time since he so dramatically introduced me to Swinburne's magnificent poem have I repeated these stanzas and others to myself. He knew history as well as he knew literature, studied current affairs closely, and was early in the field with emphatic warnings about the German danger. 'You know better than Sir Edward Grey, I suppose,' his editor said to him once, and doubtless Grossman was sure he did. He could talk by the hour on currency or psychical research, and could make them equally exciting. You may judge from all this that he was a born teacher, with the teacher's most precious gift, the power of kindling

enthusiasm. I have heard a university student speak of his lectures on the French revolution as if he had come under the spell of a great preacher.

Those, however, are by no means a complete list of his accomplishments. He had played cricket, football and tennis, and knew these games thoroughly. He himself was tennis champion in Auckland when he was over fifty, and he was an admirable critic of the game. His powers of work were prodigious. He became a professor at Auckland, and at one time was taking three subjects - history, economics and mental science - without one assistant. While he was doing all this he was still writing for the *Star* and not abating much if anything of his other interests - chess and billiards, theatre-going, lecturing for the Workers' Educational Association. Another of his hobbies was vigorous campaigning for the preservation of our native timber forests and the planting of faster-growing exotics. In those days New Zealanders needed a sharp reminder of their wastefulness and lack of foresight in forest policy. It is not surprising that one of the worst things Grossman could say of a man was that he was a terrible example of the results of specialisation. He used to tell of an Englishman he had met who specialised in two species of lepidoptera, which were found in only one country - Iceland. I share his view, particularly when the specialisation is early. […] I learned a lot from Grossman, especially in later years, when I associated with him almost daily. […] He was a New Zealander in up-bringing, background and thought, the first formative influence of the kind I had met. Moreover, as a Canterbury man, he brought to me a breath of the unknown New Zealand. He was one of many who broke down my prejudices and enlarged my knowledge.

[…] Another was the father of one of my school chums, with whose family I was fortunate enough to make a lifelong friendship. This was Samuel Gray, of Mt. Eden, for many years Clerk of the Borough. He left England when he was about of age, newly married, and invested in a bush farm at Normanby, in Taranaki. This was in 1881, during the first great depression, and he lost his money. That Taranaki country has long passed out of the living and dead timber stages, and, with its patterned prosperous dairy farms, grows more and more like an English shire. Mr Gray moved north to Auckland and held several commercial posts until he found something more suited to his exceptional ability - the clerkship of a new and important suburban borough. I had come to know the family of four girls and three boys long before that. Until later years Mr Gray's income must have been small, but a household happier [and] more companionable among its members and with guests, I have never known. It was a gay circle with an insatiable interest in everything under the sun, from politics and books to games.

[…] On Saturday evenings there would be gatherings of family and young friends round the fire or the piano, and, as always, endless talks bubbling with zest and wit. Mr Gray liked nothing so much as talk, and he was perfect in his attitude towards the young guest. He had much information and comment to give, but his manner was never didactic or dominating, and no matter how young and inexperienced you were, he drew you out. Mrs Gray said comparatively little, but even when she did not

express her kindness you felt it. Behind the scenes her guidance was wise and strong as well as devoted. All the Greys were readers. […] If they did not like this or that they said so, and generally there was a good reason for their opinion, but the note of their lives was enthusiasm - enthusiasm for books and people, for all the drama of life, for family and friends, for a lively comment in a letter or a noble passage of English prose, for a flying [rugby] three-quarters as well as for a galloping or majestically moving line of verse.

[…] This enthusiasm has never flagged. It is part of the pull that [the Grey house] 'Ellamore' has exerted on a wide circle through the years. Friends from far and near have gone there whenever they could. For many years after my return to Auckland I hardly missed a Sunday. Mr and Mrs Gray died a good while ago, but 'Ellamore' remains. It is still a homing place for their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, and gives the old welcome to friends and their families. My own children and grandchildren are in the circle. The house is richer in memories than any I know. There, through all the changes of time and fate, a genius for friendship has flourished, to make life not only sweeter and lovelier, but stronger.

It was a household of mixed origin and allegiance. LIke myself, all the children were born in New Zealand of Homeland parents. Mr and Mrs Gray influenced their children without dominating them. Through personal memories and a host of books, the call of England was there, but the family grew up good New Zealanders. Mr Gray was an English liberal of the Gladstone and Asquith school. He was particularly interested in politics, history and biography, and his chief regret was that he had missed a political career. His favourite novelists were Scott and Thackeray. In his sober English fashion he worshipped Scott as devotedly as the most perfivid Scotsman does Burns, with the difference that his feelings went round by his head. *The Antiquary* was his favourite, and at one period he read it once a year. He was a man of deeply religious but unorthodox faith. He loved the Bible and the Prayer Book and read them to his children. I remember his saying he did not know if the Bible was inspired, but he was sure the Prayer Book was. In politics Gladstone was his hero. I had a lot to learn there. To the Johnstons, Gladstone was a calamity. Had he not disestablished the Irish Church, surrendered to the Boers, been partly responsible for Gordon's death, and tried to give Ireland Home Rule? From Mr Gray and Mr Grossmann I began to learn some Irish history.

In truth I was a callow young Conservative and a bit of a snob. The joke about my job on the *Star* was that to my people the *Star* was a 'Labour rag', read only by what was then known as the working-class. How little many of us knew about social conditions! As a boy I had witnessed protests among Parnell shopkeepers against the regulation of hours. I have mentioned what shop hours were in those days, and looking back, it strikes me forcibly how stupid and unimaginative was the opposition to this legislation. In a highly favoured country not more than fifty years old as a British colony, some of the bad practices of the British had crept in, and there were pretty rigid social barriers. When I came to write the history of my country I discovered a good deal. One was the pleasant practice of

> certain drapers in the pre-Liberal-Labour days, of employing girls as 'learners' for a few shillings a week, or nothing at all, and after a year or two dismissing them to make way for others. Mr Leys told me he asked a leading Auckland draper, who was a pillar of a church, how he reconciled this with his conscience. 'The custom of trade,' was the reply. Frequent contact with a well-informed, liberal-minded, wise man like Samuel Gray, and the breezy inclusiveness of his family, was a salutary experience.[1936]

Between baron capitalists and the Leninist Left, Mulgan stood for a third, squeezed creed in New Zealand politics: not a transplanted and outdated British 'Whiggism', but a left-leaning 'Liberalism' fit for the circumstances of modern New Zealand and committed, above all else, to humanistic education and the flowering of a local Republic of Letters:

> I was apprenticed in the trade of writing. Before I left school I told a friend I hoped to get a footing in the magazines. But what magazines? When I went to work I soon found English magazines were beyond me. I had nothing to say on their level. There was very little New Zealand demand for articles and stories. My own paper published hardly any contributed matter. One or two papers in the south, notably the *Otago Witness*, encouraged local writers, but the pay was apt to be microscopic. In the nineties a young journalist starting out on a distinguished career received two guineas for six short stories. Newspapers had not long passed the struggling stage, when a pound was a pound, to be looked at very hard. There was an idea that if a contributor got his name in print, the publicity was sufficient reward. Anything savouring of literature was apt to be regarded as an unimportant extra.
>
> Arthur Cleave of Auckland started *The New Zealand Magazine* and kept it going for some time. All such efforts came up against two very strong obstacles. Our population was very small, and New Zealand had not yet found itself.[1937]

Mulgan will loop back to the question of fair payment for literary and cultural output in later chapters, but what he is busy establishing, brick by brick, is a nation with a unique and hence universal mission: to carry the torch of human civilisation on into new climes and new centuries, seizing every opportunity for exchange, criticism and growth. His mind would boggle at the avenues open to 'New Zealand' today: for a start, our country is no longer a bilateral meeting of Maori and European, but, thanks to a mixture of immigration, tourism and the Internet, something infinitely more complex. Mulgan's 'founding story' in *The Making of a New Zealander* may help people like me to recover themselves amid the chaos of globalisation, but this is a beginning, not an end; the 'destiny' of 'New Zealand' - how we might end up 'making life stronger' for ourselves and others - will not be 'decided' on our or any future generation's watch.

[1936] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 78-83.

[1937] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 84.

‘Night Watches in Christchurch’

Moving to the *Press* in Christchurch in 1904 (at the age of 23) for ‘more experience’ of both journalism and New Zealand[1938], Mulgan found himself working nights:

> It seemed an affront to nature, a sin of ingratitude, to go to bed. […] I had a habit of whiling away the walk home by reciting poetry. Swinburne seemed appropriate to the hour. ‘When the hounds of spring are on winter’s traces…’, ‘From too much love of living…’, ‘Fate is a sea without a shore, and the soul is a rock that abides; but her ears are vexed with the roar and her face with the foam of the tides.’[1939]

Swinburne’s death marked an important moment in Mulgan’s development as a journalist:

> The late cable contained two words: ‘Obituary Swinburne.’ I dashed off a few lines of a footnote and quoted a verse from ‘The Garden of Proserpine’. Was it ‘that no *man* lives for ever’? I wasn’t sure, but I risked it. Next day I found it was ‘no *life* lives for ever’. I could not have checked it, but this was one of my many experiences that taught me one of the fundamental rules of writing - and many other situations in life: always verify your references. Accuracy is the first rule in journalism.
>
> The *Press* was a more literary paper than the *Auckland Star*. It had always prided itself on its style and its concern with literature. This might be expected. Canterbury was founded by men with literary tastes, who read the classics and could turn a neat verse. […] The paper liked the pointed epigrammatic sentence and literary allusion. It favoured Saturday leaders on cultural subjects. There was a Literary Page on Saturdays and to get into this was considered a distinction. William Henry Triggs was editor and W.H. Graham assistant-editor. Mr Graham was acting-editor when I joined. I much appreciated his kind reception of a young man who had left home for the first time, and we became close friends. Both Mr Triggs and Mr Graham were Englishmen, so I continued to be under English influence.
>
> Triggs was a good journalist, but he was conservative and conventional even for a conservative newspaper, and too much inclined to take his politics from his club.[1940]

This is, in light of the preceding chapters, a damning condemnation; in fact, the *Press*’s liberal competitor in Christchurch, the *Lyttleton Times*, offered a conservative young Mulgan at least as much in the way of opportunities for growth as the paper his parents would have preferred:

[1938] See Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 86.

[1939] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 90.

[1940] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 91-92.

> The *Lyttleton Times*, like the *Press*, cultivated style in its editorials, and I think the two papers maintained a higher level of English than those of other centres.
>
> When I joined the *Press*, Samuel Saunders had been editor of the *Times* for thirteen years, which covered the period of the Liberal-Labour ascendancy. He was New Zealand born, and his father, Alfred Saunders, was an English Radical remarkable for the strength of his character and the variety of his interests. […] He was devoted to education and wrote a two-volume history of the New Zealand of his day. Samuel Saunders inherited his father's radicalism.[1941]

The *Press*, however, had its share of worthy contributors too:

> I must mention one outside member of the staff, not only for what he was, but for what his class has done for New Zealand. This was H.M. Lund, music critic for the *Press* for some years. Lund was a pupil of Clara Schumann's, and a friend of Brahms and Sir Charles Halle. He was a very fine musician, and as fine a man. 'I wish I had died before this,' he said to me during the war of 1914. By that time, however, he had proved his worth in Christchurch and become an institution. Though feelings against Germans ran high, most people thought none the worse of Lund. After concerts the old man used to spend hours in the office over his notices. Report had it that he wrote them first in German and then translated. Whatever his method was, he achieved admirable English. As for his influence, here is a story told me by the person concerned. She was a young singer who was to make a name for herself through New Zealand. Lund asked her to help him in a concert that was to celebrate the jubilee of his musical career. She took some songs for him to choose from - all popular ballads of the Victorian type. Lund put them aside and suggested others. This changed her whole musical outlook. 'I hadn't known there were such songs,' she said to me. The arts and sciences in this country owe a great deal to foreigners. Think of Julius von Haast in science; Karl Schmitt in Auckland music; van der Velden in Christchurch painting. This is one reason why I hold that we should not limit encouragement of immigration to British stock. Britain herself has benefited immeasurably by welcoming the foreigner.[1942]

This Janus-headed pioneering energy - a constant oscillation between local digging and listening to foreigners - is a feature of 'New Zealand' as of any other worthy nation or culture. The founders of Christchurch brought buckets of this humanistic or spiritual energy with them, and Mulgan himself inherits and deploys it:

> If one wants to understand New Zealand one must understand its parts. All people from the North Cape to Stewart Island are New Zealanders, but with a difference. That difference arises from differences in foundations, climate,

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[1941] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 93.

[1942] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 94.

and landscape and products. In climate and landscape, to say nothing of other factors, there is much more difference between Auckland, and Canterbury and Otago, than between Yorkshire and Devonshire.

[…] Canterbury was a Church of England settlement carefully organised by capable and cultivated men, who entered upon an estate encumbered only by nature, and lightly at that, compared with most of the North Island. There were no Maori wars, no trouble about land ownership. Most of the land was open to the flocks of the sheep-farmer. The more one reads of Canterbury's founders, the more one is impressed by their character and equipment. Probably there never was a special settlement in the Empire more ably led. These men were well educated and could do the spade-work of pioneering and government. That they had lived the lives of the privileged class in an ordered society did not unfit them at all for the change to tent and sod hut. If they had had no actual experience in government, they knew from history something of its theory, and their education gave them refreshment during the years of building from the very ground. In fatigue and solitude - perhaps riding by compass across unroaded plains, or working unfenced stations from lonely huts - they had full minds to fall back upon.

Take James Edward FitzGerald, leader of the colonists who landed in 1850. He was a Cambridge graduate, and held an important position at the British Museum. Long walking tours in Britain and Ireland gave him a knowledge of the life of the people outside his class. In New Zealand he was immigration agent, inspector of the police, newspaper founder and editor, Superintendent of the Province, the colony's first Premier, and when he retired from politics, Auditor-General. He was one of the finest orators in our public life, and his plea during the Maori wars for generous treatment of the Maori is a classic example of idealism loftily expressed. There was Charles Christopher Bowen, who added to the curriculum of Rugby and Cambridge education in France, so that he read French almost as easily as English. Throughout his life Bowen found relaxation in the Greek and Latin classics. 'When scarcely in his twenties,' says Dr Scholefield in his *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, he 'threw himself with enthusiasm and marked ability into the life of the colony'. As private secretary to J.R. Godley, the founder of the Canterbury settlement, Bowen rode from end to end of the South Island. At twenty-two he was Inspector of Police, and at twenty-four, Provincial Treasurer. In 1860 he went to Peru, crossed the Andes with Clements Markham, the famous explorer (an association that bore fruit many years later in Bowen's help to Scott in his Antarctic exploration), and in the United States and Canada formed friendships with many intellectuals, including Longfellow, Lowell, and Oliver Wendell Holmes. Returning to Canterbury Bowen held provincial offices before he entered national politics. In that field he is best known as the pilot through the House of the Bill of 1877 that established a national system of education, which displaced the uneven provincial arrangements.

This man of 'very attractive manners and quick perception, with great tact and far-reaching ability' (Alfred Saunders, the historian) was Speaker of the Legislative Council in the last years of his life. His activities varied from

> the founding of Canterbury University College to a directorship in the New Zealand Shipping Company, formed to trade with England, and the care of Hagley Park and the public gardens, which delight every visitor to the city. As a poet he is remembered chiefly by verses written in 1861 in which with remarkable precision he forecast the help given by the then colonies to Britain in wars for freedom.
>
> Such a career illustrates the quality of the flower of our pioneers, and the very wide scope that this country gave for the exercise of their talents. It was the all-round man rather than the specialist who was needed in those early days.[1943]

Without shying away from a xenophobic rentier streak in Christchurch and Canterbury life (still visible in our time), Mulgan above all celebrates a healthy connection to land and literature unique to the region and enriching to 'New Zealand' identity:

> Coming to the work of colonisation at that period in English history and at the farthest distance from England, such men were not prepared to be governed in their daily round from London. […] John Robert Godley, chief founder of Canterbury, said he would rather be governed by Nero on the spot than by a Board of Angels in London. So the Canterbury settlement joined the rest of New Zealand in demanding self-government, and Britain gave them a constitution only thirteen years after the country had been very reluctantly annexed.
>
> Canterbury was at first a homogeneous settlement. The strength of such a foundation lies in its cohesion, organised direction, cooperative character, and common purpose. Ideals are set up and to a considerable extent respected, and a kind of family loyalty is brought to the enterprise. […] In what might be called Christchurch society, English ways always prevailed. There was, and is, nothing quite like this group anywhere else in New Zealand. Since modern prosperity began, Auckland society has been measured by money and little else. The older families, including missionaries and officials, were neither wealthy nor socially ambitious. Canterbury society has been compounded of money, family, landed interest, and Church. There are, of course, social sets founded on land in other parts; but none has quite the same combination of qualities as Canterbury - that admixture of wealth and background. Years after my Christchurch period, the wife of an English colonel went from Auckland to live in Christchurch, and writing to me about her social experiences, asked: 'Why didn't someone tell me about the First Four Ships?' It was remiss of me not to have done so.
>
> The First Four Ships were the *Mayflower* of Canterbury. They did more than start a settlement; they established a social tone. […] This society has always been closely tied to the land, and in this resembles the general community. I soon noticed that Christchurch was much more land-minded than Auckland. Citizens of Christchurch are accustomed to think in terms of

[1943] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 94-96.

sheep and wheat and horses, and they know a good deal more about them than the Aucklander does about his prosperity-making cow. I could see this in the attitude to the annual Agricultural and Pastoral Show. Christchurch was really interested; it knew what it was talking about. […] The best arable farming land has always been in the South Island, which is one reason why human roots in the land there are deeper than in the North. […] There was plenty of hard work and hardship and sometimes danger, and wool could drop in price and land the sheep-farmer in bankruptcy. Something developed, however, that could be called the lordly life, in the higher ranks at any rate.

[…] I would hate to do any injustice to the Canterbury class I have been describing. If a humble North Island townsman may say so without being suspected of patronage, they have a lot of fine qualities. One of these is a sense of public service. It was inevitable, however, that their rule should be challenged. 'Canterbury Pilgrims', after planning a closed English community, found they could not keep strangers out. The Scots in Otago suffered a similar disappointment. In Canterbury the main lure was sheep country; in Otago it was gold. [Christchurch], this most English of our towns, with its old-world atmosphere and conservative social tradition, has bred very active radicalism. In my day it sent a strong Liberal-Labour contingent to Parliament, and since then, like other big cities, it has given powerful support to Labour. It was Canterbury that bred W.P. Reeves, the main architect of the labour legislation in the 1890s.

[…] I suggest we may find more than one reason for all this: the intellectual interests that the Pilgrims brought with them; the challenge of shopkeeper and manufacturer; and reaction against the rule of the upper class. Canterbury University College was founded in the 1870s. In *New Zealand Now*, Oliver Duff remarks that some of the 'entrenched minority' were more deeply liberal than most of the majority who attacked them. William Pember Reeves was born to a comfortable life. His father, William Reeves, was a farmer and then a business man in the young settlement. He took a share in and managed the *Lyttleton Times* and was in politics for some years. William Reeves was always a Liberal. Pember Reeves was educated at Christ's College, which was the local Church of England Grammar School, and would have studied at Oxford if his health had permitted. William Rolleston, a Cambridge man, who is said to have sworn at his bullock-teams in Greek when he was a runholder, introduced liberal land legislation. Sir Robert Stout, a Shetlander who became Premier, Chief Justice and Chancellor of the New Zealand University, said of Rolleston that he did not know anyone 'who gave a better example of what classical culture could do in humanising mankind'. A later example was Henry Acland. […] In politics Acland belonged to the party that ranked as conservative, but he cherished the principle that every person of every grade was entitled to education.

All this did not prevent the majority from remembering that as a class the minority had looked after its special interest; what minority in power does not? Once when the *Press* was supporting the parliamentary candidature of a member of an old family, a friend said to me: 'The *Press*

> forgets that that lot "grid-ironed" Canterbury.' 'Grid-ironing' was one of the old-time devices by which some landholders so arranged their properties as to keep out land-seeking strangers. Such methods were partially justified by the runholders' insecurity of tenure. Big holdings, leading to monopoly, were to a large extent a necessary stage in New Zealand's development, and the monopoly did not last long. Sheep could be profitably handled only on large areas, and this remains true of much of the back country today. Small farming was difficult and even precarious before refrigeration was successfully tried in 1882, and it was only a few years later that the Liberal-Labour Government began to press owners of large estates to subdivide. By 1906 the Government had taken for subdivision one hundred and twenty estates, in various districts, with a total of 680,000 acres. Many of the small farmers who were planted on these subdivisions, walked onto land already greatly improved. While North Island progress was being retarded by Maori wars and other special difficulties, big estates in the South Island found much of the money that kept the country going.
>
> However, Cheviot was in the South, and the more radical-minded were not likely to forget what happened there. A rich territory of 84,000 acres in one ownership ran 60,000 sheep and supported some 40 persons. Challenged by the trustees of the property to reduce the valuation or buy it, the Government bought it and cut it up for close settlement. Within a year, says Reeves, 'a thriving yeomanry, numbering nearly 900 souls and owning 74,000 sheep, 1,500 cattle, and 500 horses', were at work there. The use of the word 'yeomanry' in this context by a man like Reeves, is a pointer to social conditions in Canterbury sixty years ago. Since that time, the value of Cheviot in land production and human industry has greatly increased. Many of the small farmers placed on the land throughout New Zealand by Liberal-Labour policy voted the party out in later years. The promise of better opportunity to acquire the freehold was a factor. Cheviot, however, provided an historic example of an industrious apprentice who remained true to his master's teaching. As a young man George Forbes drew a section in the original Cheviot ballot, and began his life there by living in a tent. He was elected member for the district, rose to Prime Minister in a Liberal and then in a Coalition Government, and after retiring from political life with thirty-five years' service, during which time he sat for the same constituency, died on his farm.[1944]

Mulgan's dawning sense of national identity was nevertheless aesthetic before it was economic or political; travelling through Arthur's Pass in Canterbury with his wife Marguerita, for example, he realised that

> there is an undying fascination about the word 'pass'. It suggests exploration, danger, mystery, the majesty of mountains, the march of armies, the mystery of the unknown. […] Behind the rain-curtain on the west was the snow-capped mountain mass. We were tingling with excitement as we walked through the intermittent rain. We had burst into a

[1944] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 97, 99, 103-105.

> new world, and how much better it was, we felt, to make this entry on our feet and at our leisure! We were wet and tired when we arrived at the Bealey Hotel. The hostelry was rich in memories of coach travellers housed over decades, but we had it to ourselves, which added to the sense of adventure. We felt, as one often does travelling, that the service had been set up for our special benefit. Sitting that evening by a big fire, having dined well, we experienced that rare feeling of really deep content which comes from physical well-being joined to mental and spiritual exaltation. […] To break into new country and taste its beauty, grandeur and mystery, by oneself, especially when one is young, is a memorable experience. How much more so to do this with the best-loved of companions to share to the full the quality and depth of excitement! At the top of the pass, which is flanked by snow-peaks and glaciers, we saw alpine flora for the first time.
>
> […] Our first incursion into the Canterbury high country made us feel we deserved, in some slight measure at any rate, to be considered Southerners as well as Northerners. We began to appreciate more fully the life-pull of that country on the Canterbury-born. This corresponded to our own implanted love of northern tree-fringed bays, tidal flats, and the tang of a tea-tree fire. On journeys north to Auckland from Christchurch, I felt as the train climbed out of Wellington, that I could savour the characteristic scent of the North Island. It is slightly sweet and damp and balmy, a suggestion of the sub-tropical, as against the cleaner, drier scent that the wind brings from the tussock land. We had passed to another stage in our education as New Zealanders.[1945]

The multiplying effect - in this case of scent - extends to all spheres of culture: after the experience of New Zealand's South, Mulgan felt more 'Northern' than ever, just as any New Zealander finds her identity as a human being - and hence as a 'New Zealander', 'American', 'Chinese', 'woman' or anything else - sharpened via contact with the best of foreign culture, or indeed the best of culture period, regardless of origin. The advance of this cosmopolitan 'Spiritual Humanism' as a *political* creed - 'liberal' *par excellence* - was nevertheless halted by the advent of World War One, which led to a polarisation of politics along materialistic lines:

> Later on, the Labour Party, an organisation separate from the Liberals, rose from small things to be the official Opposition, swept into office with a huge majority, and governed the country for fourteen consecutive years. That in politics nothing is impossible is a lesson many today are slow to learn. The seeming security of today may be a wrecked position of tomorrow, and nothing is more hazardous than political prophecy.
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> In Christchurch I was with my paper in its general policy. However, what I felt about politics, and better men than I felt, was soon to be like the twittering of sparrows in a raging storm. In 1914 the first world war broke out.[1946]

[1945] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 100-102.

[1946] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 105-106.

‘War and Its Effects’

> *The war of 1914-1918 was the end of an era, not only for New Zealand and the British Commonwealth, but for the world. Society before 1914, national and international, was compounded of many forces, states of mind, and ideals. Progress was conceived as a law of nature. Competition in armaments went hand in hand with a strong movement for international peace. The humanitarian impulse fought vigorously against exploitation of individuals and peoples, whether by private or State enterprise. Slavery was abhorrent to civilised peoples. As in the Dreyfus case, injustice to the individual might evoke indignation at the ends of the earth. International law had some real force. Europe had developed a measure of moral order, and something of a conscience. The atrocities in the Congo Free State and in the Putamayo region of South America raised a storm of protest. In the two world wars to come, there were to be hundreds of Congos and Putamayos, some of them sunk in the abyss of wholesale and hideous cruelty that would have seemed quite incredible in the pre-war time. I make this point because one has to be fairly old to remember what life was like in those days. There were no concentration camps, unless one could give that title to the Czar’s Siberian prisons. The most efficient secret police were bungling and soft-hearted amateurs compared with the Gestapo and the agents of other totalitarian States. There was freedom to go about the world. Permits to leave one’s country were not required, and you could travel over Europe without a passport. Save for tariff barriers, there were no official fetters on trade. There was comparatively little interference with freedom of expression. Commerce in thought was free. Then the crash came, or rather crashes, with an uneasy and in some places brutal armistice between - the two world wars were really one - and everything in the moral order was challenged.*[1947]

World War One, Mulgan argues along with contemporary English journalists like Robert Fisk and Peter Hitchens, took a toll on European Christianity from which it will never recover: a God which can arms-foldedly condone human suffering on such a scale is no God worth having. Only a Christianity ‘transfigured’ for the modern age will now do; Mulgan is interested in how his ‘New Zealand’ - and by extension, his humanity - will ever reach such a horizon. If nothing else, the war offered ample opportunities for study; one such vector was the debate surrounding compulsory military service:

[1947] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 107.

> Among the many things that Britons brought with them to New Zealand was a firm trust in the Navy as a first line of defence […] and a strong preference for the volunteer as against what was called the pressed man. Old prejudices were imported in some measure - the popular dislike and neglect of the Army and the curious idea that it was an infringement of liberty to compel a man to fight or prepare to fight for his country.
>
> In Britain the Army had been treated in such a way by the populace that one could say that even at its worst it was better than the nation deserved. G.M. Trevelyan, a Liberal historian, calls this attitude towards compulsion a new and strange definition of liberty. Compulsory service was part of the ancient law of England, and to Plantagenet or Tudor it was quite natural.[1948]

Mulgan links this liberal defence of conscription to the quaint view that economic power is distinct from military power; rather than imagining, as we do, that the rich can afford their own superior weapons, he suggests that the poor can and will always find ways to rise up if they feel themselves to be the victims of injustice. Once unleashed, however, the forces of victimhood have a tendency to coagulate into a revenge which has nothing to do with equity; members of free societies must hence be forced to defend them:

> History's infinite capacity for producing surprise was, perhaps, never displayed so startlingly as in the two world wars of this century. It was the weakness of so many people before those two wars that they did not realise history could so behave. They could not imagine that new and evil forces might arise to challenge the whole system of order and possession. Some of them were exceptionally well educated men in high places. They had studied history; did it never occur to them that the 'Have-nots' might again challenge the 'Haves', but this time backed by the armoury of modern science? 'For Solon said well to Croesus, when in ostentation he showed him his gold, 'Sir, if any other come that hath better iron than you, he will be master of all this gold.' Many of those who were deceived by the Kaiser's Germany and Hitler's had studied the history of ancient Greece. Philip of Macedon's methods of conquest closely resembled Hitler's.[1949]

The 'system of order and possession' to which Mulgan is primarily referring is of course the warts-and-all British Empire, the grotesque underbelly of which he systematically underestimates. The First World War, however, jolted 'New Zealand' into adult, and hence critical, self-awareness:

> Our sons and brothers and friends, men who had never thought seriously of war till a few months earlier and had undergone only a short training, were now thrown into a first-class battle where the odds were all against them. Never before had a landing in such conditions been attempted. We had read about such clashes, the mass of men flung into the fight and taking

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[1948] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 108.

[1949] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 109.

ground and fighting desperately to hold it. Now it had happened to us, to those men of ours whom we had never thought of as soldiers, but good ordinary chaps of farm, factory, shop and office,

> Whose consecrated souls we failed
> To note between the common guise,
> Till all-revealing death unveiled
> The splendour of your sacrifice.

So Gallipoli brought three shocks: bereavement, realisation, and compliment. […] The mood of New Zealand when it received the news of the Gallipoli landing could never be repeated.

[…] The effect of that first war was to make New Zealand grow up at a jump. The war strengthened nationalism everywhere, to the embarrassment of those who had to draw new frontiers. It did so with us. A boy, with a boy's feelings, had been given a man's job and done it well. Our young men had battled with their peers, if not actually 'on the ringing plains of windy Troy', at any rate, not far from there. This made us think more of ourselves and about ourselves. If the growth of nationalism is encouraged in one direction, it is apt to develop in others. New Zealanders began to see more clearly that their country was not just another Britain, but a different land, with a history and destiny of its own. It must think its own thoughts and find its own methods of expression.

Though ties with Britain were not weakened with the war, but strengthened, the critical spirit towards Britain was stimulated along certain lines. There have always been New Zealanders who have been depressed and angered by social conditions in the Motherland, especially the lot of the poor. They could not fit in with the system of social privilege, especially before it was modified by two wars. This feeling was particularly common among the young. A visit to England has pushed many a colonial to the Left in politics. In the first war large numbers of New Zealand soldiers made England their home away from the front, and saw English life at close hand. They were highly appreciative of British hospitality, and of that vast body of history and culture which we may call the English (or if you like it better, British) heritage, but is really the possession of all British peoples. Many of them, however, could not help noticing things they thought wrong.[1950]

The same dynamics of esteem that complicate relationships between individual people extend to communities and nations; healthy self-worth relies on the honest admission that foreigners are better at some things and we are better at others. The wars helped Mulgan's 'New Zealand' to appreciate that, for all it lacked Britain's Shakespeares and Johnsons, it could actually compete with her:

> As C.E. Montague notes sadly in his book *Disenchantment*, troops from the Dominions were sometimes bluntly critical of their comrades from Britain. The two lots of men sprang from very different social and economic

[1950] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 110-112.

> conditions. The colonial is quick to learn, adaptable and resourceful, a born improvisor, and ready to move without orders. His society is not classless, and can exhibit forms of snobbery no less offensive thatn the worst of England's, but its caste system is loose, and there has never been any feudal patronage. To a much greater extent than in England a man is judged by what he does, not by his origin and social status. […] Even in the second war, when to a much greater extent British commissioned ranks had been open to talent, a New Zealander told me he disliked the way British officers spoke to their men. He did not mean that they spoke offensively. What he disliked was the clipped, curt method of command, as if from a superior class to an inferior. This springs from a fundamental difference between English society and colonial. In England, social classes have been carefully graded on a system rooted in history. […] English graduations and deferences have been liable to irritate the colonial in peace and exasperate him in war. Perhaps he declares, with appropriate adjectives, that the whole thing should be swept away, and at once. Such a thing would be impossible, at any rate without wrecking the show. You could no more so change the character of Englishmen and their institutions in a day, than you could induce New Zealanders and Australians to use the goose-step. What the English can do is to loosen up their system, and that they have been doing.
>
> At any rate, our success in war and our feeling that in certain respects we were superior to our Mother, nourished national feeling, induced a deeper pride in our own country.[1951]

'The English of the Line'

Such 'pride', however healthy in the right doses, becomes sinful when it exaggerates or starts to look down its nose: 'Every community that is a member of a war alliance tends to see its contribution to the cause out of its due proportion,'[1952] Mulgan admits, before warning of the dangers of doing so. If 1930s German and Japanese nationalism contained obvious pathological elements hostile to a truly patriotic (and therefore humanistic) spirit which unselfishly celebrates the best of both self and other, the emerging 'New Zealand nationalism' after Gallipoli, based on the myth that New Zealand soldiers were categorically better than English ones, urgently needed to be nipped in the bud. Mulgan's verses 'The English of the Line', written after World War One and republished during World War Two, therefore go out of their way to celebrate the anonymous *English* soldier's honest service and reluctance for self-promotion:

> I took two types of the English Tommy -
>
> poor Tommy of the line,
> Of the unromantic regiments whose blood is yours and mine.

[1951] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 113-115.

[1952] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 116.

> […] They lack the Celtic glamour, and they do not advertise.
> They leave their story to be found by him who cares to read,
> From Minden on past Waterloo - a Pantheon of deed.

> [… There was] Hodge, the farm labourer, 'stood rooted in the aged soil, while the freedom slowly gained,/ Flowed past him to the swelling town, and left him fettered fast,/ In the land he saved so often, to the pillars of the past', and Smith, 'the child of old and reeking slum, where souls are packed like cattle, and the clean winds never come'. At the end, I asked if England could rise to such greatness with the weight of so much wrong, what might she not do if she made her nation a real brotherhood. I rejoice that since I wrote these verses the lot of Hodge and Smith has been so substantially improved. […] I wrote of Hodge 'plodding through the hopeless years on a precipice of care', and 'finding haven in the workhouse ward - a large and lordly share'. […] My Hodge answered the call in 1914 as his fathers used to do, and
>
> Fought hard for England's honour, and his master's league-long lands,
> And his own poor, leaky cottage, and the labour of his hands.[1953]

This virtue of accepting, not one's economic or social fate or local injustices, but the responsibilities of defending one's Homeland from foreign evil, was also celebrated, to Mulgan's delight, by Maurice Hewlett in his 'The Song of the Plow': Hewlett's 'Hodge' likewise 'made no boast; grudged no old scar,/ Sought nothing that he had not got,/ But took his place affronting war,/The slow, the patient child of Earth,/ By them on whom a happier star/ Shone to forecast a happier birth.'[1954]

Although it foregrounded individual heroism, or perhaps precisely *because* it did so, the First World War smashed the collective myths which had held the British Empire together; beyond religion, an alienation crying out for rejuvenation bled gradually into economics and politics:

> A slower and much more important reaction was produced by the impact of war on old values. The war shattered these, or so shook them that people had to re-examine their foundations. Put briefly, the main new consideration was life versus property. The unprecedented loss of life in the war, and the army of maimed, lessened the importance of property as a political, social, economic or moral factor. If human life was conscripted, why not property? The only real answer to this was that it was not expedient, not practicable. However, in the first and second wars, property was drawn upon to a far greater extent than ever before. Besides, the first war dealt a death blow to the old doctrine of *laissez-faire*, that is, that the State should leave things alone. Societies at war found that the State simply could not leave things alone, and that when peace came, the clock could not be put back. And, as I have said, in the minds of very many persons the importance of property declined in comparison with life, and when I say life I do not only mean the

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[1953] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 117-118.

[1954] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 118.

> question of whether a man should live or die with a gun in his hand; I mean life in its various aspects: good health, more certainty of employment, a better chance for women and children, education, higher standards of living, the fuller life all round. Here it was that Liberalism was caught between two forces, Conservatism and Labour. It had left *laissez-faire* far behind, but could not march towards socialism. It had to attempt some compromise between State intervention and the preservation of individual freedom. It is not surprising that many persons ultimately found both the older parties unsatisfying and embraced Labour. In this country the Liberals ceased to exist as a separate party, but leavened both the older parties. They liberalised Conservatism and steadied Labour. Before long I found myself moving to the Left. I think that in the following thirty years I moved a good way, but I have never surrendered what I believe to be the liberal creed.[1955]

The survival or otherwise of the antitotalitarian left is in many respects the global economic and political drama of *our* time too, but if such a creed flourished spontaneously under conditions of war, at least within nations like New Zealand, it cannot be expected to do so in peacetime without subtle and sustained humanistic effort:

> In 1945 the victors looked back to the victory of 1918 and the disillusion and disappointment that followed. In 1918 we were full of hope. In 1945 we had hope, but we knew more.
>
> It is not my business to set out at any length what went wrong. We underestimated the strength and resourcefulness of evil in the world. We did not realise that national feeling, so admirable and wholesome up to a point, would become so strong, general, complex and dangerous. We were much less well prepared for peace-making than in 1945. We created the League of Nations, and then betrayed it. The difference between the tasks of war and peace is profound, and the victors failed in the armistice years because they did not fully realise this. In war there is the cohesive force of a common effort called forth by a common and clearly seen danger. The nation achieves an immense measure of cooperation, an exaltation of spirit, a marvellous degree of fortitude. At the time, we tend to think we can carry this common purpose into peace, but when peace comes the cohesive force is weakened, old differences return, disillusionment creeps in, as it did in the twenties and thirties, and the defeatist finds a nourishing seed-bed laid out for his planting.[1956]

The only stable foundation for a humane liberalism, in other words, is an individual sense of vocation which transcends money and believes in work for its own sake, not because of any real or imagined external threat or reward; in the middle of World War One, Mulgan's thoughts turned from the world's problems to the not unrelated question of his own legacy:

[1955] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 119-120.

[1956] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 120.

In 1916 I returned to the *Auckland Star*. […] By forty a man should have found himself. He should have marked out his line, have formed some idea of what he can do. The joys of childhood and youth may be more ecstatic, just as the sorrows may seem more piercing and shattering, but the years should bring balance and philosophy.

I was going on for thirty-five when I went back to Auckland, and it was not till later that I began to acquire some confidence and settle down to a pattern in my work. I overcame the difficulty in my speech sufficiently well to do a fair amount of public speaking, including lectures in journalism at Auckland University College for eleven years. Taking stock in my mid-thirties of what I had done did not give me any satisfaction. If a mouse may think of a lion, I thought of Milton writing his sonnet at having arrived at the age of twenty-three - twenty-three, mind you.

> How soon hath time, the subtle thief of youth,
> Stolen on his wing my three and twentieth year!
> My hasting days fly on with full career,
> But my late spring no bud or blossom showeth.

Many a would-be writer has thought of that sonnet, and sighed. Yet by the time he was twenty-three Milton had written the 'Nativity Ode'. The only book I had published before I returned to Auckland was *The New Zealand Citizen*, written in collaboration with my father. I had written some verses, few if any of which I would wish remembered. Now, though there was a full newspaper job to do, which entailed keeping up with events at home and abroad, there was a better chance of writing books.[1957]

'Words for New Zealand'

> *This seems an appropriate place to say something about writing, and particularly in and for New Zealand. The end of the first world war was a rough landmark in our cultural history. Our stronger sense of nationalism stimulated our literature, and the last thirty years have been much more productive in quantity and quality. I was fortunate in being brought up in a reading family, and taught by men who had a true sense of the value of words. Without any particular prodding I graduated through boys' books to the English poets and novelists. Thanks to my father, I knew bits of Macaulay's* Lays *at quite a tender age, and I have always been grateful for this. I suggest that Macaulay has been the means of introducing more men and women to poetry than any other writer. He has the action and rhetoric a child likes, and there is enough real poetry in him to plant the seeds of good taste. What a fine companion he is through*

[1957] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 122-123.

life - how many situations his easily-remembered verse fits, and how many memories of him are recalled by events![1958]

Who now can say that such words accompany them? Crises of humanistic learning notwithstanding, Mulgan is clear that art and economics should not be separated; once poetry severs its connection with the business of daily life, it ceases to provide the fuel for truly 'vocational' activity on which a left-liberal economic order is premised:

> I went on to the great poets, and many minor ones. Shakespeare is first in my affections, and after him Tennyson, Browning, Wordsworth and Matthew Arnold. I say 'affections' purposely. Milton is the second greatest poet in English, and 'Lycidas' the greatest poem of middle length, which I could not trust myself to read aloud for fear of breaking down, but as a companion Milton may be a little difficult; he was so to his family. In the application of poetry to the everyday scenes, happenings and problems of life, I am not sure I would not place Tennyson first of all. It is not only that, as Sir John Squire has written, 'the whole English countryside, the whole English climate are within his covers', but he has the right line or lines for innumerable situations from the trivial to the deepest problems of life and death. […] Some critics of Tennyson remind me of the man who thanked God he was an atheist.
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> […] Words have always fascinated me, and they do so more and more as I grow older. That the simplest words, used in a certain order and for a certain occasion, should have the power to move us so profoundly, is a continual mystery. A.E. Housman asks what there is in six simple words of Milton, 'Nymphs and shepherds, dance no more', that can draw tears. 'What in the world is there to cry about? Why have the mere words the physical effect of pathos when the sense of the passage is blithe and gay?' Because they are poetry, he replies. Snatches of an old song - words by John Ingelow - that was popular when I was young, often come into my mind.
>
> When sparrows build, and the leaves break forth,
> My old sorrow wakes and cries
>
> and 'We shall part no more in the wind and the rain'. That last line recurs to me again and again as I walk alone in the wind and the rain. Why? No doubt I cannot wholly dissociate the music from the words, but why all the fuss about such a simple idea clothed in such simple words? Certainly there is the pathos of parting, but when the writer of a crooner's song tackles separation is the result anything more than expense of spirit in a waste of glue? The answer again is that these lines are poetry, and poetry affects the emotions.

[1958] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 124.

> Poetry is a great stand-by in life. In an English radio talk on the art of living, there was mention of a man who could wait for hours on railway station platforms not only with contentment but with pleasure, because he could go through a mass of music in his mind, including all the Beethoven symphonies. Poetry and prose serve a similar purpose. You can pass the time in recollection of beauty and grandeur, and draw out pieces to suit all sorts of situations. The New Zealander does not stop at poetry from Britain. That is his basis, but into his collection, his literary rag-bag he throws from time to time bits from writers of his own country. 'Rosalind has come to town, all the street's a meadow.' 'The hour-glass fills with weather, like a wine of slow content.' 'The faith of a willow in winter, or a blind hound nosing the knee.' 'The high white windy stars.' 'Otaki, that rollest in thy pride.' 'From the dark gorge where burns the morning star.' 'They played him home to the House of Stones all the way, all the way.' These are some of the New Zealand lines I have put, with bits of English poetry, into my mental travelling bag.[1959]

Poetry connects us, somehow, to life as a whole, and smashes through the laws of animal survival and mercantile accumulation as it does so, thereby liberating us for higher moral engagement with the world; any person's 'canon' or 'mental travelling bag' must include at least *some* 'local' words if the authenticity of the universal is to be achieved in her. Mulgan's 'New Zealander' must do more than memorise English, American, Maori or any other words (though that would be a good start); she must creatively transform them into her own poetry:

> New Zealanders must use, cherish, and pass on the magnificent body of English prose and verse, ancient, modern and evergrowing, that is their joint possession, but it will not entirely suffice for their needs. In the imported soil of language and tradition, but in new sunshine, wind and rain, we must grow our own prose and poetry. Some of the subjects and points of view of English literature must be alien to new societies. Nature herself imposes a bar to complete communion. The seasons furnish the most obvious example. […] 'Memory was given to man,' it has been said, 'that he might have roses in December.' December? Why, that's the month our summer holidays begin, and it's full of roses. […] In reading English literature we have to make an unending series of adjustments in season, landscape and social habit. In writing we have to adapt our inherited instrument of language to our own life, our land and its ways of thought and speech. […] My idea is that as the years pass, provided we do not butcher pronunciation unmercifully, Maori words will gradually creep into our minds and hearts and become an integral part of our inner life. […] Poetry has been defined as emotion recollected in tranquillity. Sometimes the experience lies more or less dormant in the mind for years.
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> […] One thing more about my liking for poetry may be added, because it illustrates as well as anything the changes I have gone through. When I was young I saw little or nothing in Walt Whitman. He seemed pretty

[1959] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 125-126.

ordinary, eccentric, and rather vulgar. I could not stomach his unconventionality. I have come to admire him greatly. Why? For one reason, because I have grown more thoroughly colonial. I recognise in him something akin to our own British colonial frontier spirit - an independence, a freedom, a worship of nature, different from the attitudes of Englishmen. Whitman is the essence of colonialism in literature. Poems like 'President Lincoln's Funeral Hymn', ('When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloomed') and 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!' speak with the accent of a new world, and New Zealand is a new world.

Meanwhile much was happening to literature in New Zealand. The process that had been going on in me had been working in others, and sometimes more quickly. […] We are apt to forget that the Pilgrim Fathers landed as far back as 1620, and that there was an earlier colony in Virginia. New Zealand has had a short infancy, childhood and adolescence. It was born, moreover, not before or early in the industrial revolution, but in the middle of it. Railways and steamers were running before the Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840. The development of this colonial child was forced. We were not quite sixty years old when, on sending our first troops to South Africa, we began to think we might be a nation. In a period of less than fifty years from that time, we fought in history's two greatest wars, and with a strength and in a geographical range that our grandfathers would have thought fantastic. It was as if a youth of eighteen, looking forward with no misgivings to a conventional coming of age, was suddenly called upon to play a man's part in a long, complicated and tragic family crisis. […] Our own literature has not known anything comparable to the long-continued, confident, large-family life that American literature enjoyed in the nineteenth century, and into the twentieth. Before the first war ours was something like an infant crying in the night, crying in a back-room with no one heeding it. When a new stimulus and prospect of better sales came to our writers, the greater world to which they looked for models and often for markets was sophisticated, disillusioned, and bitter. There was no pleasant undergraduate period. If a New Zealander wrote another *Huckleberry Finn*, his main object would probably be to depict Huck as the pitiful victim of a conscienceless capitalist economy, and the story might be drowned in a flood of propaganda.

In order to progress, New Zealand literature had to do two things. It had to move away from the dual world of which Katikati was an example, where one foot was in New Zealand, and the other so firmly in 'Home'. It had to see a tui as an Englishman sees a robin, and tea-tree as a Scot sees heather. This feeling had to be woven into the creation of character, into an intellectual fabric. The local must not be scorned because it is local, or the small because it is small. Like writers in every land, the New Zealander draws inspiration from local landscape and its life. To love one's country but to give particular devotion to the place of one's birth or early associations, is a common condition. We shall follow Britain and America in the development of regional literature. If that literature is to be vital, however, interpretation must make a bridge between the small and perhaps remote scene, and humanity. We shall derive much of our best prose and

> verse from local attachments, for through our deep and passionate concentration on the particular we shall express the truth in general.[1960]

Although modernist 'self-denial' - the eschewing of a too-easy lyricism, romanticism and sentimentality in favour of the obscure reference - is for Mulgan (as for Ivor Brown) 'rooted in a species of integrity'[1961], the fact that lowbrow culture can morph into a moneymaking modern 'industry' ought not to prevent artists - as distinct from hucksters and charlatans of all kinds - from pursuing memorability as a goal in their work. Mulgan is less concerned with the fate of the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, or the risk of bad writers making millions of dollars in a free cultural marketplace, than he is with just remuneration for the real thing:

> Generally speaking, New Zealanders now write more as men of the world than they used, and less as New Zealanders, though the New Zealand background is often plainly there. […] Postwar New Zealand poetry has widened the poet's technique and human experience, but, in my opinion, it shares the defects of contemporary English poetry, which to a considerable extent has been its teacher. Both master and pupil have become afraid and scornful of simple emotion, and have deified the intellect in involuted thought. […] Maybe this is because I am old and memory does not feed easily on new pastures. If, however, the new verse is less easily memorised, I submit this is a distinct weakness. Poetry should be a companion capable of being called up at any moment.
>
> […] Another feature of much of the poetry of the twenties and after is that poets seem positively to dislike popularity. Poetry is more a coterie affair than before. Poets used to write for a public; now many of them appear to write largely for other poets. Yet I salute the greater vitality and range of much of our newer poetry in New Zealand. In fiction, essay-writing, history, biography and criticism, there is a similar gain. Our writers concern themselves to a greater extent with the general life of the nation. We are more self-critical, and are better equipped for the job. The historian and biographer have access to a much larger mass of material, and scholarship is thereby nourished. Oliver Duff's *New Zealand Now* and M.H. Holcroft's philosophical essays are the product of history working on fine minds, and those minds are the children of that history.
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> Our literature, like that of other countries in these swaying years, has become charged with propaganda. The time is out of joint, and it is the artist's business to set it right. In some quarters the doctrine is preached that all art must be propaganda. This must be rejected by anyone who values the liberal, humane tradition of letters. I had an amusing experience of this obsession. A few years ago I wrote a short story about a mild-mannered clerk who was fond of poetry. Going to his office one morning about under the influence of spring and Keats, he told his employer just what he thought of him, and was sacked on the spot. The story ended with the clerk breaking the news to his wife and making a joke about it that

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[1960] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 127-131.

[1961] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 132.

bewildered her. A Leftist critic said of the story that he was less interested in it than in what happened to the clerk after he had been thrown out of employment by our economic system. Well, well! Mine was a very modest little effort, but if this is the criterion of literature, quite a number of the classics will have to be rewritten. I will say one thing; my hero clerk would not have whined about his lot.

We are not strong yet in wit or humour. Irony is suspect. Our public speeches are apt to be dreary processions of platitude. This lack of native humour is a little curious. New Zealand is a magnificently endowed country and prides itself on its high standard of health, education, and general living. Why has it produced so little literature that is joyous, or even happy? Oliver Duff notes that the Cockney is readier with jokes. We are a frontier country, but we have nothing to put beside the frontier humour of America. Perhaps the explanation lies partly in that compression of our youth to which I have referred. So many of our writers seem convinced that this is always a vale of tears. Browning has a poem about a dying man who refused to regard life as a vale of tears, but apparently what Browning said is not evidence these days.

How has the author fared in this improvement? He has benefited by it, but I have yet to meet or hear of anyone who has made anything like a fortune on the local market. There is a good deal of misconception and some cant about the rewards of writing. It is beneath the dignity of letters to work for money; devotion to literature should be its own reward. It is true that genius may break out under compulsion to express itself, whether it is paid or not. It is also true, however, that many geniuses have written for money, and that some of them might not have written if there had not been the urge to make a living. Sometimes money is the spur that genius or high talent needs to make it take its coat off. Briefless barristers and hard-up doctors - Conan Doyle is an example - have written in their spare time and thereby found fame and fortune. But the rewards? The public is dazzled by the success of popular books. They do not realise that numbers of well-written books have only a small sale and bring their authors little. It is a revelation to find from the returns of Civil List Pensions in England how many distinguished writers have been forced to accept this aid from the State. The reason is that there is no such thing as a profession of literature, in the sense that law, medicine, engineering and architecture are professions. The demand for the services of writers is unpredictable. Writing is not a profession; it is an adventure - often the best fun in the world - a gamble.

When I had been writing books for twenty years, I made a calculation. Beginning with my collaboration in *Maori and Pakeha*, a history of New Zealand, in 1921, I had written ten books, some of which had had a fair success. Some were published in England and others in New Zealand. Four of them were very small and two of these four were verse. I found that all the money I had received from my books, straight-out payments and royalties, did not equal my salary as a journalist for one year. If all this surprises you, consider the average novel in England. It does not sell more than two thousand copies, or did not before the second war. If the author is

> paid a shilling a copy royalty, he receives a hundred pounds. It may have taken him a year or more to write the book. The most money I have ever received for a book was for *The City of the Strait*, the Centennial History of Wellington, which was a commissioned job. Even in England only a small proportion of writers give their whole time to writing. They spend writing days in salaried employment. A woman writer may have a husband to support her. There are so many writers in the English Civil Service that they have formed a Civil Service Authors' Club.
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> […] Obviously, however, the smallness of our population is a serious handicap to the native writer. He may capture the many times larger market overseas, but in trying to do so he may be tempted to be false to his art. The English publisher may prefer an English setting to a New Zealand one, but the New Zealand writer cannot know the English scene as well as he knows his own. One reason why New Zealand needs more population, is to nourish the cultural life generally. We should have more writers, more artists, more musicians and more people to maintain them.
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> Meanwhile the State has come to the aid of literature in three ways. Shortly after the first Labour Government took office in 1935, it introduced pensions for writers of standing whom circumstances had not treated well. In the year of the Dominion's Centennial, the Government published a series of national surveys which set a high standard of format as well as of content, and payment to the author. Later the same Government established an annual grant for the publication or writing of books that were not likely to be published on the ordinary commercial basis, and set up a committee to advise upon allocation.[1962]

Mulgan is grappling, in this extended passage, with the same question of the humanities' proper relationship to capitalism which still confronts Charlie Tyson a century on from World War One:

> When I chose to go to graduate school in literature, I did so with the maximum possible moral smugness. I dropped meaningful hints among my consultant-friends about the 'coarse imperatives of business' and the 'disfiguring strictures of our capitalist order', all of which, I suggested, I would sidestep by bowing into the university's hallowed halls.
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> You know how the story ends, how the academy makes advertisers of us all. Exhortations to promote our work, to lure undergraduates into our courses, to specialize in a sexy brand or niche, […] turn nearly every young scholar into a walking PR firm.[1963]

[1962] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 131-135.

[1963] Charlie Tyson, 'The Rise of Reassurance Lit', https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Rise-of-Reassurance-Lit/248145?key=sDFk4Qum8UZIcp0FmqC6TvIRRHuWiEahZODOVAOTp1xpa_FyukV30HoCz0rgqZGTNEFBZGpDVXdJZ0tMdktaWm9ueUFDNnViUGc0ZDZpbFVMdUhqUFE2UmJYYw, 28/2/2020 (accessed 5/3/2020).

Like Tyson, however, Mulgan realises it would be a grave mistake for writers - whether of highbrow fiction or academic prose - to wallow in self-pity about the fact that their work cannot sustain itself in an unsubsidised marketplace. If the temptations of Twitter look more and more (paraphrasing Tyson) like 'an obligation to self-advertise', this does not change the meaning of artistic engagement any more than it addresses the problem of 'just remuneration' for creative labour, which is, as Mulgan shows without solving it, political before it is economic; shameless self-promotion might work as an income-generator in the short term, but 'justice' is always the deeper and more lasting satisfaction. Like his honest English 'Tommy of the line', Mulgan's artist works a day job as she has to, and she hopes to be widely read and remembered, but she above all 'does not advertise'.

'"Home" and the English'

> *In 1926 a dream came true; I visited England. I was able to do so through the generosity of Sir Cecil Leys and his co-directors of the* Auckland Star*, who gave me leave on full pay and a handsome cheque for expenses. I wrote a book about my visit, and how it came to be written is worth telling as an example of the way opportunity may come to a man. If it had been a completely overcast day when we went up the English Channel in the Tainui, perhaps my book would not have been written.*
>
> *[…] As I described how the rain came down on the scene, and went, and the sun shone, [a certain Mr Squire] quoted some lines from [Francis Thompson's]* The Hound of Heaven*: 'I dimly guess what Time in mists confounds.' A little later I had a postcard from Squire. 'Can you see me? I have an idea.' When I saw him, he told me he had been talking to Mr Robert Longman, of Longmans, Green & Co. He had mentioned what I had said about my first sight of England, and suggested there might be a book in it. Mr Longman was interested. So was I![1964]*

If I am making a case for the lasting global value of *The Making of a New Zealander*, it was Mulgan's *Home* that won him the right kind of recognition while he was alive:

> The book brought me letters from people in various parts of the world, and was the foundation of friendships. A retired major of the Indian Army wrote me from Surrey. Some years afterwards he walked into my office in Auckland quite unexpectedly, and told me it was largely a result of reading my book that he had come to see New Zealand. However, the appreciation of *Home* that pleases me most is something I heard of only in recent years. A New Zealand prisoner of war reported that 'the book all the men in the

[1964] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 136-137.

> camp were after, was *Home* by Alan Mulgan.' If a man writes a book that cheers the lot of prisoners of war, he may legitimately say he has not written entirely in vain.[1965]

The weighty pull of the Mother Country - London in particular - remains for New Zealanders (second-generation ones and British Passport-holders like me in particular) well into the 21st Century, so one can only imagine the nostalgia of the wartime generation, fighting for an empire whose capital they had never seen:

> We grow into a nation, but ties with the Homeland remain. They are material and cultural, and range from Shakespeare and the Bible to trade, social habits, political institutions and *habeas corpus*. I know there are objectors to the word. By putting it on my book I have suffered in reputation with some New Zealanders. I cheerfully concede 'Home' may be used in the wrong way - if it indicates a spirit of subservience; if it means we are English rather than New Zealand; if it is written with a small 'h'. I have good support. There was my Australian friend on board. A very famous Australian, Sir Donald Bradman, has written: 'No Australian can ever taste the true fulfilment of cricket's enchantment without experiencing a season 'at Home'.[1966]

The challenge for Mulgan is how to write honestly about Britain after 45 years of thinking about her from afar:

> I did not see nearly as much of England and the British Isles as I wished, but enough to fill my heart and fortify my mind. I saw England's beauty and strength. I was there all through the General Strike, that enormous folly touched with good humour. I returned more convinced than ever that the British, and particularly the English, for after all they *are* the predominant partner, were the greatest people on Earth, greatest in combined achievement and character. If, however, I am told that I love England uncritically, that I am infatuated with her, which has been suggested, I say, 'Nonsense! You cannot read *Home* carefully and intelligently and not see that I find faults in England and the English.' I have written so many articles containing criticism of England, that if I were to be given a pound for every one I could take another trip 'Home', and a very comfortable one, despite the increased cost of travel. However, it is difficult or impossible to persuade some people that you can love or admire and yet be critical. If they dislike something or other about a person or nation, they dislike everything. People have said to me: 'You don't like Shaw.' This was not a very fair way to put it. I disliked some things about Shaw very much, especially his methods of controversy, but I admired him enormously in other respects and was certain he was a great man. There are things in Kipling that irritate me, but I should hate to be without him, and I say deliberately that the set made against Kipling for political reasons is one of

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[1965] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 138.

[1966] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 138.

> the most discreditable chapters in the history of English criticism. When you are moved by Milton's poetry, that does not mean that you accept Milton's theology.[1967]

One of England's biggest weaknesses, Mulgan argues, is an imperial absence of curiosity towards the marginal:

> One of the surprises the colonial has encountered in England has been the apparent lack of interest in the Empire and especially in the Dominions. […] Even the BBC in the late 1940s put on a New Zealand Day programme in a naïve spirit of discovery, as much as to say: 'By jove, here's a country away down in the South Pacific. Let's go and have a look at it!' The first requisite for really good relations between England and the Dominions is that Englishmen should regard colonials as adults equal to themselves, and not as interesting children. This unimaginative attitude is not confined to any one party.
>
> In the intellectual world there has been a tendency to despise colonial society as raw and crude. This has been complicated by a Leftist disposition to be hostile or indifferent to anything in the Empire-Commonwealth because that organisation is supposed to be the creation and special preserve of the Tories. Anything fostered by the Tories must be suspect. This type of critic often lives in an academic cell sealed off from hard experience, and confuses theory and the more hothouse kind of art with life. His misconception of oversea conditions is confirmed when he meets a colonial who declares that his own country is an intellectual desert. A commentary on this judgment was made by a distinguished Englishwoman who appreciated what she found in New Zealand. The complaint, she said, was made by two types: those who had never been to New Zealand, and those who had never been anywhere else.
>
> A large class in the Old Country has grown up in conditions of comfort, including service and deference, and some members do not transplant well. They miss these lubricants of life, and also the circle of persons of similar tastes, the sort of set that grows naturally round a university college, or a country rectory. Consequently they deplore the lack of refinement and culture. They do not realise how unreasonable it is to expect overseas a replica of England. It is not only that society is newer and smaller, and still a good deal occupied with pioneering, but that they themselves are making a wider set of contacts, enlarging their former experience.[1968]

Instead of dismissing the colonies as primitive, the English would be better off understanding the struggles of pioneers on their own terms:

> The record of the Christian Church in New Zealand is rich in cheerful bearing of hardship, in devotion and heroism. It has its martyrs, European and Maori. I have read the autobiography of a Church of England

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[1967] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 139.

[1968] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 139-142.

> clergyman (*Southern Cross and Evening Star*, by Canon John Russell Wilford) who as a young man was appointed to a New Zealand country parish in 1904, in our middle period. He had come from an English rectory, and his wife from a doctor's comfortable home in London. In their first New Zealand vicarage there was no water laid on, the scullery flooded after rain, the chimneys belched smoke into the rooms, and every night at bedtime the household propped the doors open so that they could get out quickly if there was an earthquake. Before the vicar went off on his daily round he carried the day's water supply uphill from a trickle. A plague of rats called for wholesale poisoning, but the smell was so bad that when the bishop came they insisted on having meals out of doors and refused to let him stay with them. 'As my wife managed the bishop, so she managed me,' wrote Mr Wilford at the time. 'We hadn't,' she told me, 'come thousands of wearisome miles just to solve domestic problems. There were souls to tend.' Let him go out on his job and leave her to her troubles. That was the spirit in which which these two laboured for many years in New Zealand country and town. Far greater were the hardships confronting the early missionaries. Some had to endure the nearness of cannibalistic orgies, and went in peril of their lives. As a worker in the Dominions, however, the English Anglican Priest may be affected by new conditions. In England he enjoys the privilege and prestige of an Established Church; overseas, he does not. There his church is less secure and poorer, and if he is set in his ways he may find the change rather disconcerting.
>
> The university don is exposed to another danger, that of regarding the world as a Fellows' Garden. Oversea conditions shove him into closer relationship with the mass of extra-university society - clerks, farmers, car-drivers and navvies. If he is unimaginative he will deplore the general lack of culture and sigh for his English life. It does not occur to him that he would find the same lack, and perhaps more of it proportionately, if he elbowed his way into the toiling masses of Britain. Comparison between a selected community and a general community should be made cautiously.[1969]

One of the central challenges of intercultural understanding is that the barriers to entry into a foreign culture, even one with the same native tongue, are deceptively high; as Mulgan (with characteristic economy) puts it, 'a basic difficulty in spreading truth from one country to another is that there is so much history to learn'.[1970] The example of American (mis-)understanding of New Zealand's relationship with Britain is a good illustration of the problem:

> At a time when, if Britain had had to stand alone against Japan, these islands would have been wide open to attack, tens of thousands of Americans came here as welcome guests and protectors. New Zealand was a base for their operations in the Pacific Islands. I saw the great fleet of transports carrying men who had trained in New Zealand, and escorting warships, leave for the Guadalcanal landing. Nothing could have done so

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[1969] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 142-143.

[1970] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 145.

> much as the presence of these Americans in our midst to acquaint us with American ways of life, and make us realise the importance of the United States in Pacific and world strategy. America was no longer a geographical expression, but a vital entity. The American became far more than a character in a book or on the screen. He was walking about our streets, and coming into our homes. The metaphor of forged links is hardly adequate. Seed was sown.
>
> One of the things we discovered was that Americans had the queerest ideas of the British Empire. Shortly before the war an American correspondent, who was a university graduate, asked on arrival in New Zealand, when we were going to throw off the British yoke. Whatever the answer was, laughter or resentment, it should have been the beginning of his education in the nature of the Empire-Commonwealth. New Zealanders had no thought of throwing off the British yoke, for the simple reason that there was not any such thing. We managed our own affairs, we had thrown our strength into war without any compulsion whatever on the part of Britain, and were about to do so again. When the American 'invasion' came, we found this 'yoke' and 'exploitation' idea was commonly held. It was believed we paid our taxes to King George, which was entirely incorrect. Really, it was the other way about, in that Britain, as always, was shouldering by far the greater burden of Empire defence. […] However, time and alliance should dispel a good deal of this misunderstanding. Many American servicemen took New Zealand and Australian wives back with them, and these women may be disposed to assure their new communities that these countries are not quite in the same position as the American colonies were in 1775.[1971]

If the multiplied difficulty of understanding more linguistically and culturally distant peoples - so obvious and urgent in our time - holds an ever-increasing share of everyone's attention, New Zealanders (even Maori, who arrived by *waka* only in the 14th Century, not earlier as Mulgan and others previously supposed) are in the unique position of being citizens of the 'youngest' country in the world - the last habitable landmass on Earth to be discovered and colonised by human beings. This feeling of being correspondingly less 'rooted', Mulgan argues, is based on an illusion; unlike trees, human beings do not have actual roots. If we belong to anything, it is to a transnational, transhistorical moral community; New Zealand history is remarkable for the quantity of its contributions to this community in such a short time:

> 'We are continually told,' says Professor Brogan in a *Spectator* review of a history of the American people published in 1949, 'that American history is dull, that it lacks the romance of, say, French history - bloody revolutions, kings' mistresses, splendid and disastrous wars, Versailles and the Louvre and all that. It is, I think, a defect in historical imagination to suppose that vivid romantic history can take only one form.' […] It was unreasonable to expect to find in America the mental cultivation of Europe. Americans were

[1971] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 144-145.

busy cultivating other things. They were building a great nation by taming a great land. The romance, the deep human interest, the enormous significance of this drama, this history with a difference, are only now beginning to be seen at their true worth by British communities. […] On a smaller scale and with less diversity, [Australasia's] is the same kind of tale as America's - pioneering with body and mind, carving out a new society, improvising, planning, finding out what was on the other side of the hill, ploughing and sowing again and again until there was harvested, with the wheat of bread, the flower of a new love, the spirit of a nation. 'Australia,' says Mr Donald McCullough, question-master of the BBC Brains Trust, 'may easily turn out to be the greatest achievement of this country.' 'Cricket, yes,' I can imagine an Englishman saying, 'but what else?' The Englishman is more surprised than he should be when from those far-off lands there come men with a strange physical and mental bearing, fond of the mother country but challenging some of her ways, stalwart and independent, standing firm on their own feet and looking clearly out of their own eyes.

In a poem written near the end of the century, 'A Colonist in His Garden', William Pember Reeves put the colonial case well. Reeves was born in New Zealand only seventeen years after its foundation, and in Canterbury less than seven years after the arrival of the 'Pilgrims', but that did not prevent him from being heir to the culture of the ages. When he went to England after making his mark as a radical statesman, he was welcomed by the Fabians, held his own easily in high intellectual circles, and was Director of the London School of Economics. The colonist in his verses is one of that considerable band of cultivated Englishmen who enriched our private and public life in the early days. A friend in England writes to him to come back. Let him not say he can be contented in those lonely, empty lands 'where men talk but of gold and sheep and think of sheep and gold'.

A land without a past; a race
Set in the rut of commonplace;
Where Demos overfed
Allows no gulf, respects no height;
And grace and colour, music, light,
From sturdy scorn are fled.

The colonist so addressed might ask what Mr Podsnap and his associates talked of but sheep and gold or their equivalents. What he does say is that England has gone, leaving him with happy memories: he is rooted firm and fast in the new land.

No art? Who serve an art more great
Than we, rough architects of State
With the old earth at strife?
No colour? On the silent waste
In pigments not to be effaced,
We paint the hues of life.

‘A land without a past’? The empty plains that he first saw forty years before are now warm with harvest.

This idea of a land without a past is a recurring theme. Philip Carrington, who was born in England and educated and ordained in New Zealand, and is now the Archbishop of Quebec, made use of it in the first lines of his poem ‘Rangiora’. As he rode by the Canterbury town of Rangiora, and remembered the history-steeped countryside of England,

> The land has no antiquity
> (Said the little voice in my head)
> After all it has no history…
> (No history, it said)

But what is history, he asked himself, and found the answer in the coming of the Maori and then the European, to Rangiora. I myself was constrained to preface my ‘Golden Wedding’, perhaps somewhat unjustly, with: ‘“Of course, what you miss in a country like this, is history!” - Any tourist.’

Though the first centuries are very shadowy, New Zealand has a long past. The country was rich in story and legend before the white man came. The Maori linked these islands to a homeland in the tropical Pacific. The white man linked it to its antipodes in the North Sea. […] It is the opinion of some that New Zealanders in general are still aware of the loss of their European past and do not feel they have made a past for themselves in their new land. In a fine poem called ‘The Forerrunners’, Charles Brasch, a contemporary writer, has expressed the idea that the Maori occupation was warmer and more understanding than ours, and

> Behind our quickness, our shallow occupation of the easier
> Landscape, their unprotesting memory
> Mildly hovers, surrounding us with perspective,
> Offering soil for our rootless behaviour.

In other words, the European’s way to true possession is through the Maori. […] Looking over the history of this country with ‘no history’, we find that the British Army has left its record here in graves stretching from North Auckland to Wellington. […] The major story, however, is one of peace. It is the landing of pioneers to face sometimes a comprehensive question mark; the smoothing of the land, and the building of homes, towns and cities; the making of laws to meet new conditions. it is John Logan Campbell walking across the Auckland isthmus before the foundation of the city, building a house on the new site, and living to see a hundred thousand people appreciate his gift of Auckland’s noblest park. It is the first bullock-waggon, loaded with family and goods, to enter the Mackenzie country, and the memorial church at Cave to all those adventurers, men as well as masters, with a bowl from the farthest Hebrides serving as a font basin. It is Gabriel Read digging out gold from the soil with a butcher’s knife, and so starting a rush that transformed Otago; Julius Vogel staggering the colony with his

> millions to build roads and railways; 'Ready Money' Robinson getting together the 84,000 acres of his Cheviot Hills estate, and John McKenzie, Minister of Lands, buying it under challenge and cutting it up for settlement. It is the missionary, Samuel Marsden, new to the country, spending a night with Maoris who had killed and eaten the company of the ship *Boyd*; and nearly fifty years later the young Maori warrior who, during an attack on a British position, died in the arms of an ensign of the 65th Regiment, whispering with his last breath, 'Forgive us our trespasses.'
>
> It is Richard Seddon forcing his darling Old Age Pension Bill through the house in a committee sitting of nearly ninety hours. It is two Scandinavian immigrants landing at Napier without any money, and walking to their section in the Forty-mile Bush, the woman carrying a baby and the man blankets and tools. It is Truby King saving babies not only for New Zealand but for the world, and Katherine Mansfield writing a story for her school magazine. It is Ernest Rutherford being told of his scholarship to Nelson College as he dug potatoes, and David Low drawing his first published cartoon at the age of eleven - and getting half-a-crown for it.[1972]

Does Mulgan do justice to Maori and Polynesian contributions to New Zealand's story? It would be obscene to say so, but it would be equally absurd to suggest that men like Mulgan did not pave the way for a humane modernity which makes recognition and correction of their blindnesses possible. If, as I suspect, it is *language* which stands primarily between tribes, it is no surprise that the process of mutual learning advanced among geographically disparate English-speaking peoples before it could even seriously begin among European and Maori neighbours. Mulgan's trip 'home' was a journey of self-discovery as a New Zealander, a process which simultaneously deepened his connections to the human community beyond New Zealand, if not in all its diversity, then at least in some of its English-speaking part:

> It is a commonplace that the English are the strangest of mixtures. They became the world's greatest traders, and at the same time produced a magnificent body of imaginative literature. If there had been no powerful inquiring minds among them, there would have been no Newton, no Locke, no Faraday, no Darwin, no Lister. Yet it is notorious that as a people they are mentally lazy.
>
> Part of this laziness is a lack of curiosity about what people have done and are doing. […] This is one respect in which the Englishman differs basically from the American. The Englishman does not particularly want to know what goes on elsewhere or in other peoples' heads. The American does. He is avid for information. He and his wife will flock to lectures on any subject from the Early Church in Abyssinia to the formation of the coral islands. The Englishman stays at home and smokes his pipe. It follows that as a class the Americans are easier company. They want to know all about a stranger, and it is agreeable to talk about oneself. Their hospitality is more

[1972] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 145-149.

> spontaneous. For those reasons some New Zealanders get on better with Americans than with English people.
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> I have specifically written 'English' and 'Englishmen'. The Scot is different. He uses and respects intellect. His bent towards inquiry is much stronger. Sturdily independent in himself, he is at the same time more approachable and more gregarious than the Englishman, because he is more democratic. To realise the truth of this, one has only to think of Gilbert's verses on the two Englishmen who found themselves on a desert island, but could not associate because they had not been introduced. […] However, before I leave the English, let me say again, that I hold them to be the greatest of peoples. They make me mad and sad as well as glad, but pride in them is stronger than the madness or the sadness, and I love them.
>
> The Irish give us the imagination and dash they have infused into other communities. We get on well with them, so long as they do not press their imported differences too far. […] My own education in this problem I include in my development as a New Zealander.[1973]

'Babes in the Depression Wood'

> *I returned to Auckland in the late spring of 1926, a fuller and, I hope, a wiser man, and because I had enlarged my experience, a better New Zealander. It would have been pleasant to live in England for some years with a congenial job. Not that I had been offered one, and I could hardly have accepted it if I had. However, I would have wished to return to New Zealand in the end. This was my country. If I saw its faults more clearly from visiting England, I also saw its virtues. So back again to the newspaper round, the job of helping to edit an evening paper.*[1974]

New Zealand could not hope to compete with larger European countries in terms of the quality of its specialists; in the early days of ponderous sea travel, the isolated pioneers were forced to solve their own local problems without the help of a globalised network of goods and services. This do-it-yourself spirit, which was New Zealanders' greatest strength on the improvised battlefields of the two world wars and in daily civic life, was a weakness when it came to solving truly complex problems such as those presented by the Great Depression and modern modes of economic organisation more generally:

> There was little study of public economics. When Sidney Webb, the famous English Fabian, visited New Zealand in the nineties, the first period of advanced social legislation, he commented scathingly on the absence of research. The system of State conciliation and arbitration in industrial

[1973] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 150-151.

[1974] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 153.

> disputes was established in 1894. Not until 1940, forty-six years afterwards, was provision made at any university college for special research into social relations in industry, and when this was done it was by private benefaction. Industrial research was left to the individual efforts of those university professors or lecturers who might be enthusiastic enough to take it up. […] Knowing what we do now, it is almost incredible that the arbitration system was allowed to go on for so long without any background. The number of small concerns, where contact between employer and employed was necessarily close, gave great scope for experiment in industrial relationships, but little or nothing was done. There were countries that were more progressive. With us, year after year, it was a hammer and tongs fight between the unions demanding higher wages, shorter hours and better conditions, and the employers opposing them more or less. The vast third party, the public, was not represented. The infinitely complex problem of managing men and women, of intimate daily relations between managers and hands - the question why one factory, poorly furnished with amenities, was a happy place, and another, with every welfare device, was not - all this was beyond the ken of the authorities and the parties. The opportunity of fostering a real sense of responsibility on both sides was passed by. Arbitration court, rigidly constructed, was presented with part of a problem and expected to solve it as if it were the whole. The weakening effect of this policy has been publicly recognised by old hands in the Labour movement. When, in the second war, New Zealand factories had to make a new range of war supplies and industrial harmony became vital, the Government cast around for someone who knew something about industrial psychology, and borrowed a philosophy lecturer from Victoria College. Systematic work in this field is now organised in a government department.
>
> Into this community, accustomed to think in ruts and distrustful of the experts, blew winds of post-war problems, culminating in the hurricane of the depression.[1975]

Mulgan lived through an age of accelerated need for specialisation in an isolated and growing country; one feels, reading him today as one surveys the decline of public standards of linguistic expression, the spread of euphemistic corporate jargon, and the marginalisation of the classical humanities in the school curriculum in New Zealand and all over the globalised world, both that the pendulum has swung much too far the other way, and that Mulgan, were he alive, would be shocked at the extent of the cultural degeneration. One of the challenges of defending generalist humanistic education against 'scientism' is how to get one's attitude to 'science' right: no progressive humanist could wish to halt, denigrate or otherwise interfere with free empirical inquiry, which depends on specialisation for its teeth, meaning and usefulness; but individuals in thrall to the methods and mental habits of specialisation risk losing their sense of themselves as autonomous moral agents, and of losing the adolescent journalistic interest in *everything*, which, as Mulgan argues, ideally precedes adult specialisation and also, in the manner of Zola's *J'accuse* and other modern forms of *engagé* public intellectualhood and

[1975] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 154-155.

whistleblowing (within and across professional lines), survives it into old age. Democracy ultimately depends on the willingness of concerned laypeople to challenge or check the authority of technocrats; the craft or vocation of professional journalism is an adult specialisation like medicine or law or poetry or novel-writing, but that spirit of journalistic curiosity - which might also be called poetic or novelistic or humanistic or musical - is a vital ingredient in all healthy citizens, and by extension in a healthy society. No amount of pressure or reward for specialisation should be allowed to obscure or dull the fundamental humanism required for individual citizenship or useful membership of a community, whether of autonomous individuals or sovereign nations. As New Zealand groped towards more specialised forms of economic and social organisation in the course of Mulgan's lifetime, it also struggled to embody its own emerging sense of autonomous moral identity on the world stage, like an awkward adolescent who nevertheless senses her own unique vocation swelling inside her:

> [Once upon a time] New Zealand went so far in its attitude to the League [of Nations] as to propose that the Dominions should not exercise their right to act independently within the League, but should 'transmit representations through Britain after consultation'. […] The Labour Government made a dramatic break from this policy. It had opinions of its own at the League, and expressed them, whether Britain liked it or not. It threw its weight into the fight for more action. 'Her (New Zealand's) spokesman repeatedly and often in plain undiplomatic language, urged that the League should be true to its principles in organising assistance to victims and in refusing to recognise ill-gotten gains.' There was considerable public support for this stand. Many of us were increasingly critical of British policy and were worried about what was happening in Spain and in the League. We had no doubt that Munich was a disastrous humiliation.
>
> Our connection with one activity of the League, the International Labour Office, may be mentioned to illustrate the limited, self-satisfied, unimaginative outlook of the [former] Government, and a large section of the public. The official view was that New Zealand led the world in labour legislation, and in that respect had nothing to learn from other countries; therefore the expense of sending delegates to the International Labour Office's conference would not be justified. The *Auckland Star* hit this attitude hard. Apart from the possibility that New Zealand might have something to learn, had it not something to teach, and was it not New Zealand's duty to teach it? It was not until 1930 that we were represented at an International Labour Office conference.
>
> To discuss at length the complex question of New Zealand's relations with the outside world is not my business. I touch on it to show that new forces were levering us out of old troughs of thought. We were being educated in new duties. It is a far cry from the old disposition to leave everything to Britain, and the set-up today, when New Zealand counts for something in the world's councils, and appoints and receives diplomatic representatives.[1976]

[1976] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 156-157.

As Mulgan stresses, New Zealand was above all an extraordinary laboratory for experiments in industrial relations during a period when the battlelines of the Cold War - *laissez-faire* capitalism on one side and various forms of coercive, authoritarian and totalitarian interpretations of Marxism on the other - were being violently drawn across Europe, Asia, the Americas and Africa. Mulgan's left-liberal ideal - individual energy and thrift and general disregard for symbols of luxury, coupled with an egalitarian and fraternal willingness to share the joys of education *justly*, in the manner of a welcoming *soirée* - may not have been fully and finally achieved anywhere in the world - such 'harmony without uniformity' must be reinvented afresh from day to day - but at least Mulgan's New Zealand provided bursts of such opportunity in the form of family friends, generous teachers and bosses, talented and selfless colleagues, and brave sons and soldiers.

The question of New Zealand's emerging responsibilities as a regional leader in Oceania arises organically out of this pioneer ferment; Mulgan's language may be shockingly imperialistic by our standards, but his message, once deciphered through the filters of a well-placed generosity, is clear: 'New Zealand' is more than a one-time colonial meeting-house between Maori and European; Auckland in particular, with its burgeoning population of migrants from across the Pacific Islands, can become the dynamic Polynesian capital of a more dialogical and outward-looking globalisation: 'New Zealand should be a centre of anthropological and general Pacific studies worthy of the world's attention.'[1977] Towards the end of the book, Mulgan will extend the call to East, Southeast and South Asia (Zealand's 'Nearer North', as he refers to these regions) in a prescient prediction of the country's demographic, cultural and diplomatic evolution beyond his death.

The Depression, however, forced some more urgent navel-gazing; in such circumstances, the idea that thrift and honest hard work alone could solve the country's economic justice problems was revealed as hopelessly out of date; New Zealand needed a mixture of specialist research and moral imagination to overcome the challenges of the day. The beginnings of a Universal Basic Income discourse can be discerned at the edges of Mulgan's diagnosis of New Zealand's depression-era cultural malaise:

> A Wellington editor once said that as news a dog-fight in Lambton Quay (the city's main street) was worth more than a ministerial crisis in Europe. No postwar oversea responsibility could affect New Zealanders a tithe as deeply as the depression that struck the country in the late twenties. It was little or no consolation to victims to know they were not alone, that they were caught in a world storm. […] The depression hit us all the harder because it took us by surprise. We had lived long in an easy groove, taking prosperity for granted. To some extent this was true of every country. Britain, however, had had much more experience of unemployment, and had met it many years earlier by an insurance scheme contemptuously called 'the dole'. Our position was something like that of the United States. To a lesser degree we experienced the exasperation and bewilderment that possessed Americans when they found that, after all, their proud country

[1977] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 158.

was not favoured by the gods, but, economically, was mortal. We had made no preparation for such a winter of hard times. We would not have 'the dole' - not we! The ignorance on this matter was extraordinary. I talked one day to two well-informed Auckland businessmen. One was a man of particularly wide and deep reading, and of liberal opinions. It was news to them that the British 'dole' came from a contributing scheme of insurance, which had then been in operation a good many years. The Prime Minister, George Forbes, came back from the Imperial Conference in London in 1930 resolved not to introduce the 'dole', but circumstances were too much for the Government. People could not be allowed to starve.

Some of those who remembered the 1880s thought the slump of that time was worse than this one. It may have been, but in the 1930s the temper of victims was much sharper. People were better educated, better informed, more conscious of their rights. The standards of living had risen. The community had gone beyond the pioneering stage, when people in difficulties were more or less content to make shift with a sort of camping life. So, altogether, New Zealanders were not disposed to accept docilely unemployment, small subsistence benefits or charity. The Government produced some ideas and was not idle; what it lacked was imagination. There was no national plan of public works to assist unemployment, no policy of making bad times a preparation for better. Expenditure on public works was severely cut. Railway construction almost ceased. Lines were left unfinished, and the tracks deteriorated. Some of the relief workers put on to jobs like chipping weeds on roads must have thought they could have been more profitably absorbed. Nor was there enough imagination in the day-to-day attitude to the unemployed. One Minister told a deputation that he too had suffered: he had had his salary cut. The money paid out in relief might have been more satisfying if a more active and intelligent interest had been taken in conditions, such as those in relief camps. Numbers of unemployed were put into camps on low wages and separated from their wives and families. Cheerless camps in the country in winter were an ideal forcing ground for grievances. They produced this kind of cry of bitterness and disillusionment, written by a contemporary poet, A.R.D. Fairburn.

> Back-block camps for the outcast, the superfluous;
> reading back-date magazines, rolling cheap cigarettes;
> not mated; witness to the constriction of life as essential
> to the maintenance of the rate of profit,
> as distinct from the gross increment of wealth.

Whatever, may be thought of their economics, these lines were a new voice in New Zealand. The bitter tone that came into our literature was largely a product of the depression.[1978]

The slippery slope of the modern welfare state - the so-called 'culture of entitlement' crystallised in the modern right-wing cliché of generations of single mothers and

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[1978] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 158-160.

distant drug-addled fathers devoid of any motivation to find vocations of their own - may not have appeared on Mulgan's radar of concern, but he stresses that the roots of such disillusion and laziness are spiritual before they are economic. *Justice* dictates that everyone be guaranteed a minimum share of society's money pie in advance of their autonomous labour in it: to be made to 'work for the dole' is *doubly* ignominious, because it adds the insult of coercion to the injury of unfair or unlucky discrimination on the job market. Free-riding in a truly egalitarian and fraternal society is its own punishment; that it is tolerated does not mean that it is encouraged. To *punish* such free-riding, however, by forcing people to contribute in ways not autonomously defined by them, is to sever the bonds of trust on which a left-liberal economic and social order could possibly hope to be built. Mulgan, however, focuses less on the cultural long-game of social welfare reform than on the ways New Zealand conquered the 'intellectual defeatism' of the interwar years through a mixture of honest hard work and a relaxation of the prejudice against highfalutin experts:

> The unemployed were not the only sufferers. Mrs Helen Wilson, a farmer's wife, contrasted the lot of young single men in camps with that of surrounding farmers. Among other things she noted that the boys received ten shillings a week pocket money. 'The farmers received no ten bob a week. They never saw money. Every penny earned was already mortgaged to the dairy factory, which allowed them the necessaries of life…' The unemployed themselves were not blameless, as witness the riots in Auckland and Wellington. There were business men and farmers who were disturbed when they saw a relief worker leaning on his shovel. Quite likely the leaner was a middle-aged man who had never before done manual work. Some of us longed to take city grumblers and set them to work with shovels at the wages these men were getting. We fancied their backs would have given out soon. […] 'New occasions teach new duties,' but the process of education is apt to be painful. […] The world cannot be proud of the armistice years. It is a commonplace to say that it was a period of disappointment and disillusionment, as the high hopes faded that came with victory, and it was apparent that democracy could defeat a military foe but not an economic one. Suppose, however, that we try to add up all the bereavement and misery, the disappointment and poverty, the failure to keep faith with those who died, and the pitiful experiences of many who survived; suppose we take into account all the suffering and failure and selfishness and stupidity, individual and collective. Does all this justify the spirit of surrender that was such a feature of creative and critical expression in the twenties and thirties, and of certain layers of social life - the dreary introspection, the cynical hopelessness, the creed that nothing mattered? History will label this the age of defeatism. Much of its literature might bear the caption: 'Dethronement of Nobility.' Those who considered themselves intellectuals were largely to blame. It was a difficult time for this class, said John Buchan. 'They found themselves living among the fears and uncertainties of the middle ages, without the support of the medieval faith.' The brittle intellectuals, as Kipling called them, huddled in coterie corners and moaned. One suspected some of them had suffered little, directly or

indirectly, from the war, but they showed less pluck than many a maimed soldier. Someone whose name I don't know - I got the lines appropriately enough from the *Journal* of the Kipling Society - wrote of this class:

> For whom when all goes ill it falls to verse
> If possible to go a little worse;
> And when the gates of heaven on their hinge
> Cry ominously, not content to cringe, -
> Clap their small hands as the great irons lunge,
> And on the world's behalf, throw up the sponge.

The badge of courage glows in the words of Eugene Lee Masters's housewife of the old American days, whose record could be paralleled in our own annals. She was married for seventy years and had twelve children. Eight of them died before she was sixty. She spun, she wove, she kept house, she nursed the sick. At ninety-six she had lived enough; that was all.

> What is this I hear of sorrow and weakness?
> Anger, discontent, and drooping hopes?
> Degenerate sons and daughters,
> Life is too strong for you -
> It takes life to love life.

There is comfort in the thought that, during the depression, and through the other disappointments of the armistice years, a large proportion of voiceless people everywhere faced life with something like the spirit of this American pioneer. They might have thought more deeply; on the other hand, thought did not possess them. They went on with the daily job of living and did not whine. In 1939 something happened to put the old-fashioned virtues back in the forefront of battle, visible to all.

There were sprouts of this rootless and sapless intellectualism in New Zealand, but naturally it would be rare in a small and relatively unsophisticated society. On the contrary, New Zealand was in a position to benefit by the depression. Hard times, following the demands of a new era, made people think and express themselves. They nourished literature and the arts. They gave the man with special knowledge opportunities and wider recognition. Ideas began to command respect, and research made headway. The cushions of complacency built up by long years of prosperity became hard forms. As Oliver Duff says in his *New Zealand Now*, we had 'come to the end of blind living'. 'We can no longer dig gold out of the ground with a butcher's knife, as Gabriel Read did, or put a match to the bush and wait till the rain and a little fertiliser bring gold out of the ashes.' There was a marked increase in interest in economics, and it began to dawn on New Zealanders that what they called the practical man might have his limitations, and the trained specialist his uses. The Government gathered specialists about it. The university professor came out of his study

> and lecture room to advise the Government and talk to the crowd. It was another stage in our growing up.[1979]

A small nation fighting for survival and prosperity in a complex world will face compromises of different kinds, but Mulgan is arguing here that the 'spiritual humanism' of his favourite 'New Zealanders' is not negotiable, and not at odds with modernity; on the contrary, such commitment to individual vocation, based on a generalised curiosity crowned with professional training, made the leaps and bounds of the Enlightenment possible. Forms of economic and social organisation which reduce people to cogs in a coercive machine are the most dispiriting forms of slavery imaginable, whether they assume right-wing, left-wing, feudal or industrial guises. The key to New Zealand's future as Mulgan saw it was to pass on the good cheer and good-hearted industry of the best early pioneers, on the one hand, while allowing room for modern experts and specialists to come and go freely via a mixture of immigration and a friendly revolving-door policy towards the country's own curious children:

> All this time New Zealand was continuing to send a substantial proportion of its best brains abroad. There were at least three reasons for this: the smallness of our society, with its restricted opportunities (the Dominion did not reach the million and a half mark till 1930); the lack of appreciation of exceptional talent; and the need for study abroad. A third reason may be that by nature New Zealanders are travellers. Conditions in their long, narrow island system make them move round. In his book *Report on Experience*, my son, the late John Mulgan, who went from New Zealand to Oxford, described them as 'often wanderers and restless and unhappy men. They come from the most beautiful country in the world, but it is a small country and very remote. After a while this isolation oppresses them and they go abroad. They roam the world looking not for adventure but for satisfaction. They run service cars in Iraq, gold-mines in Nevada, or newspapers in Fleet Street. They are queer, lost, eccentric, pervading people who will seldom admit to the deep desire that is in all of them to go home and live quietly in New Zealand again.' Those at home 'are all the time wanting to set out across the wide seas that surround them in order to find the rest of the world.'
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> Students go overseas to extend their special studies and many do not return. Other New Zealanders, qualified in their callings, also find conditions 'over there' more attractive. Others, with no special qualifications, sail into the blue to seek their fortunes. Successful New Zealand emigrants have been found far and wide, and in every walk of life. […] The success of these New Zealanders may be attributed to a good foundation in human stock; conditions of life that developed energy, independence and initiative; and a sound educational system, which has provided ladders for outstanding ability to climb from primary school to university. Now New Zealanders were increasingly conscious of the need to keep as much of this ability as possible at home, or to draw it back after it had graduated, academically or

[1979] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 160-163.

> otherwise, in the greater world. In this, as in other respects, the village or small-town mentality was widening into a metropolitan or national vision.[1980]

'An Editor's Chair'

> *From the beginning of 1916 to September 1935, shortly before the arrival of the first Labour Government, I worked on the editorial staff of the Auckland Star. […] We journalists had also to cope with the Treaty of Versailles and the spanner that J.M. Keynes threw into the reparation works when he wrote his book on the economics of the peace; with the birth of the League of Nations and the defection of the United States - one of the great refusals of history and probably the most tragic of all in its consequences; with the rise of Mussolini - have you forgotten that he was the first Fascist dictator, some years before Hitler?; with the depressed areas of Britain and fourteen million in the United States. We had to comment on these things without the inside information that is available to journalists on the spot.*[1981]

Mulgan's testimonial of his decades on the front lines of New Zealand journalism places some of the Copernican developments of our own time - everyone is a newspaper, radio station and TV channel of her own now if she wishes to be - into historical perspective. As the historians of the future will wryly grapple with the primitive early Internet years in decades and centuries beyond us, so too can we look back on Mulgan's era with a certain *plus ça change* amusement:

> New Zealanders, courageous in many respects, have curious streaks of timidity. The correspondence columns of our newspapers, however, are far from reflecting the intelligence of society. There must be many people who have something useful to say, but do not say it. The man with a bee in his bonnet says too much. You do not realise how many cranks there are till you run a newspaper.[1982]

We all know this now; the economic formula for justly rewarding humanistic contributions to society, however, eludes us as it did Mulgan and his contemporaries. Prestige is one thing - and a newspaper like the *Star* was well placed to offer it in its day - but fair pay is another:

> The *Star* can look back with some satisfaction to the encouragement it gave to writers. We collected from far and near. Among them were some well-

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[1980] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 163-164.

[1981] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 165.

[1982] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 168-169.

> known names, but we were always on the look-out for new talent. This is not so plentiful as you might think. We gave a monthly prize for a short story, but there were some months when we didn't get a story worth printing. We introduced original verse, and paid for it - very little, it is true, but still something. Some of the best poets in New Zealand wrote for the *Star*, and I have been pleasantly reminded of this by acknowledgments in their volumes and in anthologies. The poem I remember best was one that Robin Hyde (Iris Wilkinson) wrote about the feelings of a bewildered Italian conscript sent to fight in Abyssinia. It was a jolly good poem, and I took the unprecedented step of starring it on our editorial page.[1983]

Amazon may solve the distribution issues which plagued Mulgan's literary generation (and cause an abundance of others), but broader complaints about writers' rates of remuneration cannot be said to be new:

> It could easily happen that when a book was reviewed there were no copies for sale. I had a complaint on this score after I had given a special article to a book from a famous London house. I put the position before the publishers, but never received even an acknowledgment.
>
> This state of affairs is liable to be particularly rough on New Zealanders who publish in England. They naturally look to their own country for custom, perhaps for a large part of what they hope for. They may read excellent notices in their own Press, and then find that the local booksellers cannot supply the immediate demand. By the time new stocks arrive, interest may have fallen off considerably. Experience with my own books taught me to be active in liaison between publishers and booksellers and newspapers, and I was led to remark that it took nearly as much time and energy to sell a book in New Zealand as to write one. Through better representation of English publishers in New Zealand and the use of air-mails, the position is a good deal better than it was, but sea distance still presents a difficulty for booksellers and authors. Few though we New Zealanders are, we offer a good market.
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> There is a lot of work in a long review of a big, important book. I may instance T.E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 660 pages. It took me a fortnight to read the book at odd times, and even then I skipped a bit, and five hours to write the column and a half review. It is good fun to get one's teeth into a job like that. At current rates in the New Zealand Press I would have been paid thirty shillings or a couple of pounds for the article. Rates are higher today. Some years later, when I met the late Dr R.J. Tillyard, Chief Commonwealth Entomologist, I found that he had reviewed the book for an Australian paper, and we compared notes. It had been a big job for him too, and he thought the payment of seven guineas was inadequate. If I did not tell him I wished I had half his complaint, I thought so. Seven guineas was a good fee as fees went, but for a man of Tillyard's standing it

[1983] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 170.

> was not startling. In addition to his fee, however, the reviewer gets the book.[1984]

If newspapers were not in a position to influence the literary economy as much as a liberal humanist like Mulgan would have liked, they could at least claim humanistic influence - limited but real - beyond their commercial constraints:

> Looking back on his life, a journalist may find it hard to say what he has achieved, individually or collectively. He may have been for years on the unsuccessful side in politics, and seen cause after cause fail. It is admitted that editorial influence is not what it used to be, but this is not the kind of thing that can always be measured.
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> […] I recall two important improvements that the *Star* helped to obtain in my time. One was a permanent home for the University College. […] The other achievement in which the *Star* had a hand was the War Memorial Museum (the war of 1914-1918) on Domain Hill. Fortunately Auckland was united in this project; the drive for money was very well organised; the architectural competition yielded a first-class design; and the result was a noble building on a superb site. The pillared classical front overlooked an island scene that must have suggested a poignant comparison to some of the New Zealanders who fought in Greece at a later time, and high upon it were carved the words of Pericles to the Athenians: 'The whole world is the sepulchre of famous men…' Thucydides would recognise something Greek in the scene, and understand the annual pilgrimage of citizens to this shrine on Anzac Day. It is an irony that in a country which has erected a monument of such design, linking us with the glories of the ancient world, Latin and Greek should be pressed back from their already limited ground in our system of education. This was an inspiring example of united civic effort, well directed. […] The influence of a newspaper, however, is not to be measured by such direct visible successes or failures alone. It may make itself felt quietly in many directions.[1985]

Mulgan will say more about his vision for 'the future of the press' in the next chapter, but as far as he can see, a 'free press' - and by extension, a liberal humanistic culture - can thrive neither under monopoly government control (too many perverse incentives to toe the line) nor in an unregulated media market with built-in oligopolistic tendencies:

> Many of our country papers have disappeared. This is a pity, for country towns and districts have their own life, which should be nourished. We need less centralisation, not more. The reasons for this decline here and overseas are the greatly increased cost of starting a paper and running it, the peculiar nature of the newspaper business, and improvement in communications. Newspaper competition is peculiar. A city supports a large number of grocers, drapers and ironmongers, but it cannot support anything

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[1984] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 171-172.

[1985] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 172-173.

> like the same number of newspapers. A newspaper lives on advertising revenue, not on sales, and there is not enough advertising business to suffice for a multiplicity of newspapers. Advertising goes where it can do the most business, to the large circulations.[1986]

No humanist could cheer when this oligopolistic logic triumphs over honest attempts to support a rich and diverse cultural landscape:

> The *Star* bought out its rival. We were glad to win the fight, but there was no exultation. We had friends on the *Sun* and felt sorry for them and their colleagues thrown out of a job. In her book of recollections, *Journalese*, Robin Hyde wrote that 'among the *Sun*'s staff that day it is recorded that the *Star* people recorded their success with a champagne dinner. *Vae victis*.' Robin Hyde was gifted as a writer, but as a journalist not very responsible. This *Star* person neither took part in nor heard of any champagne celebration.[1987]

<u>'The Future of the Press'</u>

> *What I want to say is perhaps best approached through a lengthy experience I had as lecturer in journalism at Auckland University College, from 1924 to 1935. […] That journalism was one of the last professions or callings to acquire university status is not very surprising. It has never been recognised as a profession in the sense that the church or law or medicine is, or engineering or architecture. It is a calling or craft compounded of many factors. Some of the requirements of a good journalist may be acquired or developed in the ordinary course of university studies: English, for example, history and economics. In every successful journalist, however, there is an inborn instinct for news. This cannot be implanted by any teaching, though it can be developed.*[1988]

Mulgan's quest for a left-liberal modernity, sufficiently specialised in its economic arrangements but also robustly curious in its spiritual orientation, finds its microcosm in the 'profession' of journalism, which emerges from marginalisation in his lifetime. The problem of *education* for journalism, however, was only beginning to be seriously addressed: the technical aspects of the journalism business might usefully be taught in pre-professional settings as well as on the job, but not, surely, *instead of* broad humanistic learning. The question where general humanistic education should end and where specialised, technical education should begin is a

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[1986] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 174.

[1987] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 175-176.

[1988] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 177.

deeply political one; societies will save money in the short term by funneling high-school and university undergraduate students into job-training programs at the expense of, say, Art History, Philosophy and Latin (or classical Chinese), but the long-term costs of such decisions, not to mention the intrinsic costs to individual spirituality, are unlikely to appear on bureaucratic balance sheets. Mulgan, however, starts from the opposite end of the problem: there are clearly some useful things which *can* be learnt *before* one enters the workplace:

> In respect to nearly every profession or calling, there are roughly two schools of thought, the practical and the theoretical. The practical says the right way - and perhaps the only way - to learn a job is on the job. The theoretical contends that work in office or factory should be based on or supplemented by special training in school or university. These two schools argue and agree up to a point, or disagree. The trend has been to multiply and extend special or professional training. When I was young there was no law school in Auckland, and no school of architecture in the country. On the other hand, it is a fact that academic training is only part of the business. The best way to master a profession is to practise it. No one would suggest that a medical student should not go to a medical school, but I have heard a middle-aged doctor say that a young fellow should be compelled to wait six years after qualification before going into general practice on his own account. Presumably he would spend those six years in hospitals or in working privately under the direction of older men.
>
> Probably there are still some journalists who think that teaching journalism in a university is a new-fangled and pretty useless frill. The only way to make a journalist of a man is to put him into a newspaper office and let him sink or swim. But why not teach him to swim? To go from metaphor to reality, it is well known that expert instruction makes a youngster swim much more efficiently and with much greater satisfaction than if he has picked up the knack anyhow. Some day he may have his own life or somebody else's to save in the water, and if he has been well taught he will bless his teacher. Any young fellow may spend a lot of time in a newspaper office picking up knowledge which he could learn quickly in a class, and there are some things he may never learn at all, or at any rate, completely. It would be interesting to know how many newspapers instruct their juniors regularly in the law of libel, the art of interviewing, or the principles of criticism, whether the subject is a play, a book or a football game. You *can* teach the principles of journalism, just as you can teach the principles of law. By taking a student through the making of a newspaper in all its stages, the lecture room can make his practical path a good deal easier.[1989]

Just as law and medicine are understood as postgraduate specialisations in some advanced countries, so too is journalism perhaps best entered via a postgraduate diploma of some kind; what is emphatically *not* an option is a system where a sense of spiritual belonging to human society is mortgaged to the immediate demands and stresses of the market economy. The predatory excesses which

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[1989] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 177-178.

result from such short-circuiting of humanistic education (witness, for instance, the hijacking of the adjectives 'vocational' and 'professional' to mean the exact opposite of their original spiritual etymologies) are as unwelcome and dangerous in journalism as they are in medicine, law, engineering or any other trade taken seriously:

> All through my lectures I hammered at responsibility - the vital moral compliance of that sense. A journalist acting maliciously was morally as bad as a person who robbed a blind man of his pennies. In the twenty years since I gave up lecturing, I have felt more and more deeply about this. Though I have never ceased to be a journalist, I have been able to take a more detached view of my profession. A sense of news and comment is the driving force in a journalist. A sense of responsibility keeps him on the right course. If free countries have to curb their Press, it will be because the steering has become dangerously wild. A newspaper is much more than a purely commercial concern. It is an enterprise unofficially and tacitly licensed to print news and opinions. Significantly the synopsis of the professional study for the New Zealand Diploma of Journalism, set forth in the *University Calendar*, began with these words: 'Journalism as a *social service*; the modern newspaper, its *obligations*, rights and privileges.'
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> In what is probably the best book written on the subject, that very distinguished journalist and publicist Wickham Steed says that the Press is 'a sort of co-operative society in which the public is a partner'. 'The underlying principle that governs, or should govern, the Press is that the gathering and selling of news and views is essentially a public trust. It is based upon a tacit contract with the public that the news shall be true to the best of the knowledge and belief of those who offer it for sale, and that their comment on it shall be sincere according to their lights. The same kind of trust is implied in the relationship between a doctor and his patients…' Mr Steed goes on to consider the relative guilt of a dishonest doctor and a dishonest journalist. The number of people such a doctor can harm is narrowed by physical limitations. The journalist can poison the minds of hundreds of thousands or millions. Since ideas are the most potent things in the world, he who deliberately or without due forethought sells them, or news on which ideas are based, in false quality, is the most blameworthy of adulterators.[1990]

If modern corporate scandals teach us anything, it is that abstract codes of ethical compliance, which are effectively attempts to 'legislate love' or provide public cover to predatory businesses, do not work, and are viewed as obstacles or public relations exercises rather than as enabling constraints by those forced to pay lip service to them. Writing in the 1950s, Mulgan did not enjoy our decades of postmodern experience in this field; rather than seeing that the 'solution' to unethical business practices, in journalism as elsewhere, lay in the singing and dancing and gay conversation of his youth - not in dry *post facto* moral checklists for people whose real interest is profit rather than meaningful human exchange - he

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[1990] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 180-181.

maintains a naïve faith in the power of value catalogues and ‘codes of ethics’, even as he diagnoses the unique problems faced by the media industry:

> I am very far from suggesting that the British and the Commonwealth Press are free from stain. Every journalist worth his salt knows what is wrong with the Press, just as every good doctor knows what is wrong with medicine. The basic difficulty is reconciling the commercial and the ideal. A newspaper must pay its way. If it is subsidised, it is exposed to the danger of being influenced by those who supply the money. British, American and Commonwealth newspapers are charged with being subservient to advertisers. This factor has been much exaggerated. At any rate it is better to be dependent on advertisement-revenue than on direct subsidy from an individual or party, as some Continental papers seem to be. Acceptance of an advertisement is a contract for business service which is rendered impersonally. The paper is simply the transmitter of a business offer, a transportable noticeboard. If now and then pressure is brought to bear on the paper by advertisers, the proprietor or the editor is free to resist it. If, however, the paper is subsidised by a person or party for political reasons, the contract is of a different kind. No such freedom is possible. Besides being a communication between seller and buyer to promote business, advertising is a subsidy, paid directly or indirectly by the public, that makes possible what it calls a free Press.
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> However, since a newspaper is a commercial undertaking as well as a social service, proprietors may seek to make large profits. A private proprietorship may be just as mercenary as a public company, but it is free from the necessity of having to consider the interests of a large number of outside shareholders, many of whom may give little thought to the moral responsibilities of the concern from which they draw their dividends. Enlightened private ownership is the best form of control. If he has the will and the money, anybody can start a newspaper. He may seek to make money, to push a political creed, or to feed his ambition. He may be an idealist, or he may be utterly without conscience. Any scallywag can become a journalist. There is no filtering process save what is put into action by reputable editors and proprietors. So it is open to anyone to seek to exercise, in Stanley Baldwin’s words, applied by him to certain English newspaper proprietors: ‘The privilege of the harlot throughout the ages, power without responsibility.’
>
> […] I am convinced, however, that something could and should be done to establish a code of ethics in the Press, and that this move should come from the Press itself. The official British Commission on the Press came to this conclusion. So did the unofficial American Commission. The American investigators would like the Press to make and enforce a code of ethics, but think that probably this is impossible. They warn the Press that if it does not reform itself, the State may act. The Commissioners do not like the idea of State intervention, nor does any journalist. This warning should be heeded. One of these days the Press may find itself subject to a law requiring it to exercise ‘reasonable care’. Or the State may make it an offence for a newspaper to publish certain kinds of statement without

> publishing at the same time counter-statements by the parties concerned, or giving those parties an immediate opportunity to present their case. Everybody who reads a newspaper knows how often there are two sides to a case, and that the first side sometimes gets a lengthy start.[1991]

Who, then, can be trusted to perform this due diligence? Mulgan understands that a government monopoly on the media is a terrible idea, but he also understands that enlightened private ownership is a rare gem:

> Some Labour leaders stand unequivocally for a free Press. Mr Peter Fraser, Labour Prime Minister in New Zealand for ten years, was one, and Lord Attlee, Labour Prime Minister in Britain, is another. Labour parties have socialistic aims. Complete socialism would include the Press. How would the Press be conducted in such a regime? I can see three ways: a journalists' guild; a public utility corporation like the BBC; or a government department. Can it be believed that under any one of these arrangements the Press would be as free as it is today? There would be no competition. The measure of freedom enjoyed would depend ultimately on the Government. The temptation to stifle criticism of the Government would be powerful and constant. My preference would be for a public corporation. The worst kind of controlling body would be a government department. If there is one thing more than another that a government is *not* fit to manage, it is a newspaper.
>
> Meanwhile the New Zealand Press might set an example in organised self-discipline. I have referred to the exceptional opportunities existing in New Zealand for experiments in industrial control, and our failure to seize them. There are similar opportunites in the connection between Press and public. We are a small, isolated, homogeneous and compact community. Our newspapers are exceptionally uniform in methods and standards. They have hardly been touched by the irresponsible sensationalism that is so marked a feature of journalism in some other countries. Their general standard of news evaluation and taste is much above that of Britain. Their code of fairness and decency is high. The average style is good, and some of the writing has distinction. I should like to see more enterprise in news-getting, more courage, more specialisation, and more joint action to raise standards all round. The ultimate responsibility for the standing of the Press rests, *not* with editors, but with proprietors. Newspaper proprietors in New Zealand enjoy a profitable monopoly into which it is very difficult to break, and are organised in an association which covers the whole country. From all these considerations it follows that New Zealand proprietors are in a particularly good position to take joint action to raise and maintain the standing of the Press. Acting with the Journalists' Association, they could frame, and do their best to enforce, a code of ethics and good professional practice such as is already observed by experienced and reputable journalists. They could set up a public relations committee to which a citizen who failed to get what he regarded as satisfaction from a newspaper could

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[1991] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 182-183.

> state a case. I am well aware it might be difficult to impose a penalty on an offending paper, but the very existence of such an appeal body would have a steadying effect on the newspaper world, and would prove to the public that newspapers had a sense of obligation. Then if legislation to curb the power of the Press were introduced, newspapers would be surer of public backing for their opposition to it. Without such backing, their defence might not prevail.[1992]

Not even Mulgan is thoroughly convinced by his own argument here. But in a world in which technology has converted individual citizens into content publishers all of their own, the idea of regulation of the media is obsolete anyway; the Joe Rogan phenomenon was as unimaginable to Mulgan as the future of media at the end of the 21st Century will be to us. The basic human, humanistic and economic parameters of cultural production, however, do not change; if people are satisfied with *just payment* for their content contributions, rather than seeking monopolistic profits through sensationalism and self-promotion, then the only challenge, enormous though it may be, is how to arrange such just remuneration.

Mulgan's autobiography is strewn with examples of the ways in which economics and humanistic creativity ideally intertwine. His Grammar School education was made possible with scholarships which were *just enough*; his first paychecks as a journalist were 'big money' to a boy who had never seen real money before, but by no means CEO stuff; they did, however, eventually allow him to pursue a parallel (and underremunerated) literary career. And as we will see, he was able to make a late-career shift from newspaper editor to radio broadcaster in part because the salary he was offered was the minimum he considered acceptable.

'Journalist into Broadcaster'

> *In 1935, at the age of fifty-four, I went from journalism to broadcasting. I did so partly in a spirit of adventure. Usually, when a man has reached his fifties, he has got beyond wishing to change his calling, and if he has not, he knows there are not many openings for a beginner. I realised that such a chance as the Broadcasting Board offered me, the position of Supervisor of Talks for the Dominion, was not likely to come again, so that if I wanted to throw my hat into the ring against fortune, I had better accept. I had always been anxious and timorous in my own affairs; now, with my family grown up and less domestic responsibility on my shoulders, I was disposed to take the risk that was involved. I was safe on the Star, with a benefit fund at my back. If I fell ill they would treat me generously. In my new job I could be dismissed at a moment's notice, and a lawyer friend kindly informed me (after I had changed*

[1992] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 183-184.

over) that by a recent decision I could not claim anything more. There was then no superannuation in the Broadcasting Service.[1993]

A sense of vocation requires a sense of risk and a willingness to sacrifice, but not beyond the bounds of long-run justice; Mulgan joined the newly formed Broadcasting Service in the hope that the teething problems and unfairness associated with any new industry might be solved on his watch, and that he might make a meaningful contribution to a burgeoning new media phenomenon:

> When I joined the Broadcasting Service I had no radio set in my home. I believed, however, that the side of broadcasting I was joining, would not be very different from journalism. The same news values would apply. Just as people would not read a paper if it did not interest them, so they would not listen to a radio talk.
>
> […] Accuracy is even more important than in print. The moral obligation is the same, but the radio-winged word can travel with the speed of light to the ends of the earth, and it is much more difficult to correct a mistake than it is in a newspaper. The two cardinal sins are the same in journalism and broadcasting - inaccuracy and dullness. In journalism there are two opportunities for dullness, subject and style of writing. In broadcasting there are three, subject, composition and delivery. A bad delivery can spoil the best script.
>
> So I went to Wellington and started to learn the business of broadcasting. My employer was a board of seven members (originally three) appointed on the BBC model by the Government, which had been impressed by the BBC's degree of independence. The Government advanced the Board the money to buy the assets of the Broadcasting Company, but the incorporating Act forbade the Board to borrow money save with the Government's consent. The Board followed the policy of financing capital development out of listeners' fees. This arrangement had the advantage of providing the country with a broadcasting system unencumbered by debt.
>
> […] When I joined, salaries were deplorably low. The General Manager, the late Mr E.C. Hands, was getting over £1000 a year, and deserved it. […] At £650 I was the most highly paid officer on the programme side. This had been my salary when I left the *Star*, cut down in the depression from about £730. Though I thought my broadcasting salary was too small I had no grievance. Though I was new to the business I was being paid more than the administrative officer next to the general manager. On the head office staff there were experts in their particular lines, men whom it would have been very difficult to replace, who were being paid less than £500. I was shocked when I discovered this, and hastened to make my opinion clear to my colleagues, who, I sensed, were somewhat aggrieved at the disparity between my salary and theirs. I told them I would not have joined the Service for less.

[1993] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, p. 185.

> The Chairman of the Board, the late Mr H.D. Vickery, was an able man and a gentleman, but he was an accountant, and I suspect the Board looked at salaries through accountancy glasses. There was too strong a disposition to keep running costs low. The consequence was that when the new Labour Government turned broadcasting into a Civil Service department in 1936 it took over a low salary scale, and this affected future standards.[1994]

This detail, while on one level dreary, is vital if we consider Mulgan's abiding concern with economic justice for humanistic endeavour; a new medium like radio offered new options for the distribution of culture, but the same old problems that plagued the newspaper business - principally, how to avoid either public or private monopolies - remained:

> By becoming civil servants the staff obtained three benefits. They were more secure in their posts (a Civil Service job is perhaps safer than any other); they were eligible for transfer to other departments of the Civil Service; and they were admitted at once to the Public Service Superannuation Fund. What would have been the advantages if the Board had been sustained in office? That would have depended on the Board's policy. Had the Board bid high for the best brains among men and women, salaries would have been higher than in the Civil Service. If the Board had used its independence boldly in the framing of programmes, the staff would have enjoyed a degree of freedom in planning and execution which I should say is not possible in a department under any government. These, however, are big 'ifs'. On principle, and having regard to the whole good of broadcasting as a national utility, I have a strong preference for independent corporation control on BBC lines, as against ministerial control. I must acknowledge, however, the difficulty of obtaining in New Zealand a body comparable to the governors of the BBC, and of investing it with the B.B.C.'s measure of independence. Britain has so many highly capable and disinterested men and women suitable for such positions. New Zealand is now attempting to do everything that Britain does, with only a small fraction of Britain's population from which to draw persons of outstanding ability for important posts. For example, we have created a diplomatic service, and we send delegates to the United Nations, UNESCO, and other international organisations. In any society the pool of exceptional ability joined with character is smaller than many realise. Moreover, Britain shows a stronger disposition than we do to keep political considerations out of selections. More fundamental still to this problem of broadcasting control, there is in Britain a greater regard for freedom of expression. The BBC is what it is, largely because successive governments have preferred that broadcasts shall be managed by this method rather than any other, and have supported the Corporation's policy of combined freedom and impartiality.

[1994] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 186-188.

After I had written the above comment I came upon this reference to the New Zealand Service in Lord Reith's autobiography *Into the Wind*. Lord Reith was then head of the BBC:

> New Zealand had recently decided on State management as well as State ownership of broadcasting. The Prime Minister of that country asked me what I thought about it. A mistake - against the interests of both broadcasting and Government. He said one of the reasons for their decision was the difficulty they had in getting people of the right type to make up the Board. The man whom they had appointed as chief executive would have a good deal of freedom. I said he would find it difficult to get people to believe that he was not acting under direct governmental orders.

The man referred to, the first Director of Broadcasting, was Professor (now Sir) James Shelley, an Englishman who had been Professor of Education at Canterbury University College for sixteen years. James Shelley was an idealist and a crusader, with a great capacity for work. He brought to broadcasting a burning enthusiasm and a knowledge of certain of the arts that probably was not equalled in this country. He had also been trained in science. In his temperament were certain qualities that handicapped him as Director. He was, for example, not very methodical. Even his virtues plagued him; he was too sensitive and too kind. Moreover, only three years of his term of thirteen years were normal. James Shelley, however, gave distinguished and important service to broadcasting. Coverage was increased and programmes widened in scope and improved in quality. His most conspicuous monument is the National Symphony Orchestra, which was his idea and creation. It is part of the Broadcasting Service. He also wanted a Conservatorium of Music, and but for the war we should probably have it now. Quite apart from broadcasting, James Shelley's influence was wide and deep. Perhaps no man in our history has done so much in the diffusion of culture. I am proud to have won and retained his close and warm friendship.

The early development of broadcasting in New Zealand is a story of bits and pieces, uncoordinated effort by enthusiastic pioneers, and governments pressed by interested parties and not knowing quite what to do. When I joined there were a number of private stations in addition to the Board's. Eventually all, or nearly all, these private stations were taken over by the State. […] The trouble was that a vastly important public utility of quite a new kind was being developed, and ignorance and self-interest complicated the task of steering it.[1995]

The security of a pension scheme and a stable, generous-enough salary for creative work appeal to Mulgan, even as public ownerwhip and control of the media frighten him; the challenges of supply and demand - or rather, of finding a decentralised model for cultural exchange which respects individual freedom

[1995] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 188-190.

without leading to the triumph of the lowest common denominator (reality TV, celebrity Instagram etc.) - are palpably real, even if the solutions are not at all obvious:

> The quality and variety of the programmes, including the daily services such as news and weather and the broadcasting of events and contests, gradually engendered appreciation in the public mind. Largely as a result of the establishment of the *New Zealand Listener*, publicity greatly improved. The *Listener* is a first-class critical journal and a keen encourager of new writing talent.
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> […] Some listeners regard their particular preferences as all important, and think they have a grievance when they cannot get them just when they want them. This type came to prominence in 1950, when it was learned that the National Symphony Orchestra had cost £100,000 in a year, far more than it earned. The deficit was met from the Broadcasting Service's licence revenue. A newspaper correspondent asked why he and others should pay for what they did not want. The answer is that every listener pays for what he does not want. There is not one class of news, instruction or entertainment, that interests every payer of the licence fee. There is also the citizen who criticises the Service without studying the programmes, which are supplied to him by the sixpenny weekly *Listener*. Happily, as a result of years of education, the type is not so numerous as it was.
>
> […] One thing I learned is that you cannot divide listeners - or any other great body of people - into sheep and goats. Tastes are mixed, and one never knows where a particular liking will crop out. The intellectual may wish to divert himself with thrillers or low comedy, and the apparently non-intellectual may show a surprising interest in good books or music. One couple whose interests ranged from Bach to Einstein never missed the 'Japanese House-boy' series. If there is a high-brow play (I do not like the term), it is Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. As I was going in to a W.E.A. performance of *The Cherry Orchard* in Auckland I overheard a conversation between a citizen and the box-office. They were sorry that there was no room that evening, but they could give a seat on Monday. No, he could not come on Monday, because he was going to the wrestling in the Town Hall. Chekhov and wrestling; that incident taught me a lot.[1996]

What is needed, then, is both freedom for the 'consumer' and ethics from the 'producer' of culture; this does not mean that consumers need no ethics, or producers should have no freedom, but it does mean that the economics of spiritual humanism place a heavier burden on purveyors of culture than on the general public, whose moods may shift 'from Chekhov to wrestling' in the space of a few minutes. The 'education' of the adult public cannot be didactic, and cannot preclude simple entertainments, but such 'industries' should not behave as predatory profit-maximisers; all 'professions' - from law and medicine to the construction industry to import-export businesses, the media, and the arts - are first and foremost 'public

[1996] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 191-193.

trusts', not money-making exercises. In the case of broadcasting, this entails a whole series of nuanced responsibilities:

> Please do not think I rule out dialect, plump for the Oxford accent, or consider that the BBC voice is perfect. I do not. My admiration for J.B. Priestley as a broadcaster is sufficient answer. […] Any variation from standard English is acceptable if the voice is clear and fluent and has intelligence behind it. Our main trouble in New Zealand is that we do not appreciate the aesthetics of speech. We are liable to regard refined speech as affectation - the mark of a 'Cissy'. Too often our voices are thick, ugly and flat, lacking in tone and rhythm. Teachers do not set a good example. About the worst talk I ever put on was by one of them. Among the well educated, scientists as a class are perhaps the least satisfactory at the microphone.
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> […] It was part of the interest of recording to watch the surprise of people on hearing their own voice for the first time. Like the American who saw a giraffe, and said, 'There's no such animal', some of them did not believe the voice to be theirs. Except in this way, a person never hears his own voice properly. I was astonished when I heard mine. This gives me the opportunity of mentioning the most memorable link with the past that has come to my knowledge. In 1937 Miss Caroline Nias visited New Zealand. […] 'What do you think of your voice, Miss Nias?' 'Perfectly beastly!' However, she must have appreciated the extraordinary nature of the occasion. A daughter of the man who guarded Napoleon in 1815, and saw the Treaty of Waitangi signed in 1840, was recording a talk in New Zealand in 1937.
>
> The value of recording in showing speakers their faults is inestimable, and it is astonishing that public men, clergy, teachers, and indeed all who have to address assemblies, do not make more of the invention.
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> […] The change-over from journalist to broadcaster brought me one of the most illuminating experiences of my life. From being a critic, I became a servant of a public service that was criticised perhaps more than any other. A thrower of sticks at Aunt Sally took Aunt Sally's place. Like my colleagues, I was conscious of the shortcomings of the Service, but, knowing the inside running, I saw that many criticisms were based on ignorance. Some of them need not have been put on paper. A simple inquiry, even so simple as studying the programmes, would have given complainants the facts. […] There is no reason to believe broadcasting is alone in this respect. Every public institution and public man, every private individual, is subject to criticism that is ignorant, or unthinking, or both.
>
> The longer I live, the more astounded I am that people jump so quickly to conclusions. They see a fact, or what looks like a fact, and at once weave a theory round it. They do not take the trouble to find out if it is true, or if there are other facts. […] Some of our public men have suffered cruelly from circulation of slander. You may say that when I was a journalist I must

> have offended by a too quick reception of one side of a case. I am sure I did, but one is never too old to learn.[1997]

In other words, even the scourge of 'fake news', which we lazily think of as unique to the Internet Age, is really a spiritual problem with much deeper roots in our cultural past; solutions to it require a reckoning with that past, and Mulgan offers an extraordinarily valuable panorama of it.

The penultimate reflection in *The Making of a New Zealander* - intimately connected to the economics of Mulgan's profession - concerns New Zealand's capital city:

> All this time I was in Wellington, and I have lived there since I retired. […] The real Wellington is all the territory that Colonel Wakefield bought from the Maoris in 1839 on the deck of the *Tory*, the whole visible landscape of the hills and valleys and beyond, for a miscellaneous collection of goods that included blankets, soap, guns and ammunition, axes, pipes and tobacco, fish-hooks, looking-glasses, umbrellas, ribbon, sealing wax, and jew's harps, but also land reserves for the Maori. It is this widespread landscape and seascape that is the full and real Wellington, the Wellington of the lake-blue harbour and streets storming its steep ring of hills. To love her is an exciting education. Excitement is in the atmosphere of the place, the air that makes you run up steps, the northerly wind that spins you round in the middle of a street and leaves you in horrid doubt whether you will ever get to the other side. […] Wellington is also exciting in its contacts. There you may meet everybody. The city draws talent from all over New Zealand. In Wellington are the centres of the political and commercial machines. […] It is the intellectual centre of New Zealand. […] So many men in Wellington have to study affairs from a national point of view. They are concerned with what happens in Auckland, Taihape, Westport and Gore, and how it will affect Tauranga, Napier, Wanganui, Nelson and Christchurch.
>
> So Wellington was another stage in my education - the fascination of the city and the national nature of my job. […] The Centennial history of Wellington city and province, *The City of the Strait*, was the toughest job I have ever done. There were eighteen months to do the research and write the book. If Wellington had not been so good a place to work in the task would have been even harder. I had some knowledge of general New Zealand history, but little of Wellington's story. It was well worth doing, especially as in a measure the foundation of Wellington was the foundation of New Zealand. In this book I tried to make some return for Wellington's capture on my affections.[1998]

This final professional stint at the centre of 'New Zealand' life clearly deepened Mulgan's sense of belonging to his country as a whole. This was not, however, by any means the end of his spiritual journey; it rather offered what all arrivals at

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[1997] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 193-196.

[1998] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 196-197.

imaginary ‘centres’ do: a fresh sense of the fundamental endlessness of humanistic ‘education’ or ‘learning for the self’:

> One spring day in 1946 I took leave of broadcasting and of full-time work. I had passed the allotted span of the Civil Service and felt that after many years of work, in which I seldom had a weekend completely free, I needed some leisure. […] The years of broadcasting had been difficult and in some respects disappointing. The war had put a severe brake on hopes of development, and the shadow of personal loss, actual and possible, had hung over all. The idealism in the Service, however, the feeling that one was helping to direct and extend something big and worth while, and the comradeship of one’s fellows, did much to lighten the heart and strengthen the will. After the leave-taking ceremony, there was a talk in the Director’s room. I was to continue to make full use of the office, and would I do a series of broadcasts on my literary work? The work would hardly carry the weight of a series, I replied, but I had in mind *The Making of a New Zealander*. A tentative agreement about talks was made. So I walked out sad but happy. I had come to the top of the pass in my life, but the air was bright with kindness, and I was invited to go on with my work.
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> There followed the best holiday my wife and I have ever had, with the exception of our trip to England. […] We took our car to the South Island and in it covered some fifteen hundred miles at our leisure. […] There is no better way of seeing the country, unless it is by walking, but in the kind of life we lead now, that is for eternity rather than time. There was a delicious feeling of leisure, such as we had not known for years.
>
> One abiding memory is of deep and high southern tussock land, which, sloping up to rock and snow, stretches from Otago to Marlborough. Blue Cliffs in South Canterbury gave us an experience of a South Island station. Our host and hostess, Dr and Mrs Woodhouse, were interested in everything: the land, people, literature, all that concerned New Zealand life. Their own service to these things has been unstinted, and we learned much while enjoying the warmth of their hospitality. […] Here, in that enchanting but awesome country, was much that was strange to the northerner, something to be studied - so different, but New Zealand. Paradise, at the head of the lake, lived up to its name.
>
> So we moved, and stayed, and moved on, from place to place, looking and absorbing, trying to get the feel of the land in all its variations, extending our educations as New Zealanders. Then home, with full hearts and minds, to take up work again. Mine I could do in my own time. It was no longer necessary to rush for an early bus.[1999]

<u>‘This New Zealand’</u>

[1999] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 199-201.

> *Is it possible to gather up threads and make something of a pattern? I know most of New Zealand, and may it be my fortune to fill in all the gaps. True, an Englishman who has never left his native town may be a typical Englishman - if there is such a person - but travel should distil a certain amount of wisdom. It shows a man the variety of his country. The people of Britain are more varied than we are, because their roots are so much deeper and older and were struck from a number of sources when communities were more isolated. However, the variety of New Zealand landscape and industries and social aspects is sufficient to affect national life and warrant study.*
>
> *The land is mine, all of it, beauty and ugliness, success and failure. The people are mine, all of them. A country is made by its people, not by its scenery.*[2000]

If Mulgan contradicts himself in defining his 'New Zealand' by turns as both more and less diverse than 'Home', he is only exercising what Baudelaire describes as the first human right, namely to the paradoxes of poetry; Mulgan's sense of local belonging to Aotearoa is strengthened by the oscillations of travel and broad reading of international (and especially English) literature. This is what art does; it simultaneously expands and deepens our sense of self, our sense of cosmic responsibility, our 'rootedness' not to some piece of land, like a tree, but to a concept of ourselves as transhistorical agents in a meaningful struggle for justice. Mulgan doesn't get to see the end of the generational struggle or even understand his role in it; it is for those who come after him, like me, to define his legacy with our ongoing bouts of indebted creativity. In this respect, no one in the contemporary sphere of global public intellectualhood understands the value of Alan Mulgan to me as a great-grandfather figure better than American comedian Dave Chappelle:

> For all the things that I've done, I'm most renowned for what I *didn't* do. I've made decisions in my career that a lot of people have called insane. In 2004 I had a 50 million-dollar deal on the table, and in a crisis of conscience flipped the table over and walked away, went to South Africa. The idea that I wanted to share is that sometimes you do what you think is best whether anybody understands it or not. I heard a story about my father; someone told me he used to do statistics for a company in DC. The company started doing business for the South African Government, so he quit his job. This caused a lot of problems between him and his wife; it's hard for a man when he can't provide for his family the way he wants to, and he suffered through it. And a generation later, when I had my crisis of conscience, I was able to go to a free South Africa and get away from the heat. This idea that what you do in your lifetime informs the generations that come after is something I keep thinking about, something so much bigger than just ourselves. My great-grandfather [founder of Allen University] built something more substantial than buildings; he built a

[2000] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 202-203.

> community. And more importantly than a community, he built a Way. […] There's this idea that ethics aren't what they used to be, […] but good and bad are a compass that helps you find the way. I hope that you all transcend whatever you see as your obstacles, that you live outstanding lives, and that you stay connected to your communities, because you have so much power there, that you grow your communities and diversify your communities, that you don't let anybody - anybody - tell you you can't. It's OK to be afraid, because you can't be brave or courageous without fear; the idea of being courageous is that even though you're scared you just do the right thing anyway.[2001]

It is not for Mulgan to measure the size or nature of his contribution to the spiritual lives of others, just as it will not be our own job to evaluate our own legacies; all we can do is follow the compass which, through the embodied knowledge of aesthetic experience provided by others, fixes on an ever truer north of justice:

> To suppose that great scenery necessarily inspires great art is a fallacy. The painters of Switzerland are inferior to those in Holland. So far as we know, Shakespeare never saw a snow mountain, and Burns did not come from the Highlands. As a rule artists prefer bits to panoramas, and often bits that seem to the uninitiated drab and dull. I think we may have too much grandeur and beauty in the contours of our country for the good of our souls. We may be too content with external beauty to the detriment of beauty within ourselves. Our mountain peaks, glaciers and lakes have become national symbols, but they are not so intimate as little things around us - a turn of the road, a clump of trees, an old house, a herd of cows stringing along for the evening milking, a shepherd and his dog.
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> […The New Zealander] lives in remote islands, and as he gazes out over the ocean, he knows that the greater world is very far away beyond the horizon. So many of his thoughts are projected and perhaps this is reflected in his expression.
>
> What sort of man is he inside? All communities have need to bear in mind Chesterton's remarks on patriotism in that best of all volumes of literary criticism in our time, his *Charles Dickens*. He describes as 'essential madness', 'the idea that a good patriot is the man who feels at ease about his own country'. 'In the eighteenth century, in the making of modern politics, a "patriot" meant a discontented man.' Like the English, my countrymen make me mad and sad and glad. They are honest, industrious, dependable, adaptable, kind, helpful and courageous - first-class folk in a tight corner of their own or others' making. Friendliness is a common quality. New Zealanders will talk to anyone anywhere, and are ready to come quickly and cheerfully to the aid of a stranger. Their sense of equality and fraternity is very strong, stronger than their sense of liberty. […] However, time goes on. [Oliver] Duff's *New Zealand Now* is already some years old, and we move.

[2001] Dave Chappelle, 'Walk Away From Money', Allen University Address, 11/3/2020 (accessed 14/3/2020).

New Zealanders should not be unmindful of their achievements over a little more than a hundred years: the breaking in of a country and the development of a trade that gives one of the highest per-head figures in the world; an exceptionally high and relatively even standard of living; one of the lowest death-rates; a society without rigid classes; opportunity for education 'in widest commonalty spread'; care for the under-paid, the underprivileged and the unfortunate, in a system of social security that has attracted wide attention; success of sons and daughters in the competition of larger societies, and in contributions of great value to mankind; the beginnings of a native literature and art; and in two world wars a magnificent record in recruiting and fighting. Martial virtues can co-exist with unlikable qualities. if one could be transported to ancient Greece, one would not choose Sparta for a home. Courage, however, is the foundation of all the virtues. In the story of the New Zealanders in these two wars, off the field as well as on it, there is proof of the fine stuff in the young nation - its valour, its independence and initiative, its powers of endurance, its self-control, good temper and friendliness.

The exploits of Lieutenant (later Captain) Charles Hazlitt Upham, the only combatant soldier to win a Bar to the Victoria Cross, are remarkable even among the records of that decoration. What he did in Crete to win the Cross was spread over a number of engagements. […] He won the Bar to the Cross in North Africa for 'outstanding gallantry and magnificent leadership'. Again he knew just what to do in a crisis, and did it immediately with the same complete indifference to danger. Put out of action by a wound, he insisted on going back, and in the end was captured with a handful of survivors. Upham is one of the most modest of men. He did not want to wear the ribbon of his V.C. When I met him I was struck by this quality, but I have never seen a man from whom personality shone more unmistakably.

[…] When my son, John Mulgan, who joined the British Army because he was living in Oxford, met his countrymen in North Africa, he found them quiet, shrewd and sceptical. 'They had confidence in themselves, such as New Zealanders rarely have [so he wrote in his posthumous book *Report on Experience*], knowing themselves as good as the best the world could bring against them, like a football team in a more deadly game, coherent, practical, successful. Everything that was good from that small remote country had gone into them - sunshine and strength, good sense, patience, the versatility of practical men. And they marched into history.'

The warmest and most moving praise of us that I have read or heard, comes from the Canadian Leonard Brockington. He visited us during the war, and must have won all hearts; he certainly won mine. This country he called 'the clean and lovely land of the faithful'. Must we decline to cherish praise because we feel it is not merited? Rather should we take it to our hearts and pray that it will sharpen our intelligence, strengthen our will, and deepen our humility. For the easy half-blind days have gone. If this country is to solve its problems it will need fundamental brain-stuff based on faith and courage. The very soil of our country calls out for better treatment from heart and hand. The Far East is no longer a vast, distant, mysterious

> collection of human hives among which the British flag was planted here and there. It has become the Nearer North, and we have to consider how much danger it portends and how much co-operation it invites. Some years ago a young American poet, Paul Engel, told his countrymen they had to pass from pioneering the land to another task. There was a second land to be explored, 'the deep spirituality of men'. As time passes, the excuse that New Zealanders are preoccupied with pioneering in the primary sense of the word, loses more and more force.
>
> My personal final word is that in politics I am a Liberal with leanings to the left - 'left' with a small 'l'. However, when I say I want to see New Zealand Liberal, I am not thinking of politics but of a state of mind. I am a democrat, for two reasons, because the definition of faith applies to democracy - the determination to stand or fall by the noblest hypothesis - and because I see no satisfactory alternative. I dislike the taut and quivering idealism that is always on the stretch, and the intrusion of propaganda into everything. I dislike short cuts. I am not at ease about the demands science is making on education. Chemistry and physics are very necessary subjects of study, but can they ever by themselves teach us to love and understand our fellow men, give us liberality, pity and grace? Without nourishment by the humanities, these flowers must wither. Holding these convictions, I detest totalitarianism and all its works. It sins against the light. Its first victim is always truth. I wish for my country nothing so much as the cultivation of an open mind.[2002]

'The easy half-blind days have gone.' New Zealand in 2020 is well beyond the remote pioneering of Mulgan's childhood; it is now - cue clichés - a vital multicultural centre in an interconnected and multipolar world. The great global problems of our time - economic justice, intercivilisational dialogue, the fashioning of exciting but coherent new identities for ourselves and our children - belong as much to us as to any other empire or capital. We may even just prove a useful little laboratory for the big experiments of our century, an engine-room for the productive and redistributive energies which make justice possible. Our journey through Mulgan, however, reveals one big, heretical thing: the 'invisible hand' of the free global marketplace does not, and will not, solve humanity's spiritual problems; the genius of decentralised pricing must be supplemented with a knack for moral authenticity which eludes a world driven crazy by the unprecedented temptations and burdens of self-marketing. Mulgan's great contribution is not to solve this problem - he can't see that far ahead - but rather to help us to diagnose it, and to provide fuel for those hungry to address it.

[2002] Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander*, pp. 203, 205-209.

3. *Talking About Ourselves*

The idea that one might find creative solutions to the economic injustices of contemporary globalisation by digging around in the humanistic tradition of a specific country - in this case New Zealand - may seem esoteric, but the humanities offer quixotic universalism, not Cartesian instrumentality. Ruskin heightens the left-liberal Victorian pitch which early British settlers of a certain progressive type brought with them to New Zealand; Alan Mulgan represents the first generation of New Zealand-born British attempts to fashion a new national identity out of this humanistic concern. The 1986 anthology *Talking About Ourselves: Twelve New Zealand Poets in Conversation with Harry Ricketts* carries the battle for 'justice' a generation further. Born between 1911 and 1949, these poets could scarcely be said to share the same politics, but a spirit usefully summarised as '20th-century New Zealand left-liberal' nevertheless emanates from the volume, even as (or precisely because) its contributors focus on poetry rather than economics.

Introduction

Ricketts (1950-), an Englishman settling in New Zealand in the 1970s (as my own father did), argues that his book 'contributes to a kind of literary sub-soil[2003], namely a prose framework from which the world - including New Zealand - might understand the forays specific to 20th-century New Zealand poetry. Not all the leading lights are interviewed - Hone Tuwhare was away, and one other unnamed poet (Bill Manhire, one suspects) refused the invitation to participate - but an excellent cross-section *did* accept, not least because Ricketts, 'somewhat of an outsider', 'didn't start out with a preconceived theory which I wanted to prove or disprove, and I didn't have an axe to grind.'[2004] Like all good anthologies, this collection of interviews was not striving to be boringly 'representative'[2005], but synthetically creative; the interweaving of twelve discrete fibres around a common core of questions (including the role of the poet in New Zealand society and the legacy of James K. Baxter) culminated not in any fascistic mind meld, but a whole greater than the sum of its parts:

> The problem with the pre-planned interview is that you tend to get the answers you've budgeted for, or worse, the answers that you have engineered. I wanted interviews which were more like real conversations, which grew and developed in the way conversations do - capable of taking sudden twists and turns. You could say I wanted them to have their own organic form.

[2003] Harry Ricketts, in Harry Ricketts (ed.), *Talking About Ourselves: Twelve New Zealand Poets in Conversation with Harry Ricketts*, (Wellington: Mallinson Rendel, 1986), p. 7

[2004] Ricketts, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 9.

[2005] See Ricketts, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 9-10.

> […] How many people are arrogant enough to assume that their every stutter or chance word is so immensely significant that it should be preserved at all costs? […] You could call this the [edited down] Authorised Version, if you like. […] To put it in the simplest form, this book is about New Zealand poetry, past and present. What it offers is the interplay - convergence, divergence, opinion, counter-opinion, agreement, disagreement - of the twelve contributors talking about New Zealand poetry and poets in whatever way suits them.
>
> […] The *particular* value or interest [of this book] will depend to some extent on the particular reader. I imagine a New Zealand reader will inevitably find a rather different value or interest in the book from an overseas reader, but I hope it will send both back to the poetry - which is, after all, the important thing. And I hope it will send them back with a sense of enlargement and enhancement.[2006]

Rather than following Ricketts' advice, we will 'go back to the poetry' in our next chapter on Tony Beyer (1948-), a 'young poet' mentioned by more than one of these twelve contributors in 1986 as a voice of the future, and (as luck would have it in our swollen village of a country) my high-school English teacher in 1997. *Talking About Ourselves*, however, deserves attention of its own, not just as a gateway drug to something better but as an embodied example of all that is best in 'New Zealand literature'. Ricketts ends his introduction by mentioning 'a hypothetical reader in fifty years' time for whom this is all literary history'[2007]; I am fourteen years early, and Ricketts is happily still alive, but I felt suitably addressed.

Keri Hulme

> *Poetry, as taught at school, was… poetry, as it's normally taught at school. It wasn't very adventurous. […] Baxter was not there at all. Poetry was not emphasised. In fact, we did more poetry in French… French I found most unsatisfactory because I'd make translations that I thought were good - because they conveyed the mood of it - but they weren't exact translations and that was a no-no.*
>
> *[…] I was quite convinced that what I was writing was not proper poetry because it didn't sound like, say, Gray's 'Elegy' which we did* ad nauseam*. The thing that really got me hooked initially was a fit of rebellion against some English teacher who told me that my writing was far too rich and 'It must be the Maori in you; you're using all these images, and you're just overdoing it, tone it down and calm it down and it'll be much better.' So I thought, 'Right!' Anybody who came out with that sort of criticism, there were going to be small, private, home riots against them. So I started retelling*

[2006] Ricketts, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 12-14.

[2007] Ricketts, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 14-15.

> *legends but setting them either in - I'm still doing it - the present time or mixing them together. You can have a lot of fun with the Maui cycle, for instance, by just threading it together. […] I don't think I consciously thought that [I was using my 'Maori side']. I just thought, 'Well, that's the way I really enjoy writing.' It didn't throw me towards modes of expression that could be considered Maori - not deliberately. […] I was reading [the Maori legends] in English, […] in A.W. Reed's retellings.*[2008]

With ancestry more European than Maori, Keri Hulme (1947-) exemplifies a generation and cohort of New Zealanders for whom Maori mythology and civilisational wisdom, though thoroughly marginalised in colonial structures of education, were genealogically as well as geographically available; the number of New Zealanders with one or more Maori parent, grandparent or great-grandparent is now so large that even a Pakeha ('European') like me (second-generation on one side, third- on the other, such that one of my parents and all four of my grandparents were 'British' enough to carry big traces of the Old World accent) has several close relatives with liberal doses of Maori DNA. As with these family members (and thousands of other happy mongrels across the country), Hulme's attitude is not summarisable as Maori nationalism or ethnic chauvinism - an irrelevant fringe political movement here - but as a simple and natural grasping of the liberty to bring Maori culture - as she understands and discovers it - into dialogue with 'the best that has been thought and said in the world'. Not that Hulme saw her work in such world-historical terms; she simply followed her creative instincts in the face of a generalised *bourgeois* bemusement:

> Because I was reckoned to be reasonably intelligent, university was supposed to be where it was at. Perverse person that I was, as soon as they said 'University' I said 'No - somewhere else.' So I became a tobacco picker. And having done my year outside, I then decided life in the outside world was pretty harsh and I'd go and see what university was about. I lasted four terms as a law student (at Canterbury) and then quit and became a very good fish and chip cook… You're supposed to apply for admittance to the Law Faculty and you had to give reasons for being a lawyer. Prof. Gray, who was a Scotsman with an international reputation, was horrified by my reason because I said, 'Well, a B.A. is useless; I haven't got the maths for science; so, Law is as good as anything else; I might as well take it.' This was not considered a proper attitude for a budding lawyer. You were supposed to attend dinners and you were supposed to have a certain kind of dress and all the rest of it.
>
> […] I'd started writing while I was tobacco picking. I'd started the story, for instance, that grew into *The Bone People*. […] It didn't get touched for quite a long time. By that stage, I had, literally, a drawerful of stuff but it was just a kind of minor vice - you didn't talk about it. My mother's a very good and sympathetic person to all her weird and eccentric children and she had

[2008] Keri Hulme, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 17-19.

> arranged for me to have a study - which was the front porch of the house which had been closed in - and it had my desk, me, a writing lamp and my father's old typewriter. […] My mother's always been supportive, if slightly bemused at why anybody would want to waste their life doing the sort of thing I've been doing - writing. As my Uncle Bill says, 'You could have been a computer expert. You could have been earning real money!' And, bless him, he said, 'Well, now you must try to write something like *Watership Down*. Think of the millions in that!' The value I had and have for the family has got very little to do with money. Or writing.[2009]

Though there is no sense whatsoever of entitlement here, Hulme was obviously happy to discover that she might make a living in New Zealand - however basic - from her creative work:

> [After the fish and chip shop it was really] just odd jobs. I became a winder in various woollen mills - a winder is the person who keeps tying knots so the yarn keeps going on to the spools so the weavers can use it. I became very proficient at tying knots. My best was sixty-three a minute. It was hard yakka. Then I became a postie. I shifted over to the West Coast because there was a senior postie position over there. Then I got the merriest lurgi, SPK (superficial punctate keratitis), which primarily affects your eyes which meant I couldn't work as a postie any more. I became a pharmacist's assistant and then I decided I'd retire and become a writer - that was when I was twenty-five. I'd heard about the Literary Fund at this stage. I thought, 'Wow! Give me money!' So I wrote away asking for money and got a very polite letter back saying, 'Well, we don't actually just give away money like that…' […] So I said, 'Oh, I've got plenty of things, but you can't really have a look at them because they're sort of in drawers.' All that had one momentous result. A person called Patricia Godsiff who was on the Literary Fund committee said, 'I've written to Rowley Habib. You might not know him!' I didn't and I should have. 'He's Maori like you and I think you'd find contact with another Maori writer very beneficial.' And my oath yes! At one stage, for a period of about eight years, Rowley and I wrote letters to each other. So that was important because at that time the Maori Writers and Artists idea was being bruited about - it hadn't actually been formed - and I got in on that through Rowley. And that meant contact with a whole new world. Here were people writing who published. They wanted to publish and I suddenly saw the point of it all. It really wasn't just amusing yourself.[2010]

This last sentence is characteristic of Hulme's attitude to her craft: the spontaneous in-and-for-itselfness of creativity, on which her rebellious nature was willing to insist at great cost, gives way, just as spontaneously, to a sense of responsibility for her creative labours:

[2009] Hulme, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 20-21.

[2010] Hulme, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 22.

> After the first Maori Writers and Artists *hui* [meeting] that definitely wasn't good enough thank you very much, because I couldn't understand a quarter of the *whaikorero* and that was very embarrassing. So I started to nudge myself to get arse into gear and learn. And did that via books and listening. I still don't feel confident in speaking unless I've had a chance to think it through first and write it down. I don't think until I find myself in a situation where Maori is regularly spoken I'm going to achieve anything like native speaker fluency. […] Writing in Maori, I very much want to use my own dialect, not North Island dialects of any kind; not so-called classical Maori which is certainly not a dead language because it's most used for oratory, but it's not current Maori, contemporary Maori. I don't have the confidence I have with writing English. You develop a gut-feel for a language. That comes pretty quick. But then you develop an instinct for what is wrong when you do it wrong. I'm still working towards that in Maori. Kaitahu was almost a dead dialect, except there are now large moves afoot to resurrect it. I've been collecting Kaitahu words for eight years. They come up in odd places. They'll come up in old books by Pakeha [European] authors. They'll sometimes come up in conversations. You suddenly realise that a word is not the conventional term for something and you'll find it's one of the old people's words that's managed to survive. I have lots of words to do with whitebaiting.[2011]

Realising that Kaitahu words, and even words like 'whitebaiting'[2012], may be unfamiliar to a generic international audience, Hulme offers a shoulder shrug; it can't be any other way:

> It's right when it feels right and that's it. I don't think about somebody out there reading it. The bloody nice thing about *The Bone People* was the way it circulated around Maoridom. That to me was the best thing of all. In fact, we had quite a lot of the *kuia* [older women] at the launching and some of those old dears were very very dubious about the whole thing… not a proper occasion, not a wedding, not a funeral. The greatest compliment for me from that was when one of the old ladies said after it had finished, 'Oh, this hasn't been a bad idea. I'll go and buy a copy and read it and then I'll tell you.' She did and she liked it - very nice. […] The Book Award was fabulous, but the Pegasus was something else again. It says that what you are doing, regardless of how mongrel you are, is accepted as a Maori thing - great. […] One of the things that's really surprised me has been the letters that come out of the blue from people you've never heard of.[2013]

[2011] Hulme, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 23.

[2012] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whitebait (accessed 30/3/2020): '*Whitebait* is a collective term for the immature fry of fish, typically between 1 and 2 inches (25 and 50 mm) long. Such young fish often travel together in schools along the coast, and move into estuaries and sometimes up rivers where they can be easily caught with fine meshed fishing nets. *Whitebaiting* is the activity of catching whitebait.'

[2013] Hulme, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 24.

The logic of such endeavours, however, simply does not fit curves of supply and demand; while there may be a population of curious and guilty people at home and abroad eager to feel better about themselves and fork out for a book, this does not exhaust the civilisational value of Hulme's work to the world; *The Bone People* would in all likelihood have stayed in its drawer if she had not actively sought the financial assistance of local authorities. Even live events with local literary celebrities were not commercially viable in 1980s New Zealand:

> In 1980 the idea was mooted that several women would do a poetry and short story tour. There was Miriama Pitman, Kohine Ponika, Heather McPherson, Janet Potiki and myself. […] Heather was the only Pakeha in the group. […] Anyway, Matariki, which was the name Kohine gave to the group, couldn't just set off. We had to get funding. We did get some funds from MASPAC. There was some money from the Maori Education Fund and we applied for a Lit Fund grant as well to make it possible.[2014]

The current model, then as now, is of a parasitic creative economy dancing to the tune (or 'grants') of political and business establishments structurally uninterested in humanistic creativity for its own sake; when the most successful New Zealand novelist of my own generation, Eleanor Catton (1985-), said so, buckets of slime were poured on her in the national media.[2015] Hulme rushed to Catton's defence:

> 'Quite seriously, aren't writers allowed their opinions? Do we have to - whether we've been helped via literary prizes etc. or government grants - always agree with what some of the policies are? […] I've had an enormous amount of support over the years. Not least when [*The Bone People*] was declared the first classic New Zealand novel, which still makes me laugh.' Hulme added that she suspected whatever country a writer was from, they would be disillusioned with government support of the arts.[2016]

Hulme and Catton highlight a *global* problem, to which the remaining eleven poets in *Talking About Ourselves* will all, in their own unique ways, return: there is no mechanism anywhere for allocating resources *fairly* to artists, who are forced to mercantilise and reify themselves, turn themselves into brands (and their own brand managers) in order to jostle more or less underhandedly for attention in a crowded, lowest-common-denominator, plutocratic cultural marketplace. The idea that valuable cultural products might deserve support despite the fact that there is no existing demand for them is reluctantly accepted only as a derivative of national tourism or other corporate branding strategies; a single cherry of a prize for a single chosen author, rather than any fair share of the cake for artists generally (who, it is assumed, will work in 'real' jobs until they have won, by hook or by crook, sufficient fame to translate into money and be able to work full-time on their art). Hulme

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[2014] Hulme, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 24-25.

[2015] See 'Booker Prize Winner Keri Hulme Defends Eleanor Catton', https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11393211, 28/1/2015 (accessed 30/3/2020).

[2016] Hulme, in 'Booker Prize Winner Keri Hulme Defends Eleanor Catton'.

doesn't address the question - that is what *we* are doing - but she does outline it; the idea that *The Bone People* could be regarded as 'the first classic New Zealand novel', Hulme suggests[2017], is a symptom of the problem of philistinism and historico-cultural ignorance itself, the wilful (or no longer even wilful) disregard for the patrimony of entire nations and civilisations which you get when you make GDP growth an end rather than a means of humane endeavour.

Rather than dwell on the steep challenges of justice, however, Hulme returns to the flatter ground of individual human identity, which is more open than any narrow identity politics will ever allow; we all have 'homes', but these are not closed off to the world:

> I would call [Moeraki my] *turangawaewae ngakau*, 'the standing place of the heart' or 'the place where your heart feels most at home'. *Turangawaewae* literally means 'the standing place of the feet'; it's your home *marae* ('meeting-house) or a *marae* where you're permitted to speak, your domicile. *Turangawaewae ngakau* is a coining. Moeraki is to me a very very special place indeed. I've done most of my important learning and growing up here. You can literally be so intimately involved with a place that you're aware of the tides there even if you're away from it a lot. My ideal life is now becoming possible: my ideal life is to be able to spend half the year in Okarito, summer in Moeraki.
>
> […] I converted to Catholicism when I was eighteen and I was a very, very devout Catholic for a number of years till my logic ran full-tilt into the idea of Hell, which seems completely ludicrous now and I'm un-converted.
>
> […] The poetry that I used to read would have been 'Oxgrave' - you know, *The Oxford Book of Verse* and Palgrave. That was the poetry I read. I discovered, and this may be an influence, R.H. Blythe's translations of haiku but I can't ever remember thinking, 'Ah, that's a good way to handle words, let me go and see if I can do that.' But obviously everything you read is going to be an influence one way or another and I've done one hell of a lot of reading. But there's not somebody I have deliberately chosen as a mentor.[2018]

Even Hone Tuwhare - the 'first Maori poet to gain recognition "on the other side of the fence"'[2019] - is more than a token or representative figure in Hulme's private pantheon; 'New Zealand poetry' is populated by individual voices which are more than the genetic and environmental sum of their parts, because they add something creative and unique of their own to their stock. 'New Zealand' is not an aging fixed narrative of Maori and English armies fighting it out in the back-country wilderness of the human world, but a constant becoming of something present and universal. This was as true in 1986 as it is now:

[2017] See Hulme, in 'Booker Prize Winner Keri Hulme Defends Eleanor Catton'.

[2018] Hulme, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 25-27.

[2019] See *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 28.

> Something is now starting to stir. You get people like Api Taylor - that's a New Zealand voice and it's a city New Zealand voice to boot. New Zealand poetry in general? I think there are still New Zealand poets who don't sing this land, who are fairly remote from it. […] I've deliberately not mentioned Hone [Tuwhare] because I wanted to bring him up as an example of something else. I *love* Hone's work. To me, he swaggers gloriously, an Elizabethan Maori. His English echoes Shakespeare and the [King James] Bible - he's said again and again that he's entranced by that richness, those cadences.[2020]

Writers, Hulme reminds us again at the end, are more than representatives of anything; they are individual human beings before - and after - they find their vocations. The sense of responsibility and purpose which Hulme feels for her work does not descend into a stale monomania cut off from the human and natural world around her:

> Have I told you Elizabeth Murchie's delicious anecdote? She told me this in Rotorua. She has *whanauka* (family, relations) who come to the coast each year and whitebait, and we were vaguely related too. And she said to her family, 'Do you know of a Keri Hulme on the West Coast? She's a writer.' And her *whanauka* scratched their heads and said, 'Keri Hulme? Yeah, the name does ring a bell - she's not a writer, she's a whitebaiter!' And I thought, 'Yes! That's a proper reputation to have.'[2021]

<u>Rachel McAlpine</u>

> *I'm so conscious of the sheer chance of who gets published. When Curnow started putting his first anthology together, in the forties, there was a real reason for doing that. It was 'a good thing' and it was his view. He found every important poet that he knew of - but who else was writing away in the wop-wops and didn't know about Curnow? A man I know called Peter Jacobson epitomises this to me. He's been writing good poems for twenty or thirty years, and I think he's had one poem published in his whole life. It's actually getting published that makes people into poets, I reckon. Because then you've got an incentive, you've got this whole web of expectation that you'll go on writing… that you're going to get better, and you do! Whereas if you're writing away in private and showing two friends, it never develops. New Zealand's absolutely stuffed with people like that.*[2022]

[2020] Hulme, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 28.

[2021] Hulme, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 29.

[2022] Rachel McAlpine, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 31-32.

If only getting published were the end of it; Rachel McAlpine's *Wikipedia* page looks like that of a woman forced, in late middle age, to give up on the idea of ever making a comfortable living from literature:

> Rachel Phyllis McAlpine (born 1940) is a writer and web content strategist. She is the author of 30 books including poetry, plays, novels, and books about writing. Since 1996 she has trained people how to write business content for a digital and electronic world. In 2007 she launched Contented Enterprises jointly with Alice Hearnshaw to provide scalable, cost-effective online training courses for business writers.[2023]

There is nothing ignoble about wishing to improve standards of business communication, but this is the sphere of rhetoric, not art - a person cashing in on the side effects of her vocation because there happens to be a demand for it, not someone receiving 'just' remuneration for her real endeavours. McAlpine's principal burden, however - her primary challenge - was a literary economy denominated by self-promoting *male* celebrities like the Big Mac of New Zealand poetry, Sam Hunt (1946-)[2024]:

> Sam Hunt started me off. He came to St. Bride's School, where I was teaching, and said his poems, and that was a revelation to me, to actually hear poetry instead of seeing it. And he said he had a theory about how women poets were all either very, very good or very, very bad and none in the middle. I'd done statistics and I knew that had to be nonsense, so I decided the very next day that I would sit down and start writing poems and see if anybody wanted to publish a book of them. That was the middle of 1974, and by the end of the year I'd got enough to send off. […] I'd been living for thirty-four years and I had a lot to write about. The whole country was bathed in the red glow of publishers' faces who had never published a woman poet and were suddenly embarrassed, so up popped nine brand-new women poets in 1975 for International Women's Year![2025]

McAlpine is honest that she owed her start partially to good fortune and favourable political winds; she also reminds us that most artists are spurred on by being told at some crucial stage in their development that they *can't* or *aren't good enough to* do something (in the case of 'New Zealand' artists specifically, the distance from the

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[2023] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rachel_McAlpine (accessed 30/3/2020).

[2024] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sam_Hunt_(poet) (accessed 30/3/2020):

> In June 2015, Hunt released his own range of wines, under the *Sam Hunt* wine label. The range was developed in association with Auckland-based fine wine retailer and distributor, La Cantina Wines. Each of the five wine varieties (Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, Merlot Malbec) features poetry from Hunt on the label and has a QR code that enable users to listen Hunt, Kilgour and The Heavy 8s performing brief excerpts of the poems.

[2025] McAlpine, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 32.

world's artistic centres makes, or ought to make, these feelings of inadequacy and determination to overcome them more or less universal and permanent). McAlpine, however, had the extra determination and responsibility of writing for unjustly dismissed others even as she wrote, first and foremost, for herself:

> I had life on board. I didn't have poetry at all; I had life. And I had women. I was doing it *for* women, on behalf of women. There's no two ways about it; there was a void and it wasn't fair. I don't know if it's because I'm a vicar's daughter but that's probably why I had the nerve to just sit down after school and think, 'Right, I'll write a poem before the children come home.' I was doing it for other people. It was definitely a political gesture or an altruistic one. […] It's different now. I feel as if I'm filling up a space some other woman should have.[2026]

Migrating from poetry to prose, McAlpine's sense of vocation expanded to fill the constraints - economic and temporal - available to her:

> I loved writing that first novel, which is coming out next year, and next week I'm getting stuck into my second. That's what I really want to do. I think I wrote poetry because I was a woman with children, home, part-time job, etc. You simply can do a poem in several hours a day and you can go back to it the next day. It might take six weeks to write, but it's still something you can hold in your head, while you're doing the dishes. You can't do that with a novel; at least, I couldn't.
>
> […] Prose is a tremendous luxury once you've got time to write it, because you can spread out and relax and explode, whereas the poetry has to be tight all the time. Sometimes I think that's why there seems to be more discussion and preoccupation with theory and 'schools' and so on when it comes to poetry than there is about novels. I reckon novelists are so busy writing novels they haven't got time to stop.[2027]

Returning to the subject of poetry, McAlpine is reluctant to embrace '[the] idea of New Zealand poetry being different from others, although I do have a general feeling that New Zealand poetry is full of energetic individual poets'[2028]; on the question of influence, she is equally eclectic: 'Unconscious influence is hard to identify. I admire plenty of poets but they don't all strike me with lightning.'[2029] If her initial contact with Maori poetry and mythology was tepid, something about McAlpine's New Zealand nevertheless offered her a chance to embrace - or 'access', in one of our preferred verbs - a beyond of the Enlightenment mentality:

> Until recently I got absolutely nothing out of reading translations of Maori poetry and songs and chants, and then quite suddenly I was reading them

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[2026] McAlpine, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 33-34.

[2027] McAlpine, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 34-35.

[2028] McAlpine, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 35.

[2029] McAlpine, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 36.

> again. I picked a book of oral poetry off the library shelves and started browsing through it. It seemed extremely direct and that made me think, 'Oh, I'm going to have to learn Maori; I can't put it off forever!' It's an effort to learn another language, so it's easier to brush it off, and in fact I wasn't ready to react to it before. I used to think of it as a simple language but now I think that's a self-protecting attitude. The language really matters, and the feeling for the earth and those songs that describe the beginning of the world - that's what really got to me. I think it's because I've been living in this little bach by the sea. There's a whole string of thirty-seven baches. […] It's been a beautiful place to live and now the council's going to knock them down. They cooked up some lie about how it was going to be for people to park in and watch the harbour, but what they'll really do is knock down the baches and there'll be railway sidings and storage for bulk LPG. It's just what we did to the Maoris in the first place. And then they'll build out another wharf and close off this area to the public. The whole of the land round New Plymouth, the sea edge, has been clamped down. There are rock walls, stone groynes, breakwaters, rocks dumped, more stone walls, more rocks dumped. It's totally inaccessible and it's like the land is just jammed under rock and concrete and people are to go somewhere else, thank you very much. It seems cruel to the land, and that's what I've been responding to in the Maori writing.
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> I've always thought it strange that we should be able to *buy* land. It's like buying a person. It doesn't belong to anybody really, we're just lucky to be here. When buying the land can entail literally taking it away in a truck, it makes me feel that the earth must be screaming. Perhaps that's why I'm going to have to learn Maori, to get in touch with those who knew all that - which we've forgotten.[2030]

By definition, McAlpine can't know what she doesn't know about Maori culture; only the intuition that it is worth exploring has developed. The key part of her experience in Taranaki, however, concerned the concept of private property, to which her remoteness from human civilisation gave her a fresh view; if land and people cannot justly be 'owned' by *anybody*, as McAlpine suddenly realises, what of people's creative endeavours (summarisable under the hideous modern term 'intellectual property')? As with Hulme, the question is asked, but not answered.

McAlpine's final remarks concern the great self-promoter and self-mythologiser of New Zealand poetry (the rich man's Sam Hunt), James K. Baxter (1926-1972):

> When I first read Baxter, it was a long time ago and what we were offered were his early poems and I always disliked them intensely. I resented them, and even now if I look at them it's the syntax I resent as much as anything. I look at them and I see a stanza eight lines long with only one full-stop at the end and I hate it. I think, 'That's Latin! That alienates me!' It's not the vernacular; it's a preaching kind of language and it's got subordinate clauses and all that, so you have to be 'intelligent', an abstract thinker and

[2030] McAlpine, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 37-38.

rather submissive in order to get into it. Even now I'll look at those poems and I'll think, 'No, I just will not. It might be duty to try to understand this but I can't be bothered.' He just got on my nerves. I didn't like all the classical references - I thought that was a very excluding thing to do in New Zealand - I mean, he wasn't *that much* older than me really, but that generation had a classical education. I did Latin at university, but I didn't do Greek. […] I enjoyed the Latin language, but by no means did I have access to all the Greek myths which were international currency for poets - supposed to be anyway - but by the time you got to New Zealand in 1960, it wasn't any more. Our universal currency was - I don't know - nursery rhymes or something. […] This 'myth kitty' has dropped out for New Zealanders and if you have to go and look it up in a book it's wasted. Then I enormously respected Baxter when he started to strip off all that old-world stuff and used really basic New Zealand myth and Maori myth and so on. The poems I liked the very best were the 'Jerusalem Sonnets' and 'Autumn Testament'. When they first came out, I loved them. I thought they showed integrity, that he was acting out his philosophy in the poetry. But when I read him now, I think there's an enormous gulf between us. I can never feel that I'm 'one of him' like I'm one of Neruda and Lorca, because he's so relentlessly patriarchal. He recorded somewhere that Louis Johnson told him the astonishing fact that women were also people, but it never sank in, and I don't feel like 'people' when I read his poetry.

My father is a minister and he always talks in an ordinary voice in church. He never preaches in a preachy voice and he never goes sing-song. I've only met two other people like that in the church. It's quite remarkable to have just a nice man in church talking to you instead of manipulating you, and here is Baxter preaching in the way that makes me feel squirmy. […] I think he knew exactly what the problem was. But you can flog yourself with your belt and that won't change the person you are. He just has to get top marks for trying. It takes great arrogance to write poetry in the first place and to think that other people are going to be interested in what you write. So it's not surprising that it slips over the edge at times.[2031]

Others will be tougher still on Baxter's self-aggrandising and self-reifying tendencies. On McAlpine's account, however, Baxter's greatest crime as a poet - the reason why he won't survive as a major figure - was not his recourse to Greek or the fact that he cynically fed his own brand by growing a beard and so on, but rather his refusal to recognise women as spiritual equals: 'Once you get sensitised to feminism, there's no way you can eradicate that. It stays there and grows. You don't have to shout about it all the time. I mean, it's excruciating to have to go on and on saying these things, especially when people start thinking you might be quite a nice person after all. But it has to be said.'[2032]

[2031] McAlpine, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 38-40.

[2032] McAlpine, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 40.

> *[There is] the constituency that believes that language is not exactly unattached, but that it has very little to do with nationalities. I don't mean necessarily from a political point of view and not necessarily from the rather tired attitude that says the great literatures are international in their appeal; but more a critical attitude that looks for issues which are supposed to be universal… and then by a sneaky movement of logic claims that the language which deals with them should be understood by anyone. That's an equally extreme edge. And somewhere in the middle most people would want to say, 'Ah, but if you're an Eskimo, the word 'white' is rather important. What are the words we have here that are especially important? And they do exist. The ground-cover is pretty thin, but it's there.*
>
> *[…] When you transport all these [English] conventions out to the perimeter, then the first thing you lose is the irony, the first thing you lose is that very highly tuned sense of those rhythms and of those tones and so you end up with writers who really lost the ability to 'fine tune' like that - we call them 'provincial'. They can't hear themselves. […] After a while you find yourself within that frame where the language has begun to get local. After a while the more you look within the frame from the 'middle-ground' point of view the more you see it occupied by a really extraordinarily dense range of evidence, and somewhere in amongst that range there is a sense of 'New Zealand Poetry'.*[2033]

Ian Wedde (1946-) sets himself up as hostile to attempts to force the round, florid language of poetry into the square pegs of academic or philosophical categorisation; even the idea of a 'World Ethos' or 'Spiritual Humanism', at the highest possible level of (global or universal) abstraction, appears under Wedde's lens as a brake on poetic creativity, a bureaucratic refusal of constantly becoming local othernesses. And yet something in Wedde's vision of poetry as differing from city to city accords with the Confucian ideal of 'harmony without uniformity':

> [Dunedin] was an Anglophile centre, whereas in Auckland, say, from earlier, there was the interest of people like Curnow in Wallace Stevens and so on… […] From Auckland the lines always tended to run more readily towards the West Coast of America. Around the turn of the century that traffic was very dense, and earlier, in the 1890s, say, there was very little sense of Auckland being separated off. The traffic went between Australia, Britain, South Africa, Chile, the West Coast, San Francisco and so on. People travelled up and down and around on those routes all the time. […] The traffic did somehow set up certain historical relations which persisted. So when you look at the new building that's going up in the new suburbs of

[2033] Ian Wedde, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 44-47.

> Auckland with funny washed-brick haciendas with half-tile roofs and it seems bizarre that this architecture should be there, in fact it's not really - it's part of the same connection. It's a kind of Californian architecture which has travelled here along with lots of other media information, lots of other cultural glitz… magazine culture… and that's just 'historical'. So it's not surprising that the American tones will be in Auckland particularly and the British and particularly Scots ones in Otago, and that that still happens. I imagine it always will. There's something similar to be found in Australia in the difference between Melbourne and Sydney… and Adelaide.[2034]

If cities and countries are shaped by distinct forces, so too are selves:

> The only other person that I really read then was Gerard Manley Hopkins, but of course that was then going to an extreme because he was all about making structure - imposing it. And then Dylan Thomas. And then I was reading the French writers - early moderns - and then I came back to New Zealand at fifteen and read 'The Red Wheelbarrow', which in the context of all that thick, difficult, structure-oriented work was like having your head just opened up and steam-cleaned. It was incredible. I looked at it and looked at it and I thought, 'Why on earth is it that this claims to be poetry when it's so utterly removed from what I've got myself used to thinking of as being poetry, and why is it that I actually believe it is? I mean, I was convinced from the first time I read it, and so I went on and read everything of Williams', and at that stage it was hard to get the books.[2035]

Curiosity attaches to tangible, not abstract, things; Wedde's quest for self-realisation as a poet was as universal as the next man's, but he was limited by his access to culture in 1960s New Zealand:

> There weren't so-called avant-garde publications. You had to make it up as you went along, and you relied very much on a sort of information network. […] There seemed to be a great many people sharing in this who didn't necessarily know each other, and every so often there'd be an opportunity for some of them to get together. It used to be, say, at a large reading, and the energy and the excitement involved in those occasions (along with a lot of posturing and rather self-congratulatory behaviour) was really fine. And it was because people had this surprised sense of how many of 'us' there were, and of how much information was being churned through. […] We're about due for another dose of change now because the 'middle ground' is now occupied by people of my generation who are just getting into their forties and they need to be put on their toes again. I'm not quite sure where it's going to come from, but one of the places I think is from the Maori. It's important for people not only to acknowledge, to admit, where they live but actually put some work into it. It requires some study. And I think in a curious way that the re-energising is going to come from the other extreme

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[2034] Wedde, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 47-48.

[2035] Wedde, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 48-49.

> as well, from the language one, because a certain easy vernacularism can actually be very dull after a while and I sense some of that has begun to creep in.[2036]

Like McAlpine, Wedde is suspicious of modern individualism; language itself is not the 'property' of an individual poet, regardless of the innovations she brings to it. If Janet Frame (1924-2004) carries the sense of private ownership of language to its logical conclusion, the likes of Keri Hulme take New Zealand literature onwards to a new horizon:

> Take Janet Frame first. The tradition into which she was born, the literary culture and tradition into which she was born to write, was one which had begun to say to writers, 'You possess the language.' It's a modern idea. So then people come to expect the writer to leave evidence in the language - which is after all a common possession of people - to leave evidence of their occupation, which we call 'style'.
>
> So this tradition comes down and it says, 'What you individually do with the language is what matters' - which is a very individualistic attitude to have to such a common cultural property - not property, such a common cultural phenomenon - as language. It has pushed it all the way to the first person, or the use of pronouns in a way that then isolates the writer from the community. […] When she was writing about 'he', 'she', 'it' or even 'I', it was still fiction, so people had to take this individual style which was obviously hers and move it against… abut it to these pronouns that were in the fiction and say, 'No, but it's her, well it's not', and so on. So the style, being so individualistic, was perfectly suited eventually to autobiography, and finally she got around to admitting it and just writing autobiography. I think that's where the big readership comes in, because it's a perfect alignment of her inheritance and of her own individuality - it's the tradition and the individual, if you like, come together and there's a certain harmony in that now. So I think that's probably why she's now got the readership that she has. It's now much easier to read. At the other extreme with Keri Hulme: her inheritance is to some extent one that she's borrowed or that she's studying. I don't think she's being opportunist. I think what she's doing is correct, it's *tika* [just], if you like, […] for her to be doing what she's doing… one eighth Maori - doesn't matter - she's serious about it. But the tradition, the attitude to language that she has, by study or to some extent by inheritance, is one that says, 'You do *not* have individual possession of the language.' So in spite of the fact that she has a very advanced style as a writer, nonetheless the attitude that you feel in it is not one that says, 'I own this' or 'I possess this', it's one that hands it over to a community of pronouns, to a community of voices. And you feel it reading her work; it's absolutely different in that way from Janet Frame's. There's something about Keri's tone that is different.[2037]

[2036] Wedde, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 49-50.

[2037] Wedde, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 50-52.

Nevertheless, Wedde does not want a totalitarian nightmare of abolished privacy; on the contrary, a healthy literary culture serves to protect the individual voices - including those of oppressed majorities and minorities composed of discrete individuals (e.g. Janet Frame) - who for whatever reason stick at the vocation of writing:

> [Language can be] a way of preserving intimate lines of communication with people. […] Children and parents and lovers and brothers and sisters - all intimate connections do this. And people also learn to do this with 'the world', what's out there. Everyone using language learns to keep up a particular love affair or hate relationship with particular things that language is employed in keeping personal. So, at the same time as learning the same language-business in roughly the same circumstances, everyone is also learning to use language to give themselves a sense of individuality, and somewhere along the track a lot of kids also have an invisible or secret friend, and again that's got very little to do with greater or lesser privilege or anything like that. Certainly a kid who is lonely or deprived is more likely to depend on the secret friend, but there are plenty of perfectly well-provided-for (in an emotional sense) children who still also have a secret friend… […] I think it's a way of learning how to ask yourself questions and then answer them as well. And from somewhere round about there this curious business of writing down happens. Where you would have thought language was mostly involved with talking to people, or asking for help, or giving information, instead it's an extension of the secret friend thing with language.
>
> […] And maybe at a certain moment you come out of the closet, you go public in some way or other. You admit that you do it and at that point, it ceases to be this secret business, this private, invisible friend thing. It still keeps a lot of those qualities and it still keeps a lot of the defensive functions, but they begin to realign themselves. And if, out of the very many who do this, you happen to be one of the few who go on doing it, then in a sense you've made a commitment to it and it is no longer just between you and your secret friend, you're doing it in public! In the road! And at that point whether you like it or not you simply inherit a responsibility to be awake to what it is that you're doing. Then, supposing your commitment is one that's justified, I mean supposing you write well… then the responsibility also includes a responsibility to respect the people who read what you write, and at that point you've gone a long way from the intimate codes of children or lovers and you've gone a long way from private, secret friends and furtive speaking to yourself - you hope, at least! You may still be doing all that but your position is different. You are being seen to do it. In some way, like it or not, you're accountable. You have to admit your commitment, otherwise, I think, you can't really work properly. And it's not like being aware of an audience, it involves being aware of a commitment. You're committed not only to what you write, and to the fact that you do write, but you're committed to your respect for the people (whoever they may be) who read

> it. […] I don't believe in talking down to people any more than I believe in talking over their heads.[2038]

Such a mature literary culture is founded on a very clear, almost Kantianesque principle:

> You can't actually read or think on behalf of people other than yourself. But the recommitting of language […] is to do with the sense that you have to treat language as though you were looking after it for them - not as though you were using it for your own ends. I think the moment you start using it for your own ends, then you really seal it off. That's the almost fascist end of the literary inheritance. […] It's very hard to recover the language, to heal it from those sorts of occupations, orthodoxies.[2039]

These responsibilities to language require a certain humility, and an *a priori* sense of mortality which willingly elicits a shuffle off the stage when the time has come. Overzealous theoretical stands and historicist posturing, by contrast, leave an unpleasant aftertaste in readers' throats:

> If you argue constantly back from your own practice as a writer towards your theory as a critic, then naturally you're going to be begging the question every time you look at it and make an opinion. But equally, the other way, if you constantly write out of some critical concept then you're going to be imposing on your own. […] I'd rather read someone crankily anachronistic like Betjeman, or Auden being faggotty or Christopher Logue's versions of Homeric hymns, than magazines full of boringly up-to-the-minute Canadian academics. […] Whether you like it or not, sooner or later not only you, but your work, are going to be regarded as established or old hat, or it will be overtaken by events and by other writers; just as surely as one day you'll fall over with your face in your typewriter and not sit up again. It's part of the natural order of things.[2040]

This reality in no way diminishes the value of the individual contribution or the poet's responsibility to cultivate herself; on the contrary, Wedde argues, it is such humility which makes lasting literary greatness possible.

<u>Lauris Edmond</u>

> *I see myself primarily as a writer of individual poems, and a poem as an individual experience - an artefact, if you like. I think I look at other writers as individuals too, though they may have common*

[2038] Wedde, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 53-55.

[2039] Wedde, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 55.

[2040] Wedde, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 56-57.

> *characteristics. Perhaps there are more important divisions than geographical and sequential ones. […] It might be true that I am somebody's daughter but I don't think about it like that. I'd just say that there's work I admire in New Zealand and indeed elsewhere. I think the standards I apply are the same for all my reading. There are some qualities in poetry that I think are more important than others, and you find them in New Zealand, as in England or America. So there are standards that cut across locality, without taking it away - because, of course, you do also feel part of a shared experience in your own country. […] But the idea of a poet speaking as an archetypal New Zealander who is articulate enough to make manifest New Zealand experience is very foreign to me. I'm much more concerned with the humanity I find in poetry, or in a poem; its vitality - its love of life, if I can put it that way. Of course the life anybody sees, including poets, is all around and you express things strongly if you know them well, so that's where a sense of location comes in, I suppose. […] Life is to be celebrated even in poems of grief, loss, no less than in poems of celebration.*[2041]

Lauris Edmond (1924-2000) freely admits that the 'biophilia' necessary for poetry can take an infinite variety of forms or perspectives; her own do not exhaust the global kitty, or even, for that matter, the New Zealand one:

> […] I think of my own work as coming quite particularly out of a sense of close relationship with the physical world. I don't just mean a conventional type of relationship; I mean a strong sense of belonging, of being close to the heart of what's happening. [Allen] Curnow, for instance, has a different way - he is a very acute and intelligent observer, from the outside. […] So is Ian Wedde. They make you aware of the writer as observer, partly because they are so good at it; they pick up so much and you see things through their eyes. I don't think that's what I do; I seem to want to go right into the middle of an experience and write about that. […] Write *out of* it, yes. […Poetry] must be lived, not talked about. […] I know [Baxter] sets himself up as what we've learnt to call the 'Great Mythologiser'; nevertheless because of the passion in his poetry he often seems to be right in the centre of the experience, and in a small body of his work - the love poetry, really - I'd say the same about Fairburn. […] I'd say straight off that I have no patience with poetry as merely cerebral - and yet (you can't say anything on this subject without immediately proving the opposite) there's Kevin Ireland, who writes witty, urbane, visibly intellectual poetry, and I actually enjoy his work a good deal. It's because he often has such a throwaway style. If he's 'in the centre', he's not fussing about it; he's simply there in a light, natural way. […] There are two young poets whose work I like too, though so far there isn't very much of it, Tony Beyer and Bob Orr. Both of them can make

[2041] Lauris Edmond, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 60-61.

> me feel that the world has slightly changed for the reading of a poem, which is of course just what should happen with a poem that knows its job.[2042]

On the question of 'influence', Edmond is straightforwardly honest; the only Maori voice which has really penetrated her is the token 'Elizabethan' one:

> I'd have to say that I am so centrally in the European tradition, by schooling and family and habit of mind, that I can only be glad we have the Maori one too, and in its best forms I love it. But I don't think it affects my writing very much. I use the odd word or reference - and I'm glad it's there - but it would be artificial for me to claim more of a connection than that. Hone Tuwhare - I didn't mention him before - is a poet I react to warmly. His work has a full-bodied, emotional generosity and a lot of stylishness as well. And in the best of his work the Polynesian and European influences fertilise each other. If we have more poets, as time goes on, who can do that, it's good news. Tuwhare's work has taught me a lot - not, of course, to be like him. I wouldn't try to write like him. But yes, [he taught me to be more like myself].[2043]

For all the faults and limitations of literary culture in 1980s New Zealand, the improvements in Edmond's lifetime, thanks partly to government intervention and the work of enthusiastic amateurs, have been significant: 'There are far more people now who think [poetry] is part of ordinary life, not just a terrifying secret code exchanged among members of an élite. And English teachers, some of them, have helped; so does the Book Council's Writers in Schools scheme.'[2044] The era, of course, is like all others exposed to fads, or in other words the temptation to forget the past and one's indebtedness to it: 'As for postmodernism - what is it? In art generally it means working beyond all previous traditions and, if you want to, incorporating them all. [… But] if the sound is there solely to manifest itself for its own self-glorification, that's silly. A poem has to have much stronger, deeper roots in real experience than that.'[2045] This inherent transgenerational sociality of language entails other responsibilities as well for those who wish to use it *creatively* rather than for shallow instrumental effect:

> There is, for instance, the question of that poem of Curnow's - 'Dichtung und Wahrheit' - that he says has a place in a sequence about violence because it commits an act of violence. That sounds all right, but I think you have to write about violence with some consciousness of a large view. […] The trouble with Curnow's poem, to my mind, is that he's inside it. It's an expression of cruelty without the compassion that would suggest there's a larger view.

[2042] Edmond, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 61-63.

[2043] Edmond, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 64.

[2044] Edmond, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 64.

[2045] Edmond, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 65-66.

> I know poets like Dryden and Pope wrote quite viciously, but that was to criticise and condemn qualities like pomposity and self-importance. The book that Curnow is scoffing at is simply a work of art by another writer he happens not to like. So there's a smallness, a pettiness about his stance. […] I think it's a matter of the comprehensiveness of a writer's view - you can't be 'inside', in the sense I've been talking about it, unless you're 'outside' as well. You have to see individual experience in the light of a total humanity. I think Curnow is saying, 'It's all right to do this, to be cruel, because I'm only making a point.' You can't do that, or you shouldn't.[2046]

The extension of this ethicised view of creativity is that 'writing one poem [doesn't] teach you how to write any other - just that one. You do learn to be alert to traps like repetition and excess, you gradually acquire a few more words and devices. But I don't think any of that makes a 'true poem' happen more easily - it may even militate against it.'[2047] Just as a poet must reinvent herself - or at least refresh her experience of life - for each individual poem, so must her overall contribution be seen not as a discrete pile of intellectual property, but as part of a canon she herself reinvigorates:

> I've been to funerals of writers and I've felt very moved - not just by the personal loss, in fact it may not be that at all, but by some sense that, as people with artistic standards that we take seriously, we recognise a sort of responsibility. Not just to ourselves but almost to one another, and to a wider public. There's a funny sort of pride at such moments, in the dignity of our craft, in the work we each contribute to a common end. Is this an absurdly romantic notion? I don't think so. Individual writers apply their own standards, and do it very privately (the writing of a poem is never anybody else's business); then there are these moments when you come together and you feel you are all working for the same thing. You even feel you do have something to do with the real life of a people - your people - its fundamental aspirations. I think if you are all by yourself, or on a platform reading your own poetry, it would be fatal to see yourself like that - ridiculous and grandiose. But these other times, when as an individual you're nothing, that sense of belonging together can be very strong, and very fine. I suppose one's own job stays the same - to do with the pursuit of excellence in the writing of a poem, of that kind of ultimate accuracy you have to search very hard for. But occasionally you're reminded that though they'd never tell you, and you might detest their methods and style, other poets are engaged in the same struggle.[2048]

<u>Brian Turner</u>

[2046] Edmond, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 66-67.

[2047] Edmond, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 67-68.

[2048] Edmond, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 69.

> *There's always been a tendency for our poets to feel as if poetry arising from their New Zealand impressions and experience is somehow rather inconsequential. A quite unwarranted attitude as far as I'm concerned. Being here and making sense of it - that's the most valuable [and] worthwhile subject we have. We'll get back to it when we fully recover from the second round of cultural cringing. […] I think from the above it's fairly obvious that I believe one's New Zealand experiences can't help emerging in the writing and anyone who tries to filter them out, or reject them as second-rate, is wet and a snob. Those who do are usually people who resent the fact that we are geographically at a distance from the so-called artistic centres of the world, and who imply that if only we could rub shoulders with the doyens of elsewhere, how much better we and our writing would be. What tin-pot notions, what indecent panting after 'trends'.*[2049]

Brian Turner (1944-) comes dangerously close to saying something absurd here; how can a 'New Zealander', born and raised in our faraway land, possibly begin to understand the broader human significance of her journey without at least acquainting herself with the 'artistic centres of the world'? Life on a desert island is still life, but it is a life meaningless beyond itself, fertilising and being fertilised by nothing foreign, and leaving no wider legacy. Turner's real subject, however, is poetic authenticity; a New Zealander can no more creatively realise herself by denying her origins than she can by ignoring the rest of the world. The point is not to 'keep up' with global trends, but to create honestly on top of them:

> Among some there seems to be a dislike of the idea that our relationship with the people and the land of our upbringing is a big and important subject. To me it is surely an inexhaustible subject, but not one that completely preoccupies me, not by any means. It is one that is always worth pursuing, and one that hasn't yet been adequately or fully explored. When I started to write I soon picked up the feeling that many of my generation felt that, as a subject, our relationship with the land, and our comparative isolation, had been done to death. There was an impatience not only to become part of something larger, but to be seen to be writing in a style that was up to the minute. Anything that gave off even the faintest whiff of the Georgian was abhorred. Most English poetry was insufferable: stodgy, pedestrian, dull, and so on. Beat and Black Mountain was what we should be responding to. I found it all rather shameless, silly and a bit weird. Adolescently arrogant. We still haven't quite shucked the worst of the influence which has got in the way of the release of a stronger and more really identifiable New Zealand poetry.[2050]

[2049] Brian Turner, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 71-72.

[2050] Turner, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 70.

Rather than chasing America, Turner is more interested in chasing himself:

> When I was visiting Australia in 1984 I came across this statement by the novelist and poet David Malouf: 'The land itself and how we are related to it and what we are actually doing here, and what we are making - that is a great subject.' I agree. A writer ought first to listen to what is happening around him or her, and not assume that elsewhere is more interesting and better. To me the most interesting and international of writers are those who are the most persuasively and convincingly local. That's where authenticity comes from. A writer must look for roots, dig among them, and see what happens. And you do this with an eye and an ear cocked to everywhere else that you know of. I feel a strong affinity to Seamus Heaney when he writes of the value of what emerges from a 'fusion of one's roots and one's reading'. To me travel is dislocating. I feel like a stone skipping over the surfaces of places in which I can never comfortably belong. You have to live in a place for a fair while before it illuminates, and then it's more likely to light up where you came from. I refuse to use travel as a means of escape, unless I'm entirely familiar with what it is I'm escaping from. Auden's lines are important to me and are worthy of reflection, especially by those who incline to use words like traditional and regional in a pejorative sense.
>
> > A poet's hope, to be,
> > like some valley cheese,
> > local, but prized elsewhere.[2051]

The problem for Turner is how to make proper sense of the 'foreign'; the *a priori* assumptions that it is either better or worse than the 'local' are equally suspect. If 'New Zealanders' are accustomed - by the sheer size of the world 'out there' or 'overseas' - to assuming that they are nothing in the grand human scheme, then surely the only way to overcome such an inferiority complex is to acquaint oneself with that world. Reading was the way this was done in earlier generations; but physical travel, of the kind Turner disdains, is now easier than ever before. Something in the 'dislocation' of tourism or even migration, when pursued for the right reasons, is surely generative of self-realisation - not only illuminative of 'where you came from', but also calling you on to a broader human destiny of shared meaning. The logical endpoint of 'stay local' thinking is utter solitude; Turner's real target is not overseas travel or culture, but the self-loathing which refuses to reckon honestly with one's own origins. Turner's own development as a poet - which

[2051] Turner, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 73-74.

included a steadfast environmentalism characteristic of our clean, green national image[2052] - would not have been possible without foreign influences:

> Many of my contemporaries seemed to be panting after the great urban binge, for that was where *life* was, man, in the city - dope and grope, hip and hump and rock. I couldn't get off on this at all for reasons that are probably fairly clear by now. But I was beginning to think that most of what I wrote was rubbish, and then I stumbled on [American poet W.S.] Merwin [1927-2019]. What a relief. Here was a writer, whom Auden once described as a marvellous prosodist, writing poems whose tone and form were similar to many of my efforts, and who was being published and praised. Merwin saved my bacon I think. […] While writing these remarks I have [also] been listening to Strauss's 'Four Last Songs' and the de los Angeles singing 'Songs of the Auvergne'. Readers might like to bear that in mind. The lyric notes touch me deeply and wash through the loveliest of the melancholy reaches of the heart. Such music has often been the stimulus behind some poems of mine that I like most.[2053]

The final part of Turner's interview shifts to economic or public terrain; he first identifies a fundamental disconnect between supply and demand for poetry:

> A poet's role is to write as well as he can about the things that matter most to him. As for an audience, I am not able to identify one. I know of several people who have said they've liked some of my poems, which is pleasing. Sometimes I have been surprised by their choices. (One lament here, tinged with perplexity, which is that many of the poems *I* most value seem to have gone unnoticed or unremarked.)[2054]

He then echoes the broader doubts about the concept of 'ownership' which his peers in New Zealand poetry have already voiced, though again without moving beyond token recognition for Maori contributions to such debates:

> Maori culture seems to me to have had only a slight impact on New Zealand poetry. I'm fond of the best of Hone Tuwhare's poetry - I sense an empathy there, he chuckles and weeps and the land and the sea throb and heave in his poems. Overall, though, I think ethical and moral attitudes to

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[2052] See Turner, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 74, 76:

> Part - but only part - of my work is concerned with finding a way of conveying my abhorrence of the way we are reducing the numbers of other creatures and species, of rivers and tussock grasslands, of wetlands, and so on, while we multiply and despoil the world, threatening to extinguish and obliterate virtually everything. Such human arrogance and insensitivity in the face of what we *know* makes me burn with loathing for the destructive qualities of the human race. […] [Ted] Hughes [for example] infuses me with a conviction that animals have a dignity that we struggle to emulate.

[2053] Turner, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 74-76.

[2054] Turner, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 76.

> the land and other living things are more eloquently and cogently put by the likes of Aldo Leopold, Thoreau, Chief Joseph, Peter Mathieson, George Schaller, David Attenborough and, fiercely, by Edward Abbey. Those with the deepest love for the Aotearoa I know are non-Maoris. It distresses me to follow the bitter arguing over *ownership* of land - to me it belongs to all of us or none of us, and I am opposed to anyone, Maori or non-Maori, who would deny people access to the rivers and lakes and valleys and forests of this country.[2055]

The standard Maori counter-argument to such Pakeha magnanimity is to say that we have no idea what it is like to have lands, or at least the *de facto* control over resources, confiscated; if New Zealand really *were* an equal society, we could do away with the laughably obsolete provisions of our 1840 founding document, which guarantees special hunting and fishing rights to Maori as *tangata whenua* or 'original occupants' of the land - but as it isn't, we can't. Rather than trying to heal the deep wounds of New Zealand politics, however, Turner, at this stage of his career an editor for the South Island publisher John McIndoe Inc., limits himself to complaining about the faddishness of the local publishing industry instead:

> We (at McIndoes) have let work go that we would like to have published but couldn't due to our modest financial resources and limited staff numbers. […] The most annoying thing has been the prescriptiveness of a few - those who would insist that postmodern was the most interesting, valid and productive way to go. These people are pathetic really, always trying to catch up and finding that the circus is one town further up the road.[2056]

If Turner's tone in this interview at times borders on the xenophobic, by the end it is clear that his real bugbear is an insecure local literary culture and publishing scene trapped in the headlights of an ephemeral global present, unable to look back on itself and hence unable to look forward to its shifting responsibilities in an ever more 'interconnected' future. The death of Charles Brasch (1909-1973), for instance, was a source of acute grief for Turner, which only makes sense as a pang for the elusive goal of an authentic New Zealand contribution to the human conversation, a worthy and meaningful target which no amount of aping the Beat Generation was ever going to reach:

> I guess what moved me at the time of [Brasch's] death was the feeling that there'd be no more of those ruminations on what it meant to live in this sometimes lonely yet lovely land, all that classical and European preoccupation pricking us as we stumbled and roved trying to make sense of it all and where we were in relation to it.[2057]

[2055] Turner, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 77-78.

[2056] Turner, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 78.

[2057] Turner, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 77.

Elizabeth Smither

> *New Zealand [is] an exciting place to live and write in […] as long as you have what Hemingway calls a good 'shit-detector'. What's also important, because the literary community is so small, is the need for generosity and tolerance and support among writers. […But] I think a good critic has to make sure his palate is pretty clear before he starts or at least make sure he admits his prejudice. That may be why one prefers to criticise things one likes; you come out in a better light yourself. […] You can show your generosity and how nice and kind you are and how gently you're rebuking so-and-so because you really admire them. You score on all points; the author scores slightly less well but you you come out as a good chum and they don't notice quite so much that you've stuck in the odd little pin here and there.*[2058]

Elizabeth Smither (1941-) admits that competition drives literature; 'New Zealanders' are particularly dangerous and creative when they feel their backs are against the wall:

> We relish such situations; […] you can feel the backbone stiffening. An attitude like that is going to be a problem for any critical theory, because you're going to have a stiffening of the poetic backbone and then poets will rush off in mad directions just to prove that they're not common-or-garden sparrows. […] I said that I was writing a long poem - I wasn't, it was a lie - but by the end of last year I had. And I did that because of a bet that I couldn't, in the same way that someone might say, 'I bet you can't fix a drainpipe' and then you want to try it.[2059]

The kind of critical theory which leads modern literature into metaliterary cul-de-sacs is well combatted by such biophilic counterpunching:

> Novelists, even major novelists like John Barth, can fall into one tremendous trap which is that the very loneliness, the psychological process of writing novels and the changes that take place in the novelist during the writing, can become so easily the subject for a novel and of course this can happen with poetry too. […] I do think that poetry and novels and everything else owe something to the reader, although by that I don't mean that they owe a softening, or that the subject matter should be reduced, or that the difficulty of the thought should in any way be lowered.[2060]

[2058] Elizabeth Smither, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 81-82.

[2059] Smither, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 83.

[2060] Smither, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 84.

The goal of such work, once again, is not specialist or instrumental expertise as such, but the embodied authenticity of individual self-cultivation captured *in medias res*:

> Each of us has a certain amount of breath and we should use it in the area we most wish it to go. This is not to decry allrounders, but the more you become immersed in one field the more all the others lead into it. Poetry's the perfect way of grabbing at horticulture, botany, heredity, personality, the character of Samuel Johnson, the stars, your own lack of knowledge about something - there's nothing that can't be touched by poetry. There's absolutely no sacrosanct subject, but maybe your subject is a key into all the other things you would like to touch or even show your ignorance of. […] I think my more successful poems - the ones I think of as being more successful - have often been written in the stage of being gripped by something and feeling not at all sure I can bring it off. I'm very aware of my own ignorance in some area and there's the necessity to bluff, to cover my own ignorance by making a sudden leap - like coming into a crevasse and not being quite sure you can jump it, but having to because there's something behind you and this sense of danger carries you over. It's (in a way) like writing an exam answer under pressure where you're hoping to fool the examiners by a show of brilliance. I mean, of course, you've got to know something about the subject but writing a poem about something you know a little too much about usually doesn't work quite as well as where there's still a distinct touch of ignorance. […] That to me is the definition of 'open form'. It's not so much the structure, it's the mental attitude behind the poem - that however perfect the poem is in its own particular way and however much it may resound for a reader, it still leaves something open at the end of it.[2061]

Recognising the 'extraordinary richness and extraordinary liberal quality' of 'dangerous' American influences like Wallace Stevens and John Berryman ('they became as nutty as fruitcakes as a reaction against all that blandness, the peanut butter and jelly and Miss Prom in American society'[2062]), and showering her admiration on the 'New Zealand Kafka [Bill Manhire] batting his way out of a corner'[2063], Smither concludes that all surviving literature is underdog stuff; people (or even countries) with big egos and overadoring followings are by definition incapable of it, and in a small pond like New Zealand, the risk of such corruption and sycophancy is multiplied:

> [Baxter] suffered the type of burn-out that I think Curnow has been too wise and wily to allow to happen to him. This is what I mean by the dangers of New Zealand being such a small coterie. You have to be quite rigorous; not

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[2061] Smither, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 85-86.

[2062] Smither, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 87.

[2063] Smither, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 90.

> only having a 'shit-detector' in regards to your own work but also in regards to your own reputation - which can become awfully inflated. You want to preserve yourself so you might be able to write for the rest of your life, which is what Curnow's doing. He's writing with great power partly because he has gone on writing, in quite a low-profile sort of way, and that's above all what you want to do, and if you become too much of a coterie person, that's a real danger. Of course, you need a little bit of being known to buoy you up - everybody needs that occasional pat on the back. But if you want to go on for a long time, you have, in New Zealand, to develop those rigorous attitudes.[2064]

This constant hypervigilance against 'shit' can manifest as Tall Poppy Syndrome if it isn't careful (a favourite national pastime), but the egalitarianism we value at our best and most generous is not the lowest-common-denominator variety, Edmond suggests, but the equal-opportunity kind which wishes a creative vocation on everyone:

> In the sense of preserving the language, I do [think poets have a role]. That's what I was saying about American poets escaping into eccentricity and richness, so that there's a general reservoir of language which doesn't get lost. […] Anyway, part of the performance is to encourage people to recognise their own capabilities with language, to show them it's just a human activity, and I think that's worthwhile.
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> […] I think you can bear any sort of performance - even if they throw tomatoes at you - if you know you're writing well that week. If you weren't writing well but performing brilliantly, that's what I couldn't bear. It's like being interviewed by you. If I were writing really badly, all this waffle I'm going on about would seem to me utterly abysmal, but the fact is I feel I can write - so it's not too bad.[2065]

<u>Allen Curnow</u>

> *All I can suggest is that we continue where I left off (and I left off making anthologies twenty-five years ago). Something like this: 1. Choose the poems you like best from the New Zealand poets you most admire. 2. Read them carefully and critically. See, if you can, what they have in common as New Zealanders, not forgetting their uniqueness as individuals (about the only point on which God and the human ego are supposed to agree). The exercise won't answer your [I'm sorry this sounds personal] rather absurd question or any of the questions it begs in sinking order of absurdity, but a few thousand more readers (mostly in this country) will have one more anthology of New Zealand poetry, more or less true to label, for*

[2064] Smither, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 91-92.

[2065] Smither, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 92-93.

> *whatever that is worth. […As] I wrote in the 1960 Penguin: 'The best of our verse is marked or moulded everywhere by peculiar pressures, pressures arising from the isolation of the country, its physical character and its history.'*[2066]

The impulse to anthologise is a natural, if inexhaustible, part of community-building, whether one's 'community' is New Zealand or the world encompassed by 'Spiritual Humanism'. Allen Curnow (1911-2001), the godfather of the New Zealand poetry anthology and a vital poetic voice in his own right, was nevertheless acutely aware that even the inclusive generosity of the anthologist requires, by definition, a simultaneous penchant for exclusion; the temptation, moreover, to use an anthology as an oblique advertisement for oneself must be avoided at all costs. The example of New Zealand expat Fleur Adcock, the editor of the 1982 *Oxford Book of Contemporary New Zealand Poetry*, is instructive in this regard:

> [Adcock] is attempting to reason that she's experienced this 'subtle but distinct' change of sensibility or whatever it is. (She also says something about 'a world whose focus is elsewhere'.) Now, actually, that's a very Kiwi thing to have done, though she doesn't realise it. She's obliged to argue a change, a strange transformation of the self, which somehow or other has cancelled all that original training, education, marriage, children, and family here in New Zealand. […] It still puzzles me that she's so anxious to expatriate herself, almost as if this conferred some special status - that's what strikes me as such an old-fashioned Kiwi posture. Yet only a few years earlier, she let O'Sullivan have fifteen of her poems for his anthology, *Twentieth Century New Zealand Poetry*, which isn't exactly consistent. […] Apropos her New Zealand anthology, it occurred to me (although I'm sure it was far from her intention) that Fleur does rather corroborate the kind of thing I'm saying - she is indicating that to her mind there is something in common among these poets, as New Zealanders, and in order to disengage herself she has to invent that story of the change that takes place after so many years settled in the United Kingdom.[2067]

Curnow is objecting to the provincialisation or zooification of 'New Zealand' in such endeavours; a better approach is more matter-of-factly inclusive of New Zealand poetry, however defined, as a mobile branch of the tree of World Literature:

> I mean, compare Peter Porter [1929-2010], for instance. Well, I do know Peter - enough to admire him and his work very well - and I think his Australian origins are not disregarded. People are aware of them. Now Peter would never talk much about being an Australian but he wouldn't talk about being an expatriate either. And he does revisit Australia pretty frequently and has a good deal to do with things there. I think he carries this kind of situation off in a rather relaxed sort of way. He did a notice of me (in

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[2066] Allen Curnow, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 97.

[2067] Curnow, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 98-99.

> *The Observer*) and I thought he began it on exactly the right note: 'The New Zealander, Allen Curnow,' something something 'one of the most interesting poets now writing in English.' That was a nice way to start, simply 'The New Zealander'. After all there's no reason why one has to be just so hyperborean or hyper-Australian that one has to feel either upped or downed by the tag.[2068]

In a small, adolescent country like New Zealand, however, part of the *raison d'être* of anthologies - good, bad, or ugly - is commercial:

> Anthologies, sometimes one curses them, they're a bit of a nuisance aren't they? We do have a lot of them, but people buy them and read them and almost the whole audience is within New Zealand. That ought to be good for poetry and good for us all. […] Compared with Britain, the relative size of the audience is really quite surprising. I don't know how they do over there with anthologies. […] That 1960 *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* I did sold twenty-five thousand within three or four years, nearly all in New Zealand, and then a couple of years later went into a reprint of ten thousand.[2069]

The sales figures and local influence inflatable by more or less clever marketing schemes, however, collapse to dust in the grind of time; only the real work endures:

> Sam [Hunt] is a rather special case, isn't he? I mean, if we're talking about the sales of poetry, I suppose we're thinking of the same market and the same product. Certainly Sam has published a few thoroughly presentable poems, a lot better than some of his admirers deserve, and he could teach some of those who probably don't admire him a thing or two about English prosody. But he's been marketing what our politicians call a package. You get the whole show, take it or leave it, with all the shabby old stage props - the dentist's chair on television, years ago now, then the old ambulance for barnstorming the schools and the pubs, and some other old bomb of a suitably trendy make. I rather hope the dog is still around, because I could envy Sam that dog's trust and affection, if I didn't have one of my own. If all this really did anything for the poetry, Sam's or anyone else's, one could only join in the applause. I'm sure Sam believes it does, but even he must wonder sometimes. Or am I quite mistaken? This package - the poet and the poetry, the book in the hand, the poet acting the part, and dressed for it - projecting an image of himself - isn't it as old as poetry itself? In our own century, in English, Dylan Thomas, Edith Sitwell, and Allen Ginsberg are only three of the more spectacular performers. But everything has its price… […] So many of the public in these mass-media times are stopped short by that posturing image of the poet outside the tent - like the showman he calls out 'now showing on the within', but they don't go in, or they don't stay long. It can't be helped, it can happen to the best of poets,

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[2068] Curnow, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 99.

[2069] Curnow, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 99-100.

> but if a poet goes out of his way to make it happen, even for the profoundest purpose, I believe that's just what he's doing - going out of his way, and the profounder the further. Baxter comes to my mind again, as he often does. There's a much more significant talent than Sam Hunt's, an image much more impressively elevated in the public eye, a personal 'myth' very consciously projected by the poet. One says it can't be helped, and maybe it's silly to wish it could have been. In the long run, of course, history will satisfy itself about the poetry, and its curiosity about the poet, and will find some of us harder to sort out than others.[2070]

The poet's job, then, is not to prostitute herself for scraps in the cultural marketplace, but to craft permanence, even if one has no control over the choices made by others after one's death. Curnow's friend C.K. Stead is a model in this regard: 'None of us knows which of us a new generation will choose for its permanent poets, but if they don't choose Stead, so much the worse for them. To me the marks of permanence are unmistakable in so much of his poetry, where so many others are unmistakably ephemeral.'[2071] Curnow's own sense of vocation drives him on to the end; since he cannot influence the choices of those (like me and my readers) who will decide his legacy, all he can do is devote himself to his craft as judge, jury and executioner, the primary arbiter of the work's authenticity and quality:

> I simply have to resign myself to living with a poem day and night for a matter of some weeks and even then - even then - after a heap of drafts and discards and God knows what, it may not be quite what I'm after. The object of it all is to do better every time and not repeat anything you've done before; otherwise you feel miserable. [… I apologise] for feeling a bit incompetent to talk about the poetry that's going on, and being so absorbed in what I can get out of myself. I mean, one does have these reminders from time to time. They occur in reviews and people are either going to be surprised and pleased or just hint, 'Well, my goodness me, what's the chap doing? After all, he's seventy-three.' All one can do is think of Hardy, for instance, [who got better and better and] worked harder and harder. I mean, in those late poems there are the scenarios of at least a dozen remarkable novels.[2072]

The question of influence for Curnow is hence less genetic than inspirational; he is not interested in copying the form or content of anyone else, but in contracting the contagion of enthusiasm that pushes him back to himself:

> I find that I don't talk about other poets very much. It may be that I'm so self-absorbed and so egotistical the subject just doesn't come to mind very often. Every time I do read over something new I'm usually looking for

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[2070] Curnow, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 100-101.

[2071] Curnow, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 103.

[2072] Curnow, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 103-104.

> something that's useful to me; not something I want to lift or copy or emulate but something that will, somewhere or other, touch a nerve and revive for me the interest in doing the thing. […] I don't want models. I don't want hints about how to do it. What I want is something that, because you get on with it, because something about it strikes you particularly, revives your own will to write. It revives your own belief that doing this kind of thing is possible and sends you back to your own work. It's so easy, you see, in the long interims when you don't read much poetry or if you do you don't respond to it - it's so easy to lose what John Lehmann, in a rather dull but accurate phrase, calls 'the sense of *métier*'. And there is a kind of poem that restores one's faith in the art and that's what the good ones do for me.[2073]

Is Curnow too 'self-centred' to survive the first century after his death? He certainly worries out loud about this, and he understands that seemingly random chance will play a decisive role in fixing his posthumous reputation, but he clearly wants the best of himself *and* others - what he humbly and beautifully calls 'the most significant little' - to survive in some transmuted form or other:

> [Permanence] is an important word. […] Can we settle for fifty years, with a question-mark over the rest? […] There's a lot that doesn't survive its decade - we're fond of talking about decades - and a little, the most significant little, that does survive. It's one of the rewards of surviving a few decades oneself, to see this happening to a few poems of one'e own, and be allowed the vanity of mentioning them. There's a good deal of luck in this. Will one's new work be as 'permanent', or as lucky as the old?[2074]

C.K. Stead

> *I inherit the tradition of poetry in English and I think anyone who writes poetry seriously ought to feel that, because in any of the arts there has to be a community. There is no set of rules which defines what a poem is, or what a work of art is - it only defines itself as a work of art by fitting into a tradition. You have to reach back into the stream or tradition of your art - yourself is not enough. The significant thing about the New Zealand aspect of it is that you inherit a tradition which is very important to you, but there's a dislocation in space at the point where colonial society begins, and you really have to look at it historically. What happens first of all is that people come out here and they bring that tradition with them, and they very largely try to go on writing the same kind of thing,*

[2073] Curnow, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 104-105.

[2074] Curnow, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 105.

without confronting the degree to which their circumstances have changed.[2075]

C.K. Stead (1932-) identifies a certain important difference between writing for old and new, or local and foreign, audiences; whereas Alan Mulgan writes for posterity or an idealised universal audience beyond his own milieu, Stead envisages an endless process of continuity-via-rupture with tradition:

> There's almost always a phase of colonial literature where people are desperately producing pastiches of what's admired at home - feeling more and more that they're losing contact - trying all the harder to please at home and failing and feeling inferior. First, there's the excitement of arrival, they're English and they're excited to be somewhere else but they're Englishmen abroad, that's all. Then there's that down phase. And then there's the postcolonial phase where something new begins to happen. The first person who's really thoroughgoing about this is [Frank] Sargeson [1903-1982], who says (more or less), 'I have to invent a literary language to match my circumstances.' And he says yes, he does inherit the great tradition of the English novel. In 'Writing a Novel', he talks about fantasy in Swift, adventure in Defoe, the novel of feminine sensibility in Richardson, the robust novel in Smollett; and he says, 'Well, those writers have a stabilising effect on the English novel and to some extent all English novelists write in their shadow or under the shadow of one of them. I inherit that, but at the same time if I allowed myself to be under that shadow, it would make me misrepresent what is in fact going on about me. So I have to create a language that matches my place and circumstances.' And his inspiration for that, or his examples of where it had happened elsewhere, were Mark Twain in America or Henry Lawson in Australia. So you get that almost deliberate shift, and you get a similar shift with the Curnow generation in poetry. All of a sudden they're very deliberately going about writing poetry which recognises things as they are, rather than either describing them in a voice clearly intended for somebody abroad to read - or trying to do a pastiche of what's being done at home in the Alan Mulgan style. Now all that doesn't mean you lose the tradition, because nobody who writes in English need lose the tradition. But it does mean that your base broadens. The things that are important to you may come from anywhere where English is spoken or written. So there's a double thing of inheriting the English tradition but also doing something different.[2076]

Why just the English tradition? Stead seems to exclude in advance the possibility of multilingual access commensurate with our new stage of globalisation; his point about poetry in English, however, extends to poetry in all languages:

[2075] C.K. Stead, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 107-108.

[2076] Stead, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 108-109.

> I think if you read English and you're interested in poetry, then you respond to any poem you read anywhere that you think is a good poem - that excites you in some way - and so in one sense you're just responding to poetry, or to quality in poetry. But there is another sense in which inevitably everyone is more immediately struck by things which, at some point, overlap with their own experience and their own preoccupations. So there's a special excitement in those parts of New Zealand poetry which are recognisably 'New Zealand', and that makes them more important for us than they are for anyone else. I think there must be an extra dimension in Yeats for an Irish person, say, and in Hardy for an English person. This is a bonus, but it's more than that. These poems have to be more important for you than any other poems ever could be. Being brought up in New Zealand (or any comparable place) at my age - and it would have been extreme in Curnow's case - an awful lot of what you read related to things you'd never seen or experienced. And this, in turn, could give you, and can still give you, the feeling that literature […] doesn't deal with the real world. To me, to be confronted with reality in literature - with a recognisable reality - for the first time was very exciting, because suddenly there was an immediacy in the writing that there had never been before. […] The earliest would have been Fifth or Sixth Form, probably reading John Mulgan's *Man Alone*. And I remember in the Sixth Form reading some Sargeson stories in Penguin *New Writing* and round about that time discovering New Zealand poets. I remember an English master coming in one day and saying, 'This short straight sword/I got in Rome/when Gaul's new lord/came tramping home:/It did that grim/old rake to a T-/if it did him,/well, it does me.' And then asking, 'Who wrote that?' and nobody knew. And then him saying, 'R.A.K. Mason. That's a New Zealand poet.' Well, it wasn't a 'New Zealand' poem, of course, but that was exciting for me, because by then I'd been writing poems for at least three years and I had no notion that there *were* New Zealand poets. Then I suppose I became an avid reader of the *Listener*, and read all the poems there. When you're young and purposeful, you go out hunting until you find what you're after, and I found the Curnow anthology [*A Book of New Zealand Verse, 1923-1945*] and read that, and read Curnow, and from then on I was reading New Zealand stuff flat out. By the time I was nineteen I probably knew a hell of a lot about New Zealand poetry.[2077]

Once again, the self - if always in relation to a tradition that it freely discovers, accepts and defines (or *re*fines) - is the beating heart of all poetry everywhere; 'New Zealand poetry' is a necessarily loose collection of work by selves with one degree or other of lived spiritual connection to these islands. Aping others is no way to do it, even as the responsibility to stay abreast of developments here and elsewhere - and hence to produce work of recognisable novelty and value for other selves - remains:

[2077] Stead, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 109-111.

> That cult aspect of American poetry irritates me to be perfectly honest: this feeling of 'We know better, we're one stage ahead of you.' It's like Alan Loney saying in an interview recently that Stead was 'cluttering up the fast track'. And what this was supposed to mean was that they were all really going faster, but I was pretending to be on the same track and I was just getting in the way. I remember writing a little note to Roger Horrocks saying that there were an awful lot of ramshackle trolleys on the fast track. Loney is the chief proponent of this particular modishness and paranoia, and Roger Horrocks and Wystan Curnow, I suppose, are its academic gurus. But I don't altogether exempt Wedde either. Well, maybe it's necessary for people in order to get the best out of themselves, to believe that they are doing something for the first time. But how you can be doing something for the first time when it was done twenty years ago in America is a puzzle to me. I'm all for anything that gives people a kick along. It's hard enough to get the stuff out of yourself and if that's the way for you - well, that's all right - but you can't erect it into a critical position, can you?[2078]

Any confidence that a writer - especially in a sawn-off country like New Zealand - may have in the originality of her own work must be carefully placed indeed:

> The sense of precariousness just continues with every new thing you do. I think anybody who grows into total confidence is probably not writing well, because there ought to be a nervousness and uncertainty about what you're doing all the time. It's all right to look back and pick out things behind you that you've done and say, 'Well, I feel reasonably confident about this or that.' But I don't think you can feel that about what's on the typewriter - because if you do, it's not really something new. You might just be imitating yourself.[2079]

If the best poets refuse to take the easy, U2 path of monetising their formulae for success by belting out their old hits (or subtle variations on them), then a poet like Baxter - dead in his mid-forties - may have had, to the extent that he was 'great', decades of surprises left up his sleeve:

> There was a period when everyone was saying negative things about Baxter. Brasch and others would be dismissive, and I'd join in. What we *should* all have been saying was, 'Well, Baxter may be an irritating person in all kinds of ways, but aren't we lucky to have someone so brilliant!' And it wasn't being said. I realised this in the sixties and I kept thinking, 'I *must* write something.' I wanted to write something that Baxter would read so that I had committed myself publicly rather than just seeing him and saying, 'Jim, I immensely liked your poems, because that's the easy thing to do, you see. And then he died before I'd done it. […] I'm closer to Curnow, in that we both tend to be more scrupulous with the individual word and tend more to towards wit and less towards preaching. But I also think that Baxter

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[2078] Stead, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 111-112.

[2079] Stead, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 117.

> was working his way through to something different; that in the last phase there are two Baxters. There's a Zen Buddhist Baxter and there's a Christian preacher Baxter. And I think what's fundamental in the poetry is what in the religious sphere is Zen Buddhist rather than Christian moralist. That was still being worked out. He could have been still better as a poet - he was getting better all the time. So people who say, as they do glibly, that Baxter had done everything and his life was complete when he died - well, I don't agree with that at all. I think he needed two more decades. But even so he was a major force - terribly important.[2080]

This lazy Orientalist description - why 'Zen Buddhist'? - is perhaps best understood as shorthand for the unknown beyond of Baxter's evolving theology; but the recourse to poetry, for Stead as for Baxter, was not to advertise their religious or even political affiliations, but rather to uncover them in the first place. It is the honesty of this process, not the lustre of the packaging, which lasts the decades:

> If you try to make a literary work a vehicle for an opinion, then you're heading for trouble. No matter how strongly you hold an opinion - whether it's a moral opinion or a political opinion, which implies that certain things should be changed or kept the same - if you set out to make the work of art a vehicle for that opinion, then that's likely to damage the work of art. Because politics is one of my preoccupations I like to think that politics can get into the poems, but it has to happen on its own. And I think the only way it can happen is that the preoccupation, of whatever kind, has to become part of your whole emotional self. The longer you've had the preoccupation, and the more deeply embedded it is in your personality, the more likely it is to find ways to express itself.
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> You see, I have a view of writing poetry which is - I say this to my students in my Creative Writing course - that it's no good working on the poem, you've got to work on yourself. And by that I mean a conscious effort, saying, 'Okay, there's an hour before midnight and I haven't written a poem for three weeks - I'll really push myself along' and then deciding at the end of that time, 'Well, that's a lousy poem; I must work harder' - that's no good at all. You've got to work on yourself and the self will write the poem. It's a kind of Zen Buddhist attitude. So if the coloration - political coloration - is deeply part of your personality and part of your preoccupations, then it will, as it were, float into the poem and be intrinsically part of the poem.[2081]

Stead's definition of public intellectualhood is correspondingly distinct from the vocation of the artist:

> As far as the poet as an individual goes, I just take the view that everybody is a private citizen and has some social responsibility. A responsible citizen is aware of politics and social issues, has opinions on them and where

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[2080] Stead, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 115-116.

[2081] Stead, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 119-120.

> possible - even if it's only in the simple act of voting - participates. In that sense you have only the same responsibility that every citizen has - neither more nor less - except that writing in some small degree gives you a public identity, and therefore from time to time you will actually be in a slightly more public posture. So if you get arrested on a football ground it will make the news. In that case you still have the same responsibility as any other citizen but you may be able to exert an influence. That's all. The public aspect of it is just an offshoot of having 'a public', but the question of how much politics gets into the poems seems to me an entirely different question. It's a question the thirties left-wing poets got terribly confused by and hung-up and self-contradictiory over. On the one hand the Left was urging them to use their poems as instruments, and on the other they inherited a quite sound anxiety about turning poetry into propaganda.[2082]

Propaganda for a political cause is one thing, and bad enough for poetry; marketing oneself as a brand is entirely another, and worse. For writers who, parallel to the writing, wish to make a living without turning themselves and their lives into a public relations circus, the options are limited; over the itinerant theatrics of a Sam Hunt or the journalistic endeavours of an Alan Mulgan, Stead chose, though not without a certain reluctance, the rights and responsibilities of the university professor:

> The university teaching is the way I earn my living and although it can be a very enjoyable way, it's also very arduous, and for a lot of my life it's got in the way of my writing. So, to some extent, although I think it's true to say that I've been a conscientious and quite a good university teacher, much of it has been working against the grain. It's not been the thing I've primarily wanted to do; it's been the thing I've had to do. So although I have an attachment to the University of Auckland and to my students, and I'd be sorry to end that, I would nevertheless like to, and if I can, I will. If I'd been living in a different place, where it was possible just to live as a writer, that's probably what I would have done. […] I think if I could have arranged my life to suit myself - which very few people are able to do - I would have written a lot more fiction.[2083]

It may seem odd to stress the *injustice* of this - few people in the history of humanity have enjoyed the various privileges of C.K. Stead - but this is precisely our subject: who, if anyone, should have paid for this unwritten fiction? Should a creative artist be expected to bankroll herself, and if so, where is the justice in the inherited fortunes which allow only the sons and daughters of the rich to devote themselves wholeheartedly to their artistic vocations? A free market will tend to reward formulaic and familiar work, while a system of government grants for the 'excellent but unprofitable' will always be guarded with visible and invisible strings. That an author as prominent as C.K. Stead was forced to make a living outside his real tribe suggests only that this tribe faces systematic discrimination, in New Zealand as elsewhere. If the world was denied a good portion of Stead's literary

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[2082] Stead, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 120.

[2083] Stead, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 121-122.

output by the economic constraints of his day, perhaps we can honour the legacy of the remaining part by strategising for global reform in this area. The first pillar of this campaign, however, is to understand what, if anything, a writer like Stead is *owed*. This is impossible without considering what the actual value - spiritual rather than material - of his work is, what the value of the lost work would have been, and how we can begin to remedy the damage.

Fleur Adcock

> *Yes, there was all that forties, fifties business - the New Zealand thing, the unpopulated landscape. Then there was the view that you were just like other people, so you could write about human beings and it was 'universal' - you didn't have to say it was happening in Petone. That was Lou (Johnson). It was shortly after that phase that I left and things started changing. When I was living and writing here, I certainly never located my poems anywhere, not that I was particularly interested in doing that. I thought poetry ought to be universal and ought to be something you'd be able to read two thousand years hence as I was reading poets from two thousand years ago. The geographical elements in my poetry didn't happen till long afterwards, because of the disjunction of what has happened to me and New Zealand. For a long time I thought that I was just an English person, and that was okay. Then I realised that every time I got together in London with some New Zealanders, these animated conversations went on all night about what it was to be a New Zealander; when you thought you weren't one any longer, but still sort of were underneath. I always remember the Sargeson story about the Dalmatian who found he wasn't one any more, but he wasn't anything else. […] I remember when [David] Lange got in. I suddenly felt a New Zealander again and quite intensely proud of it.*[2084]

Why did Fleur Adcock (1934-), resident in Britain since the 1960s, feel such a pang of nostalgia for New Zealand with the election David Lange (1942-2005) as Prime Minister in 1984? Lange's politics represented the evolution of the antitotalitarian leftism in which modern New Zealand forays on the world stage - the anti-*apartheid* protests, anti-nuclear policies and general well-intentioned environmentalism, social welfare reforms and little-brother truth-to-power counterpunching (Savage, Clark, Ardern et al.) we feed ourselves as national myth - have invariably been rooted. A country with a nakedly imperial history, such as Britain, cannot ever claim the international moral high ground in the same way as a young and zealous New Zealand; the feeling that we might provide a postcolonial template for a budding globalisation of justice may be noble and naive in equal measure, but it remains

[2084] Fleur Adcock, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 129.

more or less as real now as it did in the 1980s. Adcock enjoys her teat among the warming udders of the wizened battleaxe Old Mother England, but she recognises that aspects of Britain's best self, and other nations' best selves too, have coalesced in New Zealand, and by extension, in her; her anthology project, so sharply criticised by Allen Curnow, was as much a voyage of (self-)*discovery* as of self-definition in opposition to the lowly colonials who had stayed behind:

> I think I would have [done the anthology even if I hadn't been earning my living as a free-lancer]. I was so curious about it - yes, I would. I wanted to find out, and there's nothing better than a dead-line to make you get on with something and find out. […] I suppose [I felt particularly pleased to have] 'discovered' (I mean as far as I was concerned, they were discoveries) the last two poets in the anthology, Cilla McQueen and Tony Beyer, whom I'd never heard of.[2085]

Still, Adcock can't resist having a dig - utterly justified - at the deep strain of provincialism which runs through New Zealand intellectual life: 'New Zealanders ought to look outside the country a little more broadly than they do. You go into bookshops and you never see any Australian poetry, for example. […] I mean, there are such interesting poets writing over there - Les Murray, for instance. Anyone who hasn't read him ought to do some reading!'[2086] True though this undoubtedly is (and I confess I have not read Les Murray), from the perspective of a hyperglobalised 2020, Adcock's broader Anglophilia looks just as utterly and hopelessly provincial; what of China, Russia, the Islamic world, Latin America, or non-Commonwealth Africa? If influences are a matter of choice ('the Canadians have had to shake off American influence and New Zealanders have (I suppose) ignored Australia, which was probably the safest thing to do'[2087]), why, other than out of sheer laziness, limit oneself to the products of one's own language?

Still, everyone's childhood is concrete; Adcock's was split between New Zealand and England:

> I arrived in England at the age of five, nearly six, just after the war had broken out. And then we stayed until 1947, so I was there from five to thirteen. I went to English schools; I identified with - it sounds rather pretentious to call it 'the English landscape', but kids do identify much more than adults do, because, you know, you play in the woods and you climb trees and you pick flowers and collect tadpoles. […] I had dreams of going back for many years and in these dreams I'd walk up this hill and see the village where we'd lived in Wiltshire. So I didn't grow up with this New Zealand background of flax and tea tree and the beach. I acquired that after the age of thirteen. I took that on very deliberately. It was like an arranged marriage, deciding that I must feel an affection for this place, and I did develop an affection for it but it hadn't been instilled in me before. [When I

[2085] Adcock, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 126.

[2086] Adcock, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 127-128.

[2087] Adcock, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 128.

> went back to England in the sixties], something had changed - well, I'd changed. I'd grown up but it didn't feel unfamiliar.[2088]

And yet Adcock admits that the role of the poet is always more than self-expression: 'You're not just writing because you want to unload your emotions onto paper, or your memories, or your analyses of what's going on.'[2089] For all his faults, Baxter understood the social or political nature of poetic endeavour as well as Fernando Pessoa - something less than propaganda, but more than self-advertising:

> [Baxter] could always laugh at himself - at least I think he could. I used to wonder sometimes whether he was just having us all on when he was assuming those different personae; and every now and then, looking back, I can see that wicked grin. I'm sure there were times when that wicked grin came out even amongst the oracular stances. […] There were so many men in Baxter. I had the feeling of a large amount of tragedy in his life - much of which he'd been responsible for. So, there was that tingle about the poems. He was very helpful to me when I was first writing. […] He seemed to be taking me seriously, up to a point, and being supportive and encouraging. He was very encouraging to young writers.[2090]

<u>Michael Harlow</u>

> *It's […] as if we're still collectively some breed of literary Child worrying out loud, and in print, if we really have a legitimate place in the global Family. […] Wanting, sometimes desperately, to fully certificate yourself (get that Seal of Authority and Approval), you begin by over-compensating for the negative self-image. No surprise there. What follows can be described as The Great Invention Trip. You invent, even if only occasionally, a New Zealand Product/Literature that has earned its Place in the Sun; so that it becomes a Global Event. It's there in the reviews and occasional critical essays, in the literary chat, in the almost mercantile registers employed. All very admirable and nice, some say, with pride and not a little prejudice in the Invention. There are critics who also double as poets; some poets who occasionally write as critics/ reviewers; and then there are some others, largely media or university based, who compose a kind of literary journalism. And, I might add, what we get are almost always 'single-shot-entries' in the field. The trouble is, of course, that this kind of Invention almost always requires Inflation; the need to pad the model and*

[2088] Adcock, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 129-130.

[2089] Adcock, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 130.

[2090] Adcock, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 132-133.

exaggerate the claims in the National and Local interest so that the text, the work, the body of work serves more the need and the desire, than it does the actual merits of the 'product'. […] A defence mechanism, I suppose, against the resonance of a deep doubt or anxiety about who we are and what we do. And, as a result, so-and-so can now take his/her place with the small stable of the very Best Poets writing in English in this century, or even half-century. The Pantheon swells, even if minutely. Special pleading which, I suppose, can be seen and heard as somehow heroic and hearteningly loyal, and 'Look - We've Come Through!' Unfortunately, it's a kind of plea-bargaining that raises as many if not more doubts than it proclaims assurances. The process is blusteringly familiar: promote the best local poet to heroic status - Wunderkind *is best bet, and most attractive, despite the ageing process; pump up the model from time to time by insisting on unique Kiwi cosmetics, and if he or she is good enough or even supportably mediocre over the long haul (which often is a short haul, I think), then enlarge to Mythic proportions. Baxter might well be an obvious example of the process. How easily and to what extent he acquiesced in the 'puffery', or even encouraged and generated it himself, is another matter - those who knew him intimately or even well might be able to say. The point being, of course - that this kind of Fiddle - whatever the protestations of good intentions - undermines and attacks the integrity of the poet, and ultimately insults the intelligence of the reader. It becomes: the Administration of Literature and its Management rather than the genuine critical appreciation of it.*[2091]

American-born Michael Harlow (1937-) settled in New Zealand in his thirties after a roving cosmopolitan youth - an ideal trajectory from which to diagnose our provincialist foibles and sort the wheat from the chaff of our 'literature'. The dull genetic studies which the early French comparatists considered scholarly - histories of the 'reception' of Goethe in France or Balzac in Germany, interesting as they are - do not begin to exhaust the possibilities of World Literature, which promises instead the limitless fertility of anthological juxtaposition:

> Valéry is useful and very insightful here. He spoke about the influence of one writer on another in the sense of 'derived achievement'; the means by which any writer has available to him the work of other writers as co-existent with his own: 'the progressive modification of one mind by the work of another'. What I'm talking about is not the direct line of mimetic descent, but of one text standing alongside, adjacent to, another. It's one way, of course, of initiating new departures and new beginnings.[2092]

[2091] Michael Harlow, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 136-138.

[2092] Harlow, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 138-139.

If Harlow shares William Carlos Williams' conviction that 'the local is the primary, authentic and generative source'[2093], he also wants to insist on the universal value of what this source can, in contact with foreign catalysts, irrigate; on this account of World Literature, an overblown local hero like Baxter fails to register:

> I've read Baxter in an historical context; clearly, he has been considered a major figure in the Canon and has apparently exerted a strong and sometimes modelling influence on poetry in New Zealand. As well, I've read Baxter pretty thoroughly and intensively in the way I've read Lowell or Berryman, Hughes or Geoffrey Hill or Larkin, or Middleton or Creeley… with no particular context in mind other than as makers of poems in a larger or more global community of poets, exercising a craft and all that implies. Baxter has had no influence on me as a writer at all, as far as I can tell. He had talent, and I can at least partially understand his importance in the development of New Zealand poetry. However, outside of that historical context, which is finally rather special and narrow, Baxter isn't a poet that I return to either for pleasure or for learning, in the sense that one can sometimes be attached to a writer for what he or she can teach you. There have been large claims made for Baxter as a Major poet writing in English. Most of those claims, though it is not true at all, have been made most stridently here. I think he's been puffed up and over-rated, but I'm not worried about that - that is, I'm not astonished by the mythologising. […] Apparently, he was no stranger to embroidering his own myth or acting out his own mythologising needs - a human enough wish/need in any case. All things considered, I wasn't particularly impressed by the public persona nor the poetry, then or now. That may be my blind side, or not. Consequently, I think the Baxter industry (if there actually is one), or at least the very large claims made for Baxter as a poet are misleading.[2094]

The political corollary of individual or provincial 'self-puffery' is partisan propaganda, which is nothing other than the instrumentalisation of art for purposes beyond itself:

> One can be a political activist and make political poems because that's the controlling image you have of yourself as poet and person. I'll stand by what I said recently in the *Landfall* interview, at least for the moment: I suppose from time to time I have written what you might call political poems, but I don't see them as a form of polemic or propaganda - pushing a party line or an orthodoxy. For me, the political and the personal don't easily, if at all, separate out; one is almost always part of the political *Zeitgeist*, consciously or unconsciously. I don't think you can successfully avoid or escape that, although one can be, of course, passive, or conversely very active, according to your needs and disposition - more perhaps a matter of degree and commitment. A hard-line, doctrinaire Marxist might well argue otherwise and say, as Brecht did in 1938: 'In such

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[2093] Harlow, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 139.

[2094] Harlow, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 140-141.

> times it is almost a crime to converse about trees…' It's that qualifying 'almost' that opens the net…[2095]

The emergence of new forms of Maori literature, for example, are to be valued far beyond their political utility for economically disenfranchised local populations (or guiltily overenfranchised ones); in fact, the business of separating Maori literature's spiritual value as World Literature from its local political convenience is a vital element of New Zealand literary criticism:

> One excitement for me is the emergence of a written Maori literature that is both an *old* and a *new* literature; […] not only will it help to recover the bicultural (and finally, multicultural) nature of our society and our history, but it will go a long way toward civilising Pakeha conceptions about themselves, as well as forcing all of us to deal with the racism - conscious and unconscious - we have so recently 'discovered'. The guilt trip is always a difficult and painful one, but sooner or later it has to be worked through. Obviously, the resurgence of Maori literature, and the recovery of it, at this point, can't be separated out from political activism of one kind or another, or the cultural recovery of traditions, and the social perceptions of values, etc. Along with the excitement that a 'new' literature (that is also an indigenous one) produces, and the provocations it creates, as well as the general deepening of the culture it effects, there are problems - literary problems (matters of translation aside for the moment). A crucial or foremost one for me is contained in, and is an extension of, the question: How and what do we define as 'Maori writing' in English? Important because there is almost always an over-inflation of literary quality and adjudged excellence that is part and parcel of the 'discovery' of ethnic writing. We tend, perhaps quite naturally, to over-compensate in terms of literary excellence, in terms of promoting the first example that comes over the horizon. Because we urgently want and wish for, let's say, a bicultural novel, when one comes along we over-promote, over-praise, over-sell the product. Is it a danger, and does it matter? Some would say not, others argue sometimes strenuously that it plays hell with our critical integrity, and that it creates an unfair 'double standard'.[2096]

Harlow is clearly enough in the 'others' category; as a white male American expat, he does not expect such crippling condescencion for his own work, and he doesn't want it for anyone else's either:

> I identify as a New Zealand writer because I live and work and write here, and because I have taken part, in various ways, in the literary life of the community. A commitment of slightly more than a decade. Beyond that, I write as a writer who makes use of all kinds of experience, actual and imaginary, in whatever places I find myself. The Country of the Heart is wherever you are, and the landscapes, inner and outer, physical and

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[2095] Harlow, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 142.

[2096] Harlow, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 142-143.

> cultural, are almost always in place in one form or another. One writes true to one's experiences; to do otherwise is folly. I'm certainly not in the business of manufacturing a 'national' poem, or one that 'dresses itself up' with culturally defined place names or objects. What happens in a poem that locates or positions it on a particular geography or culture, happens because of the pressures of experience in and of itself. I have no doubt that aspects of my New Zealand experience enter my work; I would expect that. How to talk about the concrete evidence is another matter. It's certainly not a question of hunting out overt references, or analysing patterns of idiom, or sentence tags, or whatever. You can do that, of course, as a descriptive exercise and it may be interesting, but it doesn't prove anything about the validity or value of a text. Poems don't have validity, they have language-being among other splendid complexities.[2097]

Louis Johnson

> *At the same time we were playing partly for publicity; there's no doubt about that. We knew we were and we didn't mind because it all helped to create a larger public here for poetry; it created public interest. And it had an effect. During that period, it probably helped to double the sales of the average edition of a book of New Zealand verse.*[2098]

Louis Johnson (1924-1988) may have exaggerated his 'Auckland-Wellington feud' with Allen Curnow for commercial reasons, but he was conscious, like all pioneers and entrepreneurs, of trying to start something viable from nothing. Even if a Baxter - or a Louis Johnson or an Allen Curnow - will not register in the annals of World Literature a century or two from now, they may have helped to create the conditions of possibility for others to flourish on their invisible shoulders in a country with no prior idea of what its own what poets or other literary folk might ever contribute to society:

> The country was ripe for [Baxter], you see. There was that mood of 'Christ, is there something we can be adulative about?' The War was just over and it was an age since there had been, for instance, a visiting concert pianist or contact with world art - anything of that kind. Cultural life seemed to have come to a frosty standstill. And then suddenly we had this flood of people from the States and England and Australia, all coming along at the same time as the growing notion, that had been there since the late thirties, of something indigenous flowering. I don't think [going overseas] was an option for [Baxter] really, because he had a pretty realistic view of the size of the pool and also knew that he was, in so many respects, the local boy

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[2097] Harlow, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 143-144.

[2098] Louis Johnson, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 148.

> who was plundering the English tradition. And he knew he could do it better here. I'm not saying you could get away with it here so much as the fact that it wasn't relevant to plunder it over there. […] I think quite early, you see, he had this notion that whatever he did existed on an almost mythological level, that it would become history; and whatever he did tended to become a parade of some kind or another. It made life with him sometimes rather difficult. He saw his life as that of The Poet - and lived it publicly. [… But] who doesn't [consciously orchestrate her own myth]? This is what the imaginative or creative life can lead you to, isn't it? […] Poetry is as rarefied as caviar - it's nice to have but you don't really need it to live by. And I suppose in this pragmatic community a sense of necessity has always been there. I've never known how to handle it myself actually. I've been passing myself off as the 'ordinary bloke' forever and nobody believes it. I don't myself.[2099]

The poetry itself, however, was never a commercial product; like the archetypal New Zealand bush raconteur Barry Crump (1935-1996), New Zealand poets were, regardless of sales figures, destined to be non-conformist loners and outsiders, even if trends in New Zealand society were making it harder for such poets to emerge:

> I've found great difficulty in adjusting to New Zealand after a twelve year absence [in Australia]. Many of the changes made here during the seventies can be seen as regressive - socially and politically, that is. The same battles that I had thought resolved at the end of the sixties are still being contested. Censorship, for instance. The individual is still under pressure to conform. Education and the media seem still to work towards a nation peopled by clones. We do not value independence, freedom, the right to differ. There is still little room for real discussion of differences. So I don't feel that, by and large, it's as exciting a scene as the one that flourished here in the fifties and to some extent in the sixties; though I suppose the work *is* more careful. At the risk of sounding negative, the feeling I have is that poetry here is much more governed than ever before; that it's surrounded by flocks of rulemakers and that this arises in part out of the way the country has worried about (as small communities do) questions like: Where do we get our recognition from? How do we know what we're doing? What helps establish us? What gives us an identity to begin with? And in this area I think the young poet now is likely to be somebody who automatically goes through a particular educational process, in order to get the qualifications to prove he's a poet or writer of any kind. And that has its limitations. Schools don't breed poets. […] It's the academic world of publish [in the right places] or perish.[2100]

Johnson is not interested in adding a new specialised branch of research to humanities departments (or another journal to the university library catalogue), but

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[2099] Johnson, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 152-153.

[2100] Johnson, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 154.

rather in savouring something much bigger: 'Manhire is one [New Zealand poet I admire]. […] I admire the energy in some of Wedde. Both of them have a sense of the other arts in their work - music and painting, for instance - and a broadening of that kind is only to be welcomed in this country. The end product ought not to be merely the fine poem, but an increase in vision for us all.'[2101] Indeed, the greatest 'New Zealand' poet of Johnson's age was probably the one who did the most to 'get beyond' New Zealand: 'I think it's likely that Fleur Adcock will emerge as the prominent poet of our particular time, regardless of any argument about nationality. She's faced up to some of the difficult questions we face on the identity front - and has chosen against being 'one of us' in a nationalistic sense. That must be respected.'[2102] Johnson, by contrast, had his own path to a broader universality blocked by humdrum concerns: 'I was never able, fully, to evaluate the experience of living as a writer in Australia. I had a daily job to contend with - a living to make - and thus couldn't make the most of what Australia had to offer. I got appetisers of it.'[2103] Johnson's New Zealand can be a spiritual noose rather than an anchor:

> The problem of the New Zealand writer, to me, remains the central problem of Katherine Mansfield's life. Kinship, bondage, family, detain one here. But we deny some aspects of human reality here for the sake of safety and conformity. […] What do you need the life of the imagination for, if you're only going to do what you're told? […] Testing themselves against what they're allowed or supposed to say is one of the real ways writers have of testing their reality within a community.[2104]

Poetry should not become a game for a privileged in-crowd, and certainly not a way of making insecure provincial people feel better about themselves at others' expense. Johnson's life as an outward-looking but tragically constrained New Zealand poet pushed back against all the comforting illusions of a small and somehow naggingly irrelevant country:

> What I don't care for is a situation in which small self-satisfied and élitist circles run things to suit their own needs, without seeing them as of some real communicational value outside their group. They use the theory to create an élite, not a more alert public or better writers. […] I've always seen myself as someone concerned with the meaning of things. I find the poetry is central to my *living*. It's the way I get answers. So it's the 'what' of the poem that matters to me rather than the 'how' and that will probably always be the case. […] And all you can do about that is hope some of it gets conveyed to other people as well. I've never wanted to be thought of

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[2101] Johnson, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 155.

[2102] Johnson, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 155.

[2103] Johnson, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 155.

[2104] Johnson, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 155-156.

> as a prophet, as I think Jim [Baxter] sometimes did. I would hope my writing established the fact that I tried to live with a sense of relevance.[2105]

Murray Edmond

> *Connections matter. To publish is to make public. To connect. The pattern of action and reaction is instituted. You write in the knowledge of what you last wrote. The individual poem becomes a shade suspicious in this theory - a chopped-off thing. More of this soon. The 'public voice' you ask about. This brought us to talking of Baxter. But I began with myself. The discourse of writer as publisher (rather than physical artisan tap-tapping at typewriter as now) with the reader as buyer, collector, critic, friend, enemy - where I am leading I realise is to my year as a 'writer-in-residence' (sans house) at Canterbury. I told you how retrospectively I notice in my work from that year (1983) I had donned this 'public voice' which I don't particularly favour as an ongoing way of writing for me. Though that is how it was. I don't disown it and its life is in that fact:*
>
> *We'll pull a*
> *cork and over wine unearth*
> *the dead. Which is our only duty.*
>
> *Don't you hear it? A touch of the presbyterian Baxter. Because Baxter is all public voice and role. Perhaps that is why his diction is so Victorian. Now I am weary/wary of that voice. I want to be done with it. Writers are projective, always sniffing out the next thing.*[2106]

Murray Edmond (1949-) takes the Nietzschean view of 'the genealogy of theory', or of human creativity in general: 'Each master has one pupil and that pupil will reject that master.'[2107] In this sense, university humanities departments, with their tacit and not-so-tacit material incentives for conformity, may not be the most fertile ground for such master-disciple dialectics:

> Writers are interested in what is next, much more than in what has been, and the theoretician constructs out of the evidence already extant. In this sense the universities can never rid themselves of the bugbear ('object of baseless fear; false belief used to intimidate or persuade; *bête noire*; cause of annoyance') of creating 'the great tradition', whether it's George Eliot or

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[2105] Johnson, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 158.

[2106] Murray Edmond, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 163.

[2107] Edmond, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 163.

> D.H. Lawrence or comic strips and road signs. I felt trapped by this in my year at Canterbury - really I felt more attachment in my work to painters, say Philip Trusttum or musicians and performers like John Cousins and Colleen Anstey than to an English Department. But Baxter had two merry years as a Burns Fellow.[2108]

Edmond's underlying preoccupation, nevertheless, is with securing the *income* to allow him freely to realise his creative self:

> You see you catch me at a time when my tone is certainly awry. I have lost my job in unpleasant circumstances. My house is in Wellington, but I live in Auckland. Here I am at thirty-five, trying not to overdramatise, trying to start again. And what's this starting again? It's a going back to roots, origins. It is admitting to myself what I am - a writer. I have always avoided this fact, as though I could do it and not say what I was. I don't want to prolong that suspension any longer. […] I am myself now, my own boss, push my own wheelbarrow of software. The trouble with a selfconscious movement is not its rigidity, but its demands on your working time when you've got to earn a tawdry living, and the fact that you have to go round supporting work that isn't very good.[2109]

The enemy of free spiritual life is any state of industrial relations which rewards or otherwise impels self-censorship:

> There's a thing from Zinoviev, the Russian satirist, which I had pinned up on my wall for a long time and the last sentence says: 'These conversations are the most valuable thing we can have at the moment.' And I think any conversation which is a real conversation is a very urgent business, because we're so much subjected to things that aren't conversations. I mean, I have just come out of that situation of losing my job at the Mercury Theatre where there were no conversations at all. Just directives. And taking that right up the political scale, that's the condition we're in and if there's a new society trying to be born, it's to do with having real conversations. There's an amazing Adrienne Rich poem, 'Shooting Script', about people having a conversation, with the line: 'A shell penetrated by meaning.' You see, the only real power we have is to confirm our ability to talk…[2110]

Edmond's 'new society trying to be born' - a world of unbridled dialogue among free individual human spirits (an ethos which we, following Tu Weiming, are calling 'Spiritual Humanism') - is one in which even past and future generations are present to communicate with us:

[2108] Edmond, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 164.

[2109] Edmond, in *Talking About Ourselves*, pp. 168-169.

[2110] Edmond, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 170.

> Keri Hulme, say, has such a strong sense of ancestors being people who reappear at appropriate moments and she doesn't confine the ancestors to the Maori heritage. What she's saying to me, as a Pakeha writer here, is: 'You have ancestors as well; they walk around Auckland and they talk to you and you'd better listen.' Which makes a lot of sense to me because if there is a new society trying to be born, it's that sense of history which is going to be important - not a list of dates or 'this changing land'. I just saw a production of Hone Tuwhare's play *On Ilkla Moor*, and I cried - the moment when the whole party of the tangata whenua rise up and sing 'On Ilkla Moor b'aht 'at' as a *waiata* against the visitors is really an amazing moment, as is the end when he says, 'The *marae* is a place where you can say anything at all - it's a place to speak.'[2111]

The barriers holding us back from realising such a republic of letters are, Edmond argues, primarily economic, or rather, psychoeconomic; we are neither psychologically nor economically capable of simultaneously embracing the world's 7.5 billion inhabitants, let alone the billions of other past and future intelligent beings with whom we might form a spiritual community of autonomous selves, and we therefore prune our communities - primarily by language and income stratum, but also by race, gender, sexual orientation, professional background, educational background etc. etc. - to suit our own convenience and vanity. But sooner or later the world beyond our little hedged communities will present itself:

> There's a superb description of [Janet Frame] going to see Charles Brasch in *An Angel At My Table* where she says to him, 'My grandmother used to be a servant of your grandfather's' - which totally embarrassed Brasch.
>
> Those two volumes of autobiography are a sort of redemption of all her past work. They're fictions in themselves. The subject of the first one is Imagination and of the second is How To Talk About Yourself. The first one is full of the 'imaginative world' but she's actually writing *about* it rather than writing it. And in the second volume the whole prose flattens out and she deals with the problem of how you write about yourself, how, as a parlour-maid in a Dunedin hotel, you go and see Charles Brasch and you say, 'I'm a writer too. We may have nothing in common in terms of social upbringing but we do the same work.' And she's trying to say to him, 'Hadn't we better form a union? Hadn't we better realise the historical-material reality we're in? Which he can't cope with. Frame tells this story with enormous compassion, which I think her early stories are a bit lacking in. She doesn't put him down at all; she just shows you the gulf.[2112]

[2111] Edmond, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 171.

[2112] Edmond, in *Talking About Ourselves*, p. 172.

4. Tony Beyer's *Anchor Stone*

> *As a New Zealander, I acknowledge that English-language literature in this part of the world is only a very few generations old. Its distinct flavour is the achievement of close but significant ancestors. There is always a place for the local voice and its traditions. It's also a useful reminder of how new concepts of identity don't always eclipse those of the past, often in fact strengthening them. This place and the ways we find to voice our belonging in it are at the core of valuing environmental existence. We also honour other cultures by having a culture of our own, however flawed or patchy.*
>
> Tony Beyer

This citation adorns the back cover of *Anchor Stone*, a 2017 collection of poems by my fifth-form English teacher at Auckland Grammar School in 1997; I return to Tony Beyer (1948-) at the end of this 'Spiritual Humanism Trilogy' in a sense to close - or indeed to reopen - a circle of peregrination which began at this school. I certainly didn't realise at the time how lucky I was to have such a major figure in our literary history in my midst.

David Howard's assessment (also chosen for the back cover by the publishers), namely that 'Beyer's lifelong focus on the vocation of making poems rather than the business of literary politics has come to a wonderful maturity in *Anchor Stone*', reflects the humility, or perhaps the resignation, of the man: with cynicism the only available route to a paid career in writing literature, at least in New Zealand, he chose the shabby compromise of high-school teaching instead. Even at New Zealand's better schools, there is neither fame, fortune nor proper gratitude - and only a ton of painful bureaucracy - to be found in teaching generations of pimpled virgins; but Beyer at least avoided the spiritual pitfalls of a more lucrative but less meaningful career on the one hand, and the bedridden fate of Carl Spitzweg's 'Penniless Poet' on the other. I am one of many to have been inadvertently enriched by such compromises; I only wish Mr. Beyer could have been more justly remunerated for his service.

<u>The Pine Hut</u>

I say only this
about my grandfather

that when a swaggie
came to the door

in the Depression

asking for work

and there was no work
and no money in the house

to pay for work
he spread a table cloth

and plate and knife and fork
and fed the man[2113]

Anchor Stone begins with this poem; the indomitable left-liberal spirit of New Zealand literature which I have spent the last couple of chapters roughly tracing is alive and well here in our time, despite all 'neoliberal' developments to the contrary since *Talking About Ourselves* was published in 1986. Something is more important to us than making money; it is hard to say exactly what 'something' Beyer has in mind here - it will take shape in the coming poems - but there is a salient sense of responsibility to live up to the best of our ancestors in some modern form or other. History will not repeat in the same guise - the Great Depression conferred responsibilities that the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and the current 2020 pandemic, for example, have not - but something spiritual in Beyer's grandfather stands for him, and his readers, to inherit and enhance.

Human justice for Beyer has a supernatural quality; the relationship between European and Maori in New Zealand for instance - decipherable in our own senses of individual identity - is more than a balance of physical or military forces, but is intimately connected to a land and nature which no one owns:

we missed the signpost twice
so began to know the road [around Parihaka]

the same sea for everyone
that speaks its language

[…] ocean all the way from here to Antarctica
utterly fair and unpitying

rocks crusted with white dung
guarded by sea birds guarding their nests

a woman's black hair
like a gap in the light

coastline for parallel desires that never meet
unfortunately (Mahmoud Darwish's term) paradise

[2113] Tony Beyer, 'Election day', in Tony Beyer, *Anchor Stone*, (Lyttleton: Cold Hub Press, 2017), p. 9.

I take as my source
the way the map imposes itself
street name and street number
over the more established grid
of ridgelines between streams
or the reverse

here the names are Waiwhakaiho
Henui Huatoki Waimea
with Mangaotoku coming in
at an angle to join them
as the diagonal support bar
strengthens a farm gate

width qualifies a stream bed
to be a river
and smaller ones can narrow
to a trickle or be disguised
by vegetation but endure
in shapes like the shapes inside us

I would not be anywhere but here
sand one glitter to each ten grains

[…] surfers switch back and forth on
glazed with spume

or glide in three abreast
flat on their torsos

both genders
ritually becoming

the young we need to pass old regrets on to
so they can choose to forget

let the essence that has many
names and is nameless

pass invisibly through
night without light

and the daytime splendour
of everything made

the stick ground to bone texture
by the milling waves

the dog who chases it
with sweat ragged jaws

the child who throws it and throws it
with elated patience

out into the water
that always arrives[2114]

Human beings, not the natural world, are capable of human emotion and human solidarity, which is what true justice (as opposed to abstract or legalistic 'fairness') always entails. One of Beyer's next poems, 'Jane's paintings', is an attempt to do such 'justice' to Jane Pountney (1949-2004):

1

I'm tired of writing
letters to dead friends

2

I remember
how elated she was
having sold a painting
to be able to buy materials
for another larger work
and how the new scale
made her stretch her arms
and art

3

in the absence
of a God
she could believe in
McCahon was her god
a flawed and stumbling
exemplar
who wrote his name
on dark
with light

4

for a long time

[2114] Beyer, 'Gone west', in *Anchor Stone*, pp. 11-15.

all she owned
of value
was the McCahon
she eventually sold
to buy a house
to paint in

5

busy vigorous generous loud
not nearly
for long enough[2115]

Pountney's generosity of spirit - and her economic struggles to realise her vocation - uncover a truth at which Baxter only hints in his *Jerusalem Daybook* and 'Jerusalem Sonnets'[2116]: Beyer's next poem, 'Processing Jerusalem', highlights the fact that 'justice' is seldom immediate, and requires a prior spirit of sacrifice:

everyone admires
a god
whose death
feeds his people

manuhiritanga
the most ancient
binding custom[2117]

Manuhiritanga is understood by Baxter as 'unlimited hospitality to the guest and stranger'[2118], the precise kind which Beyer's grandfather showed during the

[2115] Beyer, 'Jane's Paintings', in *Anchor Stone*, pp. 19-20.

[2116] These refer to a nondescript North Island village, not the Levantine original.

[2117] Beyer, 'Processing Jerusalem', in *Anchor Stone*, p. 22.

[2118] See http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Bax4Pros-t1-body-d7.html (accessed 5/4/2020).

Depression. Beyer himself claims no Maori ancestry whatsoever[2119], but he feels closer to Maoridom - even if his primary access to it is via the likes of Baxter and other Pakeha authors who had 'only a limited knowledge' of Maori language and culture - than he does, for example, to an arrogant France, despite the good things French people have also brought to New Zealand:

> *imagine being stuck on a boat with a whole lot of French people*
>
> the week after we were there
> slips on the road after heavy rain
> forced the pilgrims to jetboat upriver
> for the church rededication
> nuns
> and a bishop and cardinal from France
> all frightfully hardy in the Whanganui winter cold
>
> *beaucoup haere mai haere mai*
>
> wooden houses and remoteness impressed them
> and the straightforward compassion their saint prospect
> brought with her and allowed to spread
> like pollen rising into the hills
>
> *seeing the needs of others and of the land*
>
> next it was downstream and beyond
> to celebrate Bastille Day in the capital
>
> one
> nun (a poetic expression
> if ever there was) concluded

[2119] See Beyer, 'At Ratana', in *Anchor Stone*, p. 30:

> Aotearoa getting browner
> more people claiming a whakapapa
> back to Kupe
>
> (not me mate
> my waka's the *Berhampore*
> Onehunga 1849
>
> though I guess
> if you can name the date
> you haven't been here long)
>
> or as Parekura [Horomia] reminds us
> there are pakeha
> all over the world

for us it feels like the end of the world[2120]

Beyer has made his home at this 'end of the world', so he can only relate to the visiting French delegation as a polite local tourist guide might. The question of his relationship to local Maori is quite different; the best of them are constitutive of him in a much more immediate way. The poem 'At Ratana' investigates:

an older man starts the mihi
without preface
and the noise does not
immediately end

dishes clash in the servery
people cough
but he does not raise his voice
which as it continues fills the long room

saying what has been said
in much the same way for millennia
greeting the living
acknowledging the dead

calm patient fast rhythmic syllables
that have to be spoken
and their meaning absorbed
not necessarily by comprehension

the parts of the language I don't understand
are still my language
not imposed
but already here for me to inherit

*

when Nanaia speaks
you understand why

generations of men
were reluctant to hear
women on the marae
or indeed in Parliament

completely fluent
completely knowledgeable
cogent and focused
none of the um ah

[2120] Beyer, 'Processing Jerusalem', in *Anchor Stone*, pp. 23-24.

of usual politiksprach
completely practical

unromantic except
in the kind of future
she intends

[…] no media present
though no one has excluded them

instead of flash
this is what is going on

not glamorous
not easily sound biteable

the deep voice under
what's happening here

in this country
this democracy

this Aotearoa
that exists in the wind

always being made
always becoming

[…] first names matter
not in terms
of casual familiarity
but as a sign of respect

for what they represent
their family and reputation
their mana
speaking through them

through the past
right here in this room
towards consequences
these politics envisage

[…] beyond the written word
Ratana left
with Michael Joseph Savage
among other articles for his consideration
a peeled white potato

representing land confiscated
and therefore unavailable for cultivation
so bought spuds replaced the kumara
or land itself became an emblem
of the wherewithal to make decisions

one of the other items
was a watch with its hands stopped
like both peoples' history
until both honour the commitment to share

[…] Jesus tried to tell us
there's no shame in poverty
in fact the opposite
though there's the danger too
of interpreting misfortune as a virtue

so voters remember
in a democracy
where the poor are many
and the rich are few
it is the poor who are supposed to rule

*

the ancestral voice returns
for the poroporoaki
this time in a younger man's mouth

I'm invited to imagine that face
as once having belonged
to a child

which of course it did
soft flesh waiting for ancient bones
to emerge and be recognised

as Ratana's
white potato abides
one of the deepest images

in New Zealand poetry[2121]

Something in the autumn air of Baxter's and Beyer's rural New Zealand idyll at Jerusalem transcends human politics altogether ('fragrances of lily and feijoa/

[2121] Beyer, 'At Ratana', in *Anchor Stone*, pp. 26-31.

windfall apples fermenting/ this is how/ God's breath must smell[2122]), but the real work of literature is to add the fragrance of human justice to the divine mix, as Beyer's 'The pine hut' does by honouring another lost voice, that of pioneering poet Ruth Dallas (1919-2008):

> 1
>
> founding a literature
> we think less
> of founding fathers
>
> than grandmothers
> mothers
> older sisters
>
> cradling the flame
> rather than
> blowing it up and out
>
> in isolation
> the bird at the window
> flutters against the pane
>
> where the sky
> is the same blue
> as possibility
>
> 2
>
> to make poetry
> easy as breathing
> so words disappear
>
> […] to make poetry
> easy as breathing
> is that difficult[2123]

And then, suddenly, prose makes an irruption into Beyer's verse story; the poem 'Festschrift' ends up describing a local literary feud - absurd in its earnestness, but real in the emotion it unleashed:

> The bloke [David] Mitchell [1940-2011] threw the chair at was Roger Nutsford, who ran a sort of head shop in [Auckland's] Karangahape Road. The Vietnam poem he was reading was Robert Bly's 'The Teeth Mother Naked at Last'. Mitchell's principal objection seems to have been to

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[2122] Beyer, 'Autumn in Jerusalem', in *Anchor Stone*, p. 33.

[2123] Beyer, 'The pine hut', in *Anchor Stone*, pp. 34-35.

someone wasting his time (and everyone else's) by reading aloud verse not his own.

A closer look at Bly's text indicates some similarities with Mitchell's My Lai poems, about which he might have been sensitive. […] Mitchell needn't have worried. The didactic plod of Bly's lines […] offers nothing like Mitchell's intuitive poetic intensity

she
holds a hand over each dark eye
in turn
&

children burn.

Succinct and distinctive, this expresses what many poets were trying to say then but were hindered by the indignation Mitchell was able to use so skilfully to fuel his fire. The pity of it is that children still burn.[2124]

The spirit of justice is not, or not only, inward-looking and local; the plight of Vietnamese or Iraqi children (or Christchurch children, as Beyer's 2019 chapbook *Friday Prayers*, a response to New Zealand's worst ever massacre and xenophobic crime, illustrates), matters too:

to ignore
or degrade
the common humanity
of a different other
is not small

[…] I know I
and those I love
living and dead
have done these things
and it must cease[2125]

The gap between what is and what should be is nowhere more visible for Beyer, however, than in New Zealand's locally notorious and utterly appalling suicide statistics; he even moves to centred alignment in his poem 'Commedia' - another experiment in form after the recourse to prose in 'Festschrift' - in order to stress the Dantean magnitude of the crisis and the lucid promise of a real solution to it:

Inferno

in the circle of the suicides

[2124] Beyer, 'Festschrift', in *Anchor Stone*, p. 38.

[2125] Tony Beyer, *Friday Prayers*, (Lyttleton: Cold Hub Press, 2019).

whose punishment is the absence of mirrors
at least the taboo against talking about it is lifted
though comparisons of methods are futile
because all have been equally successful

[…]

Paradiso

we no longer possess
the elegant manual of instructions
inscribed by hand on soft vellum
with hand-tinted illuminations

the spheres turn and angelic messages
are delivered in the form of doves
white lilies mouse traps fishing creels beached whales
and light so fiercely bright
nothing else can be seen[2126]

Two local mining disasters a century apart also remind Beyer that his life is inextricably linked not only to beauty but also to suffering anytime anywhere:

Huntly 1914 (43)

a common ancestor
links the mines
and the dead who lie in them
to part of my blood

[…]

Pike River 2010 (29)

time underground
compressed or inflated
like time in a novel
    first shift
    last shift
the work not what you are
but what you do
though for many there's nothing else[2127]

It is the nature of this suffering which is significant; the victims of these disasters suffered not only a premature and arbitrary death, but a working life in which they

[2126] Beyer, 'Commedia', in *Anchor Stone*, p. 39.

[2127] Beyer, 'Fire damp', in *Anchor Stone*, pp. 40-41.

were denied self-realisation and forced to sacrifice themselves, quite literally, for future generations - not with honourable deaths, but with empty and meaningless lives. It should surely, Beyer screams, be too late in history for this kind of spiritual slavery; the fact that 'for many there's nothing else', even in a developed country like New Zealand in 2010, is testament to a kind of collective failure of humanistic energy and imagination. The lost souls of Huntly (43) and Pike River (29) should not be forgotten, as they have been (even by New Zealanders); the 'justice' they are owed is from us, the readers of Beyer's poem, to redouble our own creative efforts.

'Aratoi'

> *The 'Aratoi' section of the book was initiated during the author's tenure of an inaugural Aratoi Fellowship at New Pacific Studio near Mt Bruce, Wairarapa, in 2011.*[2128]

After a lifetime teaching prescription English to teenagers for lower-middle-class wages in a nation of sharply rising house prices, one might think Beyer deserved a generously paid sabbatical to fulfil his own remaining creative ambitions. A closer look at the Aratoi Fellowship, however, suggests that Beyer was neither rewarded handsomely, nor for who he was, but rather minimally, and for the potential of his contribution to the cultural branding of the local region. The call for entries was in reality just another humiliating grant application in which the applicant is required to satisfy the all-powerful donor, first and foremost, that she can and will jump through the hoops the donor herself stipulates if she is to access the precious and scarce funding:

> The purpose of this Fellowship is to develop the arts and/or the exploration of local history in the Wairarapa region, enriching Aratoi Museum of Art and History's programme and connecting with communities. Creative practitioners or researchers are invited to propose a project that extends their practice and is based on an interest in the region, including the role of Aratoi Museum of Art and History.
>
> Selection will be based on the nature and strength of an applicant's proposed project and the degree to which all parties will benefit from it: the Friends of Aratoi and NZPS – in terms of community connections, Aratoi itself – in terms of its public programme, and the resident practitioner – in terms of their practice. Applicants could be writers, natural and cultural historians and storytellers, visual artists, curators, producers or film-makers. Cross-disciplinary practice is welcomed. Fellows can be at any stage in their creative 'careers'.[2129]

[2128] See *Anchor Stone*, p. 4.

[2129] This excerpt is taken from the 2015 call for entries available at https://www.artistresidency.org.nz/blog/613284 (accessed 6/4/2020).

The demeaning scare quotes at the end here say it all; ‘creative practitioners’ do not have real careers, and should be grateful for whatever condition-heavy scraps are to be bestowed on them for their ‘work’:

> Fellows will be required to ‘show’ their work and give a public talk or engage in a Q&A forum of some kind, with details to be developed in consultation with the Fellow. Friends of Aratoi will also visit NZPS, on a specific afternoon of the Fellow’s residency to talk with the Fellow about their work, in their working environment. It may also be possible to incorporate the Fellow’s project into Aratoi’s exhibition programme, but this will depend on the nature and timing of the project, and should not be taken as an outcome of the Fellowship.
>
> […] The Friends of Aratoi Fellow will be in residence for three weeks at the historic Kaiparoro/Normandell House in the Wairarapa. Accommodation is free during this time (it is normally charged at a rate of $325 per week, included shared vehicle costs). The successful Fellow would also need to cover their travel costs to and from the Centre and buy their own food while in residence. In addition, they should bring necessary equipment and supplies with them, or liaise with the Acting Director about purchasing them once in residence.
>
> The Friends of Aratoi Fellowship is available to an individual. However, an applicant is welcome to propose a collaborative project, but the Fellowship would only apply to the applicant and additional parties would need to cover the cost of their residency themselves. Additionally, an applicant is welcome to propose a project of more than three weeks in duration, but accommodation and transportation costs beyond the sponsored period would have to be met by the applicant.[2130]

Hideous bureaucratic language aside, the details of such a ‘fellowship’ reveal that in fact the ‘fellow’ is essentially paying for the privilege of being one, or at most applying for three weeks of rent-subsidised solitude in a pleasant, distraction-free environment. I labour this point if only to stress that the ‘Aratoi’ section of *Anchor Stone* hence exists as much *despite* this fellowship as because of it; it offered valuable impressions, to be sure, but no ‘just payment’ to the ‘practitioner’ in question.

The first poem, ‘Paths’, is introduced by Beyer as a ‘hundred-poem poem’, a kind of multiperspectival summary of a life culminating in arrival at Aratoi:

> however many
> repetitions
>
> the tui’s voice
> always new

[2130] See https://www.thebigidea.nz/work/181127-call-for-friends-of-aratoi-fellow (accessed 6/4/2020).

[…] travelling light
not so easy

with a head full
of books

paintings
songs movies frames

strands
of conversation

without which you
leave yourself behind

[…] founding tramp
and founding father

in bronze
in the city’s reserves

[…] yes fly
you can go now

I’ve written another
poem about you

-

in the end
it is people

particularly she
for whom the house

is an embodiment
of belief

her predecessors
alive in her respect

and their successors
the artists

who come here
to breathe

-

of course it’s not
the same fly

but nor am I
the same me

-

Bashō’s website
www.frog.jp

-

[…] memories
of Ron Mason

from two
who knew him

when they were
young

a kind man
a lonely man

and one
whose uncalm heart

open to
the ordinary world

reflected
extraordinary light

[…] *I am not*
solitary whilst

I read
and write

though nobody
is with me

an ambush
from Emerson

[…] my pen

and notebook

cheap and
durable

both made
in China

Du Fu would
have liked them

[…] the dome over
where you are

contains hills
hawks and

strings of cloud
all apparently centred

but moveable
when you move

a landscape
as curious

as calves
that gather

at a fence
in front of you

to assuage
their isolation

[…] *fostering creativity*
you took me in

on the advice of course
of a selection panel

but with sincerity
and clear attention

to what would enable
the making I have

made it my life

to be for

[…] the eels
large females

hug the banks
for day shade

long-term
residents

whose purpose
is to sustain

night feeding
steady water

for generations
they will never see

[…] quiet
on the back porch

in a creaky
cane chair

the dry plant
called honesty

over my shoulder
a reminder

where all this
should be taking me

[…] you can stay up
all night
if you want to

reading papers
magazines
poems

pausing
at times
to write something

revise it

or throw it
away

[…] greater things
on earth
than your sleep

are being
decided
without you

[…] the moon
carries itself

past us all
behind clouds

taken on
trust

like invisible
necessary things

that it is still
there at all[2131]

After this initial reckoning with his sudden fate as a 'short-term resident' at New Pacific Studio - against the backdrop of the good and well-meaning individual people involved in humanising his stay and making his own private creativity possible - Beyer duly obliges his masters in his next poem by turning his attention to 'the exploration of local history in the Wairarapa region':

this is well settled country
where local lore
and the nation state
have replaced each other several times

names of things have been changed
and occasional second attempts
at revival (the dairy factory
become a craft bazaar
become an eyesore)
have failed

[…] the Anzac bridge
a plain

[2131] Beyer, 'Paths', in *Anchor Stone*, pp. 47-74.

sustained white arc
between two banks
of time's river
because time
is the ancient enemy
of remembrance

this one does not stress
they died
for King and Country
or were brave
exemplary soldiers
or even that having
died this way
they will live forever
but instead
that they were loved

the event that took them
unassimilable
they were
and will be missed
in secret
fastidious messages of blood
through generations
and at haying time
and on the quiet morning now
the quiet light surrounds[2132]

This is an extremely elegant compromise between artistic integrity and the brute realities of funding; the lost souls commemorated at the Anzac Bridge up the road from Mt. Bruce deserve and receive the same dignity of incorporation as the lost miners of Huntly and Pike River. But the contrived and contingent nature of the institutional love he is receiving for a short window of time (and in the form not of payment but of free accommodation) weighs on Beyer's conscience; the poem 'The yellow house' describes an uneasy visit to an old local clockmaker's abode:

from the clockmaker's window
the cabbage tree marks time
with soft irruptions of white flowers

[…] at the clockmaker's bench
I run my hands
over cuts and nicks
in the wood
he made

[2132] Beyer, 'SH2', in *Anchor Stone*, pp. 76-77.

a century ago

[…] the tui
at upstairs
window level

is a descendant
of the clockmaker's
garden companion

their clucks
and chimes
swallowed by time

[…] the house and the paddocks
are yellow and the dark pines
shelter darker birds

mist shuts off the hills
at night and morning
stifling green daylight

the bothered sheep
enclosed for transporting
moan bitterly from the pens

days like these you have to have
a sense of who and why you are
not to be defeated

you have to be attentive
to gather up minutes or words
and see that they work[2133]

As if recoiling from the horror of writing for pay and from the deadly prescriptiveness of the fellowship's call for entries, Beyer throws off the shackles of his Wairarapa tyranny - though without disrespecting the region's actual souls in any way - to write 'Nine for Du Fu', his favourite Chinese poet:

1

though no other nation menaces us
our young soldiers are at war

killing and sometimes dying
in a foreign country

[2133] Beyer, 'The yellow house', in *Anchor Stone*, pp. 78-80.

far from the sight of their
mountains and rivers that shape the sky

[…]

2

the nation’s troubles are its own
but so often blamed on others

nature worked out long ago
how the fern could stand alone

holding its green young
curled under its fronds

where there is compassion
no child should go hungry

3

from this far away I still hear
my wife’s unshed tears

pain of being apart
a dark shadow between us

it may be more adult
to pursue the task that separates us

but my sorrow is that of a child
left behind a locked door

4

in this small country everyone
knows everyone or his brother

the educated ones who
flatted together in their youth

remember things about each other
now better left unspoken

except by candlelight after dinner
over a glass of red wine

[…]

6

trees and the spaces between them
are what constitute a forest

a man approaching through these spaces
may be a friend or an enemy

how each of you speaks to the other
will likely confirm which

the ground you stand on to face him
will either way be soft with leaves

7

a garden is a forest we have tamed
where all but the beasts

in our hearts have been expelled
base envy faint praise casuistry

8

the retired school teacher
long after dusting the board for the last time

still dreams of chalk and awkward boys
as an actor dreams forgotten lines

or when lightning splits the night
and thunder clatters down the roof

old soldiers stand to from their beds
groping the dark for absent weapons

9

whoever invented virtual bubble-wrap
which pops at a click of the mouse

individually or in pre-selected swarms
all over all quarters of the screen

[…] came up with the perfectly absurd

consolation for the passage of time[2134]

The vague guilt of spending the Aratoi Fellowship on creativity unconnected to the instrumental call for entries drives Beyer to turn the emotion back on itself in a kind of ironic protest. Writers will always procrastinate, but in another sense, the timetable for true creativity, which is always the natural outcome of self-realisation, is utterly distinct from the externally imposed deadlines of the workplace. Beyer knows he is expected to 'produce' in his three weeks in the 'Studio', but do any of the administrators involved actually *care* what he produces and whether it is authentic to his own sense of self, or will they be 'measuring' and 'evaluating' the results via extrinsic criteria, thereby merely verifying that the results *look* 'appropriate' for the various 'stakeholders' concerned? Beyer somehow puts all this totalitarianism out of his mind, and gropes instead for an 'anthropocosmic' vision of totality:

temptations of books
in shelves on shelves
all over the house

Du Fu of course
in four or five
different translations

Flaubert and the
Goncourt brothers
to be just lightly grazed

a reprint of Whitman's
first and freshest version
and Robin Hyde's labyrinthine poems

exciting discovery
of Katherine Anne Porter
and Emerson

easily a week's worth
of Sartre and Ibsen
and essays by Geoff Park

and photographs
and maps and drawings
local history narratives

but the page I should be
reading is the blank one
my words will appear upon

[2134] Beyer, 'Nine for Du Fu', in *Anchor Stone*, pp. 82-85.

[…] in the creeks you can see how much
we've buggered the country

small waterfalls curdle the rocks
with unnatural froth

and stunted foreign fish
pale and speckled glide idly

through primordial longfin water
where even the shaded under-banks are safe now

that which appears unchanging is always
changing and can be changed back

this time or the next time may be
the one we can't afford to miss

back home I hold the fish by the tail
and drive the thin knife forward to fillet it

two grey cats wait at my feet
for the not quite empty skeleton

the Chinese masters can rest on their shelf
while the business of life is restored

the drunk one and the dour one
the shy sipper of blossom and the shaggy hermit

their ghosts are untroubled
by the attention we still give them

needing even in distant lands and languages
not so much their wisdom as mountains and rivers

or the understanding
that mountains and rivers are their wisdom[2135]

Beyer's Baby Boomer environmentalism is tangential to his real theology here; economic and technological progress bring a welcome enrichment of spiritual life too, as the poem 'Night lights' explores:

within a generation the change
from dairying to beef stock-fattening

[2135] Beyer, 'Studio', in *Anchor Stone*, pp. 88-94.

> has altered the texture of the soil
>
> farmers and their wives can support the arts
> take a vineyard tour
> hear music other than the national ration[2136]

This is not a trivial development; if Beyer's prized access to Du Fu 'in four or five different translations' is somehow a product of a cultural globalisation unthinkable in New Zealand a generation before, then my own forays in East Asia, learning Chinese directly and living and working in the Sinosphere, represent another generational advance made possible by sustained economic and technological development. It is true that fossil fuels carried me there and back (and beyond) many times in aeroplanes - a responsible economics will diligently recognise *all* negative externalities - but the idea of a 'national ration' for music or culture is patently tragic and absurd, and Beyer says so. At the same time, however, the gentrification of culture is not culture; 'vineyard tours' may be fun for all the obvious reasons, but they offer a junky sort of pleasure compared with Beyer's favourite bookshop:

> Fashionable reading is like smoking or excessive drinking; we look back upon it aghast at the waste. Now I'd rather have on hand a couple of thumbed-half-to-death Penguin classics than the whole current Booker list.
>
> Books as commodities often seem to diminish in actual value the higher their retail price. Perhaps the increase in prices of new books has taken place proportionally, but it doesn't feel that way. On the other hand, serious reading and serious earning are apparently mutually exclusive vocations: those who can afford new books don't read and those who read can't afford them.
>
> Dylan Thomas described himself as a Penguin-educated citizen. I have had a more extensive formal education than that particular Welsh wizard, but still regard myself as Penguin-educated. […] The importance of this to literary culture in the former colonies cannot be overemphasised. Nearly anything worth reading was published at one time or another by Penguin and many of their older products now languish overpriced on the shelves of urban second-hand bookshops.
>
> This is not the case, however, at the New Plymouth hospice shop. […] It's true you have to search thoroughly in cramped conditions. Though there are divisions by subject, there is no alphabetical system and some spines are faded. The standard book price of fifty cents is very affordable. My whole shelf of Maupassant, in various translations and one in the original, comes from there, as does nearly everything I've read by Doris Lessing and Isaac Bashevis Singer.
>
> Good non-fiction also abounds, in every category from mountaineering to mediaeval church history, gardening, travel, the World Wars, and the efforts of solo yachtsmen. […] As I age, I have come to prefer what I think of as more permanent books, ones which are never a waste of time: the

[2136] Beyer, 'Night lights', in *Anchor Stone*, p. 95.

> English, American, French and Russian classics I should have read earlier. Other shoppers' choices, often discussed at both length and volume, can also be intriguing. Adherents of Maeve Binchy or Catherine Cookson are complemented by quite young women with an inexhaustible capacity for Victorian fiction or Herman Melville (both shared favourites of mine.) Courteous but intense debate has at times been known to break out. […] Yet it is not only the books you bring home with you for a modest sum that make this quirky, serendipitous place of commerce and exchange such a delight. For the book lover, there is the quietly satisfying nostalgia of recognising titles and authors long forgotten: the Nevil Shutes, Joy Packers and Hammond Innes titles that my parents read, for example. I also enjoy the random reoccurrence of authors I know I will never read – Anita Brookner, Sidney Sheldon, Wilbur Smith (though it goes without saying I would defend with my life the right of anyone else to read them) – as well as old favourites no longer to my taste.
>
> More than anything else, this institution is a charity, supporting the dying but also inadvertently acknowledging the passing and changing of culture by recycling its residue. I'm sure this is true of the movies and music on offer, as much as the books. What was once loved remains to be loved again, including the world-righting conversations of retired men who drop in daily for chance meetings and probably spend little, and the women who fossick among garments with the fixity of those making ends meet for a fair number of dependents.
>
> The human village, resolute in the presence of suffering and death, shows its unmistakable face here. […] The book section is a highly successful economic model. Neither reading nor dying is likely to go out of business. If you read something you don't like, you can always donate it back for someone else to discover. I don't know if I'll ever read Charles P. Kindleberger's earnest tome, *The World in Depression 1929-1939*, but nor do I know if I'll ever again have the opportunity to purchase a copy, in good nick, too, for fifty cents.
>
> To buy a book is to express the hope that one will live at least long enough to read it.[2137]

This is perhaps the right time to say that I spent NZ$40 on my own copy of *Anchor Stone* - an outrageous price I would never have paid if I had not thought I was doing my old English teacher a favour - while browsing at a bookstore in downtown Auckland after flying back from China on New Years Eve 2019 (just before the Coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan which prevented me from going back to Beijing, and threw Ruskin and Mulgan into my path in my aunt's Cambridge instead[2138]). Without realising it at the time, the economic madness which sets the market value of *Anchor Stone* at an impossible $40 was perhaps the original catalyst for this

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[2137] Tony Beyer, 'Best Bookshop in New Plymouth', http://tauranga.kete.net.nz/new_zealand_society_of_authors_bay_of_plenty/topics/show/403-best-bookshop-in-new-plymouth-by-tony-beyer (accessed 8/4/2020).

[2138] I bought my copy of *Talking About Ourselves* for NZ$12 at The Open Book, a second-hand bookstore I chanced to drive past on Auckland's Ponsonby Road in mid-January 2020.

book, the event which made my subsequent discoveries of Ruskin, Mulgan and Ricketts (and my weaving together of their stories under the aegis of 'The Economics of Spiritual Humanism') possible: if our system of resource allocation and distribution can't figure out what a just price for the accumulated life's work of my former high-school English teacher might be, then it is unspeakably broken; finding a solution in this specific case becomes the key to broader economic, political and socio-cultural reform, not just in New Zealand, but in the entire human community of which our nation is a part.

Beyer, however, is preoccupied by micro- as well as macro-concerns in 'Aratoi'; or rather, there is no hope for the big stuff without the proper attention to family and friends. A close female in Beyer's life is reachable from the Wairarapa only via technology, and this makes dialogue difficult:

> no longer face to face
> the simplest jest
>
> can sever the spider strand
> of empathy
>
> other people's lives
> are histories that clash
>
> for words
> to form from
>
> forgive the ones of mine
> you may have found
>
> ill-formed or rash
> or simply beneath me
>
> at times the best
> a troubled man can do[2139]

The domestic anxieties of a time slipping out of one's control are there with Beyer too in the isolation and alienating unfamiliarity of his Aratoi residence:

> waking
> I feel the rain
> not yet fallen
>
> a weight
> throughout
> the silent rooms
>
> like tears

[2139] Beyer, 'She who watches', in *Anchor Stone*, p. 96.

before a birth
or after a death

[…] because
any house
is also memory

and ahead of me my father
and ahead of him
Albert my grandfather

but I can't look behind
to see if my son
and grandson are following

[…] in my room
a stranger to me

considers
the morepork's call

and the dry
collisions of grass

traces of the dancers' steps
obliterate each other

[…] the dry click or tick
of time passing
at the centre of conversations
no one pays more attention to
than he or she must[2140]

The final challenge of 'Aratoi' is the self-refashioning which Beyer's three Wairarapa weeks afford him anew:

I am still walking those paths
and could walk them in the dark
and even in sleep

[…] the diagonal climb
through the ceiling to the loft
a passage through memory

rocked to sleep
by the wind's incessant voyage

[2140] Beyer, 'House' and 'Scroll', in *Anchor Stone*, pp. 97-98, 99-100.

I set out again[2141]

On the back of such introspection, however, it is a local river which reconnects Beyer's self to the entire cosmos of meaning flowing beyond it:

twisted and gleaming
    like a sheep's intestines

or as Du Fu would say
    shining like wine

let it stand in
    for all the rivers

[…] in a cold mouthful
    taken from the forest

at the source
    or in the shadow

of the sad bridge
    near the main road

the poets offer it
    to each other

yours no yours
    as a text

as an incitement
    that will endure[2142]

<u>'The Regions'</u>

Beyer's enduring love affair with New Zealand's 'harmony without uniformity' is best understood in the context of the 'Aucklander's dilemma': instead of heading north and overseas from Auckland's narrow isthmus, as so many did (and still do), Beyer spent his life going south, into the bowels of his native country. Despite his love for Chinese poets and continental European novelists, Beyer chose to live his life toing and froing between Auckland and the lower North Island. The first poem in 'The Regions', titled 'Family Matters', is a reflection on the infinite possibilities of domestic life, even for the person who stays put in her own land:

for a change

[2141] Beyer, 'Normandell', in *Anchor Stone*, p. 101.

[2142] Beyer, 'Makakahi', in *Anchor Stone*, pp. 102-103.

we take a turn past

the lake in the park
where two Canada geese

[…] patrol the invisible boundary
around where their three

fat-bottomed goslings graze

[…] my grandson
old enough now

not to want to chase them
spreads crusts for the ducks

[…] out on the lake
surface reflections

of the tall bamboo
go down deeper

than the water itself
obscuring even deeper sky[2143]

Beyond the pathos of family, however, a persistent theme in Beyer is compassion for local and provincial poverty - cultural as well as material - and a conviction that New Zealand has problems of its own to solve before it can dare to dream about influencing the world beyond. In the poem 'Corner Shop', it is unclear (beyond a reference to 'suburbs') which region in New Zealand we are in, but the dogs and rugby league references suggest somewhere edgily working-class:

buying a newspaper
I can feel on the front page
the gritty dust
the wind blows in
through the door where
dogs are tied up
even the toughest of them
mewling like kittens
while their owners are inside
more in hope of a pie
or ham sandwich
than out of any abstract
perception of neglect

[2143] Beyer, 'Family Matters', in *Anchor Stone*, p. 107.

sometimes their empty
ginger eyes
go over me appraisingly
when I come out with the paper
sometimes bread or milk
or a necessary
sugar boost ahead of the day
it's a good place too
to ask about sports results
I've missed overnight
State of Origin
arousing in particular
surprising loyalties or disgust[2144]

Beyer is crucially *not* claiming cultural superiority to an alienated proletariat reduced for entertainment to gladiatorial contact sports imported from Australia ('State of Origin' refers to the annual grudge matches between rugby league players born in New South Wales and Queensland, religiously televised in New Zealand since the 1980s): he loves the game and wants to know the score himself, even though he can't explain exactly why he (or anyone else in New Zealand) cares so much. The poem 'Hard yards', meanwhile (another rugby league reference), reflects the economic and social realities of life for many of those raised on this limited cultural diet (and devoid of Beyer's own outlets to World Literature): a significant number, disproportionately brown, will end up in contact with the bureaucrats at Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ), formerly known as the Ministry of Social Welfare, or less euphemistically described as the Overlords of Unemployment Benefit Distribution:

you know how serious it is
by who the news sends to cover it

2

WINZ begins
its ready-to-work seminars
with three searching questions

(the obvious other one
about a job
is never asked)

do you have a driver's licence
do you have a partner
would you pass a drug test today

understandably

[2144] Beyer, 'Corner shop', in *Anchor Stone*, p. 109.

more than 50% of those present
answer no to the third[2145]

The problems of economic justice in New Zealand, Beyer rightly insists, are inseparable from the management of 'Maori Affairs', a government 'portfolio' which in the early 2000s fell to Parekura Horomia (1950-2013); but the impoverished language of government bureaucracy cannot really get to the heart of the matter, and certainly not in English, even if most registered Maori voters on the New Zealand electoral roll no longer enjoy native command of their ancestral language:

in my sleep I speak
te reo [Maori] fluently
and engage in a lengthy
rebarbative debate with Parekura Horomia
amicable of course on both sides

perhaps now the most pakeha of poets
is dreaming
dreams in another language
we are closer to a genuinely
bicultural Aotearoa[2146]

Beyer is not trying to give himself any undue credit here; he simply understands that Maori unemployment and negative social statistics are more than pesky 'problems' to be solved, and that viewing them as such is part of the problem. The 'near other' of Australia, meanwhile, embodied in a photograph of poet Rosemary Dobson (1920-2012), may end up being as much a part of the solution to New Zealand's spiritual problems as any local policy directive ever could be:

her asymmetrical face
seems to join a daughter's youth
on the left with a more lined
wisdom of the mother on the right

the upright and undifferentiated
torso of an older woman
concludes at the broad matter-of-fact hand
holding poems which in their turn hold

clear light on clear water
bed-linen freshly cleansed of dreams
a table set with wine and conversation
ordinary miraculous things[2147]

[2145] Beyer, 'Hard yards', in *Anchor Stone*, p. 111.

[2146] Beyer, 'Hard yards', in *Anchor Stone*, p. 112.

[2147] Beyer, 'A photograph of Rosemary Dobson', p. 113.

More distant and less scrutable others, such as the Japanese, are also part of the humane conversation on which the future of Beyer's New Zealand, and by extension the world, depends:

> a comfort to think
> that in Nagano where
>
> typewriters used to be made
> they still remember
>
> Bashō's visit and the long-
> expired snow he came to view
>
> each snow flake
> then as now unique each
>
> fluent stroke of the brush
> comprehensible but singular[2148]

If these are some of the 'outer regions' of Beyer's concentric circles of centrifugal humanistic concern, he loops back closer to home in 'Sonnets from Erewhon', a North Island poet mirroring a South Island poet's journey: Dunedin-born Baxter's 'Jerusalem Sonnets' recovered the beating heart of 'New Zealand' in a remote North Island community (amid a hail of classical references), while Beyer wants to do the same thing from mid-Canterbury's Erewhon Station:

> of the Romans I prefer
> Ovid in exile to Horace
> though Horace had good things to say
>
> also Juvenal to Virgil
> so usually those on the outer
> or constitutionally grouchy
>
> but you have to appreciate
> Virgil's profound grasp
> of the as yet unsuspected zeitgeist
>
> in the era of the human God
> divine Augustus issued the decree
> that determined the future of the world
>
> in a cow shed in a small town
> on the disputed frontier of the known[2149]

[2148] Beyer, 'The Characters', in *Anchor Stone*, p. 119.

[2149] Beyer, 'Sonnets from Erewhon', in *Anchor Stone*, p. 120.

The universality of this classical culture, however, has somehow been lost amid the convenience of soulless airports; there is a race to recover it which in Beyer's mind is coterminous with the environmental challenges we now face:

> out of everywhere we have created nowhere
> places of departure places of arrival
> indistinguishable from each other
>
> the eye of the traveller is scanned
> for ulterior intent or accidentally
> misplaced fidelity
>
> my deaf grandfather tall but stooped
> born at the end of the immemorial
> horse-drawn and lamp-lit aeon
>
> would set all the detectors clanging
> with his watch chain
> and the tags on the end of his shoelaces
>
> he always said the man who made time made plenty
> but time seems to be running out
>
> […] it is a new kind of time our entertainments
> and their preservation have invented
> in which people who have left this life
> not only appear in the dreams of their loved ones
> but eternally in the collective dreaming
> condemned to arrive at the same outcomes
>
> […] no one knows how long it will take
> for the sorely tried ecosystem
> to recover itself or if its condition
> is irreversible and fatal
>
> even in poetry the vocabulary
> to describe these situations is debased[2150]

The final poem in 'The Regions' - 'Earthed' - brings Beyer back to his old family home after a lengthy absence - a final resting-place perhaps, but an organic ornament destined to outlive him, not some sterile mausoleum:

> now we've returned
> and pruned the camellias
> after three years'

[2150] Beyer, 'Sonnets from Erewhon', in *Anchor Stone*, pp. 120-122.

gangling neglect
[…] the fruit trees
are all everywhere too
but that can wait
[…] a late crop of potatoes
in the ground
and if the sun stays long enough
courgettes and maybe spinach
while like a silent
echo of herself
the black cat rediscovers
favourite scratching trunks
and corners where
the warmth builds through the day
and scents and stillnesses
that do not quite remind
but are familiar[2151]

Beyer's own sense of self, indeed, is more complex than any New Zealand suburban garden, for all its comforts, can capture; a final volume of poems will be required to approach the most precious depths of such learning.

'Anchor Stone'

[…] part of art is
to acquaint oneself

with the pain of others
by imagination

or in its absence
self-infliction

[…] location a constantly
moving enclosure
of existence

vertiginous plummet
down the lower
hemisphere's curve

winds up to
cyclone strength
over the islands

[2151] Beyer, 'Earthed', in *Anchor Stone*, p. 123.

let light be song
let colour
let accumulation

each small
panting unit
a part of the whole

each small voice
heard on the wind
in a new dimension[2152]

The final, self-titled section of *Anchor Stone* begins with 'Interchange', a poem subtitled 'Brent Wong [1945-]: Abandoned Works 1970-2008'. Wong's Asian heritage makes him neither less of a New Zealander (he was born in Ōtaki near Wellington) nor less universal in his strivings as an artist than Beyer or Hone Tuwhare; Wong's surrealist paintings offer Beyer an 'interchange' to the transcendental, or rather a 'room', distinct from his own self, in which the same common sky remains overhead. Only the 'weather' is different:

into
the silence
of space

[…] deep space
silence

acrylic
on board

the centre
off centre

glows

[…] the sky is
infinitely porous

[…] you enter a place
four walls

a floor
and a ceiling

where the weather

[2152] Beyer, 'Station' and 'Departure and return', in *Anchor Stone*, pp. 130-131, 133.

is separate[2153]

No room or space, however dear or intimate or familiar, can contain a self in all its transtemporal strivings; there remains the constant question of 'the weather tomorrow':

past lives only part
of what must now follow
in a house
enclosed in fragile timber
tile and paint where
we are the new people
again[2154]

The problem of 'belonging' or 'self-realisation' is hence more ephemeral and dynamic than any amount of material ownership or locational rootedness can possibly solve; 'earth' is, after all, only one of four elements necessary for life - and for the peak experiences that crown a hard-earned selfhood:

for once
the good earth
whose uses I use
to empty my mind
for poems
emptied it
of poems too

[…] other elements
air
water
fire
without which
no full hand
full house
beginning
to topple
once it
becomes land
territory
property
other properties
are lost
not least
the unique
individual moment

[2153] Beyer, 'Interchange', in *Anchor Stone*, pp. 127-129.

[2154] Beyer, 'The weather tomorrow', in *Anchor Stone*, p. 136.

when you place
your hand
flat on the surface
and belong[2155]

Beyer is hence able to feel as acutely at home as he ever has in an imagined conversation with Li Bai:

old friend
when we meet again

in heaven
let us converse quietly

by a low fire
sipping perhaps a grape

or barley brew
out of polished bowls

the pale sun
gives lustre to

as the familiarity of our
voices warms our words

-

men can't live
as long as we have

and stay out of trouble
women or politics

or the dreary corrosion
years bring

all of which
fade into unimportance

before a hedge
that holds back the wind

[…] horses and tall
warriors at the gate

[2155] Beyer, 'The good earth', in *Anchor Stone*, pp. 137, 141.

a man whipped in the dust
until blood comes

are conditions
of the world beneath

that outlasts empires
sufficient for us

now the sides of our heads
are brushed silver

to nod sadly
over the waste

[…] old friend I have
known all my life

words alone
(and there are only words)

pierce through centuries
both past and to come[2156]

Something lurks in the specificity of Beyer's existence, however, to give meaning to the transcendental; the poem 'Long for this world' is an extended meditation on what that meaning might be, or rather, how he might yet create it:

so the capacity
to make mistakes returns
and with it the possibility
of excellence

[…] I clear the room
completely to write
but there's no eliminating birdsong
or the inaudible considerations

of spiders in the corners
reconstructing their scaffolding
or the way the light wind
shuffles leaves along the gutters

silence is such a human facility
so arbirtrary and arid
I can't believe anything

[2156] Beyer, 'Li Bai', in *Anchor Stone*, pp. 142-144.

can be made of it

except this delectable
accumulation of small sounds
that is at once its
defeat and definition

[…] we're small change
when it comes to the big ideas
NASA IN CONSTANT CONTACT
WITH ALIENS a headline shouts

but there is also
the sun's warmth on my back
while I hang out the washing
and the edges of the vine leaves

and the first
still green and miniscule
grape clusters
suspended in their shadows

[…] to mention God
is to receive odd looks
or be subjected
to salivating fanaticism

there's been this rupture
between us and the time
when the sacred was part of everyday reality
and the reverse

breaking bread together
at a table
sharing a warming draught
were the perfect symbols

of human godlikeness

[…] recalling faces
I haven't seen this century
Jimmy Docksey and Arthur
Peanut and Gordon the Dally

[…] Mike Lahood was around then too
a freckled ginger Maori from Ashhurst
and my best friend
for nearly a year

[…] I tried hard to reconcile
the utterance of my youth
with the laminated speech
of education

my father's Australian vowels
spiked with ancestral German
war-time Arabic
the occasional Yiddish disclosure

no help either from the oracular
liturgy of Anglicanism
unenthusiastic in itself
but too fruity for academia

one can not say ours
is not in the end an oral culture
a common dialect
none of us speaks

[…] I suppose those years
of mutton guts beef guts
blood tacky underfoot
on the concrete floor

initiated my distaste
for anything slick or sticky
like sunblock or insect
repellent on my skin

similarly and astute reliance
on the right word
in the right place
because a wrong one could cost

[…] by convention the *vita sexualis*
excludes the marital
so mine would be
necessarily brief

o budding girls
when I was a boy
the ache of autumn
on the walk to school

life's dawn and sunset
teach us continuity is all

not self but selves
making one of many

the arms of the young
surrounding one another
the serial upsurge
and scatter of the sea

[…] the way God speaks
in migrant flocks of oystercatchers
along the foreshore
waiting for the go signal

an identical mass
divided into individuals
of singular beauty
pied but particular

citizens my age are described
as elderly in the media
if struck by a bus
or engaged in altercation

as if there were a gaggle of us
out on the rocks
milling and squawking
ready for take-off

[…] the second date

on the tombstone
will remain unknown
for ever to the one
it most concerns

for every year alive
there are many more dead
the numb capsule of the body
propelled blind through eternity

or something more
an older poet told me
that matters more
than all our living days

[…] the calm suburbs
where everyone
if they told the truth

would choose to dwell

[…] it is the ability
not the necessity
to fall in love
may be lost with age

beginning with the
inexplicable coalescence
of your parents
who in these times

often knew each other
before you for less time
than they've known you
and what you must mean

[…] Dionysos […]
I was always a sucker
for you

[…] music supposed to be danced to
not philosophised about

[…] humid December
nature face to face
like someone invisible
in the night

who breathes
when you breathe
moves sultry-limbed
when you stir

the luxury of pronouns
interchangeable and nameless
giving rise to action
but no consequences

of the sort that wake
a just man
alone in his chamber
with the chill of thought

[…] whoever is guiltless
hasn't lived yet
yet few of us are
completely corrupt

to be broken is to acquire
the potential to mend
as to be forgiven
encourages forgiveness

[…] every start towards
becoming what you're
supposed to be
is a hard one

[…] some things it seems
can't be postponed
this morning
of terrible weather

the baby bird
has made its first flight
from the nest
to the lemon tree

a more or less
horizontal odyssey
of roughly five metres
under close parental supervision

and what a day for it
for getting used to
a life that belongs
in the wind and rain

[…] fresh rain
on the vine leaves
caught by early light
and the mother bird

busy about her
biological destiny
worms to unearth
beaks to appease

each iota
of the present world
becoming past
in an instant

that which you can't
take with you

every creditable sentence says
is everything[2157]

You can't take it with you, but you can do your best to leave it behind, strengthened and condensed, for others, as the poem 'Anchor stone' strives to do by making a mountain, not out of a molehill, but out of a mere chance pebble in the driveway:

the ends of the earth
are a train ride away
in the ruined industrial smear
at the base of the isthmus

half a century ago
I caught the same train
to where things
used to work

[…] eyes in old photos say
we built the city
remember us
now it comes down

heavy boots aching spines
destroy the world
to construct a world
then destroy that one

it matters because
where you come from
and places like it
are your home

you feel it
in the tiniest stone under foot
the temperature of shadow
under a front yard tree[2158]

From this fortress of spiritual security, affairs of family, state, and wider humanitarian, environmental and cosmic concern redouble in their intensity, starting with the domestic sphere:

it's only my brother
I'd arrange to meet

at the seafood stall

[2157] Beyer, 'Long for this world', in *Anchor Stone*, pp. 145-156.

[2158] Beyer, 'Anchor stone', in *Anchor Stone*, pp. 157-158.

in the mall

knowing he shares with me
the fittingly arrayed

and iced
joy of fish

[…] there are of course
important matters of family

and memory to be discussed
but this is a good beginning[2159]

The final image of *Anchor Stone*, however, is a national symbol of our unique and defining loneliness, our ramshackle, improvised civilisation, and our unconscious hunger for dialogue with the world: the poem 'One-lane bridge' reminds Beyer's reader once and for all that he is a *New Zealand* poet:

the last 5 km to Marokopa
sealed & windy through the hills
the upper stories
of high-rise beehives leaning seawards

off-road vehicle tracks intertwined on black sand
out to the heads & fishing

[…] a decent surf break then soft wallow
where tide & river meet
the entire spot an elegy for someone
who hasn't died yet

anywhere that empty
feels like home

[…] then the spray in our faces
requests for group photos in many languages
the sound as much to be admired
as white collapsing water

yet where they'd clear-felled the trees
embedded fences
stepped rock & hawk country
steeped in endemic loneliness

nothing to rinse this isolation from the blood

[2159] Beyer, 'Lunchtime', in *Anchor Stone*, p. 159.

this national temperament[2160]

[2160] Beyer, ‘One-lane bridge’, in *Anchor Stone*, p. 165.

5. The Economics of Spiritual Humanism

> *My thoughts as we went were how this was the pilgrim road, down which, for uncounted generations, the people of the north had come to visit the Holy City, bearing with them gifts of faith for the shrine; and it seemed that the Arab revolt might be in a sense a return pilgrimage, to take back to the north, to Syria, an ideal for an ideal, a belief in liberty for their past belief in a revelation.*
>
> T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*

'Comprehensive and Integrated': Tu Weiming's Final Ambition

The final third of this trilogy was written from beginning to end under the cloud of the global coronavirus pandemic in early 2020. It is too early to say which specific reforms to the visible (institutional) and invisible (cultural) order of the human community will result from this historic disaster - which would have been so much worse if the virus had just been even slightly more lethal than it was - but the shadows of change - good, bad, and ugly - are certainly looming on the horizon. Cecilia Ballesteros of the Spanish newspaper *El Pais* summarised the *status quo* on 9 April as I was deep in the business of this book:

> According to former UN Secretary-General Chef de Cabinet Susana Malcorra, 'the United Nations should be coordinating a strategy on multiple fronts, beyond the emergency health response of the World Health Organisation: a humanitarian front, food security, the situation of the most vulnerable human beings, the response in countries lacking even basic infrastructure, the social and economic aspects of the crisis and a plan for when it finally passes.' […] The danger that the UN will fall into irrelevance 75 years after its founding, just as the League of Nations did before it, is very real. […] 'This should be a moment of global governance,' argues Nathalie Tocci of the Istituto Affari Internazionali in Rome. 'We need [global] public health; the data supplied to the WHO by member states is often incomplete, and the whole system lacks coercive teeth. Then there is the whole economic dimension: we need international coordination to prevent a depression and relaunch the global economy, starting with the G20.' Many analysts believe this may be a key moment in the dismantling of the global order born in 1945 - it remains to be seen whether this will take the form of a natural dying out or an active planting of a new system of international relations which responds to the demands of the 21st Century. […] 'A new social contract is needed in many countries, one which also includes a new form of [global] union. This is a gigantic task, but there is no alternative,'

> Malcorra argues. […] The experts agree, however, that there is a lack of leadership and no real plan to get there.[2161]

One doesn't need to be George Orwell to realise that the *language* of international bureaucracy is part of the problem here: instrumental thinking is a wonderful servant, but a terrible master. I have argued in this trilogy that Tu Weiming offers a Chinese conception of a humanism with valid universal aspirations; one catches echoes of it all across the terrain of World Literature, and even in the remotest recesses of my own island nation. Tu's sadly declining health means that he is in no position assume global leadership in 2020, but in what may prove to be one of his last public pronouncements, made on his 80th birthday in February, he captures the heartbreaking failure of our current globalisation:

> Allow me to share just one idea which is yet to be further developed. I've been thinking about it for a few years; it's still 'in the process'. My ambition is to try to develop a comprehensive and integrated humanism which is not merely 'compatible' with many other spiritual traditions, but rather enriches and broadens the legacy of all the spiritual traditions that may have contributed to human self-understanding. At a minimum, I think four dimensions of the human experience will have to be integrated: the idea of the self; the idea of community; nature; and Heaven.
>
> Confucian learning is learning for the sake of the self; self-consciousness in particular is the point of departure for learning. It is a ceaseless process of growth and development, undertaken by a person understood as a centre of relationships rather than an isolated individual. This self enters into communication with an expanding network of 'others'; it is always to be understood in a particular historical and cultural context, and yet it has its own irreducible reality which cannot be easily subsumed under the umbrella of 'relationality'.
>
> The idea of recognising the Other, however, is a precondition for human self-understanding. The African proverb 'I am because you are' indicates quite remarkably how a person's self-knowledge or self-understanding is dependent upon the participation of others, without which the self cannot be critically self-aware. Community in this sense is rich and diverse, from the family to the neighbourhood, the nation, the global village and beyond, so the question of linking the consciousness of the self to an ever-expanding network of relationships, eventually leading to the embodiment of Heaven, Earth and the myriad things - this 'one-and-many' dichotomy - is not exclusive. Any given 'one' will have to be able to embrace many others in order to enrich the resources of its inner self. At the same time, we have to find a core that is not reducible to any external conditions. This inner identity, which is unique, together with an openness to a much larger universe, constitutes the continuous relationship between self and community.

[2161] Cecilia Ballesteros, 'La elocuente parálisis de la ONU', *El Pais*, https://elpais.com/internacional/2020-04-08/la-elocuente-paralisis-de-la-onu.html, 9/4/2020 (accessed 11/4/2020).

> As a form of Spiritual Humanism, the Confucian tradition takes the concrete and living person here and now as its point of departure; this person is rooted in the Earth, and understood as part of nature. This involves a deep appreciation of the inner truth or inner resources of the natural world; the concrete person in this world is not at all to be contrasted with Heaven, but in fact embodies the idea of Heaven. 'Nature' on this account is not reducible to any secular humanist definition, but rather imbued with a sense of sacredness. This presupposes that the relationship with the Other as a continuous unfolding of the self embraces not only the human community, but nature and beyond; the transcendent dimension then becomes an important part of human self-understanding.
>
> These four dimensions - I just mentioned the transcendent, but also nature, community and self - intertwine in a functional and structural wholeness. In this sense the self is forever open to the outside world. Learning to be human is to learn for oneself rather than for anything else; such learning involves all aspects of human consciousness and human communication, and is therefore an integral part of a much larger universe. This larger universe - this 'cosmos' - is both 'microcosm' and 'macrocosm'; you can envision the whole process as a series of concentric circles which, especially in the outer realm, is forever open.
>
> This kind of humanism is not secular, but it is necessarily sacred, because it involves not only nature, but also that which actually made nature nature, namely transcendent reality. The interplay between immanence and transcendence is characteristic of this particular way of thinking about human consciousness.[2162]

The question of economic justice, with which this third volume of our trilogy began, is fundamental to Tu's vision of a 'comprehensive and integrated humanism' - or rather, it can be properly answered only when this humanism has been actively and widely established. The list of enemies of such a project is not exhausted by tinpot religious fundamentalists and authoritarian political stuctures in the developing world; *bien pensant* Western intellectuals like John Gray are equally fierce in their opposition:

> The arguments of creationists are [feeble], since they involve concocting a theory of intelligent design to fill gaps in science that the growth of knowledge may one day close. The idea of God is not a pseudo-scientific speculation.
>
> A different and more interesting approach is to argue that theism is suggested by the fact that we experience ourselves as unified, conscious beings – in other words, as having a soul. Not necessarily an immaterial entity, the soul is the part of us that strives to realise what is best in our nature. We do not come to know the soul through any special revelation. We know it by considering the kind of creature we find ourselves to be – a

[2162] These dictated remarks - which I had the honour and pleasure of transcribing the night before - were delivered by Tu at a small birthday symposium in his honour held at UC Berkeley on 26/2/2020.

> thinking being inhabiting a life-world that seems to reflect a mind greater than our own. Once we realise we have a soul, theism becomes a credible way of thinking.
>
> Such is the approach adopted […] by John Cottingham, professor of the philosophy of religion at University of Roehampton. Modestly described as an essay, Cottingham's short study [*In Search of the Soul: A Philosophical Essay*, Princeton University Press, 2020] explores fundamental questions more fully than many much longer volumes. While it fails as an argument for theism, it is forceful and compelling in arguing that the idea of selfhood taken for granted in secular societies makes sense only in the context of a theistic world-view.[2163]

Gray insists on taking the opposite view, hijacking the centuries-long tradition of 'Buddhist philosophy' and inventing a Nietzsche to suit his own nihilistic purposes:

> In *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), Hume had written that the self is "nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed one another with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement". If the self is not an autonomous entity but an assemblage of sensations Kant's theistic faith crumbles into dust. […] Theistic religions are inherently anthropocentric. God is an infinitely enlarged projection of human personality. Yet many religions have understood God as an impersonal world-soul that may spawn souls that resemble human beings, but is itself remote from anything human. […] Older than Christianity and at least as philosophically sophisticated, Buddhism begins by rejecting the concept of the soul. The core Buddhist doctrine of *anatta* (no-self, no-soul) teaches that there is nothing in humans like a continuing identity. Popular Buddhism upheld older ideas of metempsychosis, according to which a soul is reincarnated after death. But in Buddhist philosophy, only a complex psychophysical process continues from death. Wherever it seems to exist, selfhood is an illusion.
>
> The Buddhist view is similar to Hume's: the apparent solidity of the self comes from the extreme rapidity with which one perception follows another. One of the goals of Buddhist meditation is to slow this process, so the practitioner can shed the illusion of selfhood. Some Western mystics have talked of the individual soul merging with a world-soul, but in Buddhism the idea of a world-soul is also rejected. Human salvation involves ridding oneself of any idea of the soul, human or divine. It is hard to think of a view more distant from the central traditions of theism. […] Certainly there are patterns of continuity in memory and behaviour, but these marks of selfhood shift and fade in lives that are long or varied. […] The selfhood that some find throughout their lives is a by-product of stability in society, which rarely lasts for very long. War, revolution and social breakdown regularly overwhelm the sense of being a person with a coherent life-story. A unitary self is a fantasy that can be enjoyed only in peaceful times. […] What liberal

[2163] John Gray, 'The Paradox of an Atheist Soul', https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2020/02/search-soul-john-cottingham-review, 26/2/2020 (accessed 2/3/2020).

> humanists believe to be universal values are relics of particular religious traditions. Here Nietzsche was right. Human values are too changeable, and too divergent, for morality to be in any meaningful sense objective.[2164]

Gray is abolishing the very foundations of human or humane justice here, both criminal and distributive. Echoing the Derridean imperative to forgive others absolutely (on the self-evidently absurd - if technically true - grounds that a self which committed terrible acts yesterday is not the self which is present to answer for them today), Gray prefers 'the silence of animals' - and, one presumes, the red-in-tooth-and-claw laws of their kingdom - to the hard work of calculating and accepting responsibilites over time. The intellectual authority of Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) is cited in defence of Gray's moral abyss:

> The life of Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) was both. He writes in his autobiography that when he looked back he found not a single person but something more like a club whose members changed over time. The solitary, rationalistic and rather puritanical self of Russell's late Victorian youth was not the self that flirted with mysticism as he fell unhappily out of love with his first wife. Nor was it the self that emerged from a spell in prison for pacifist resistance against the First World War, after which his interests shifted from mathematics and logic to politics, and he travelled to Lenin's Russia and war-torn China. Still less was it the self that married three more times and had countless affairs. Reflecting on his life, Russell found no enduring selfhood.
>
> Of course, Russell was exceptional in many ways. But an episodic life featuring a succession of disparate selves captures the experience of many people better than any story of the continuous unfolding of an autonomous individual.[2165]

How appallingly convenient: Gray wants to do more than reform an out-of-control 'Enlightenment mentality' to which we nevertheless owe so much; he wants to throw the whole thing out, and with it, all hope of progress and justice:

> Secular thinkers who cling to the idea of human autonomy have not shaken off theism. Cottingham writes, 'The contrast between the theistically inspired and the post-Enlightenment conceptions of the role of the self could not be more marked.' Actually, the opposite is the case. As Cottingham acknowledges a page later, it was Kant – a lifelong Christian – who asserted the prototypical Enlightenment belief in 'independent human rationality and autonomy'. The belief that human beings are essentially autonomous agents is the theistic myth of the soul reiterated in rationalist terms.[2166]

[2164] Gray, 'The Paradox of an Atheist Soul'.

[2165] Gray, 'The Paradox of an Atheist Soul'.

[2166] Gray, 'The Paradox of an Atheist Soul'.

Tu Weiming's 'comprehensive and integrated humanism' - what he has tried to call 'Spiritual Humanism', though without convincing many that this is the best label for it - is proof that 'learning for the self' need not be rooted in theism. Tu's 'Spiritual Humanism' does not wish, as Gray's careless and terrifying nihilism does, to sever the conversation about human selfhood which the Renaissance and Enlightenment kickstarted in modern times; it wants to extend it by liberating it from ossifying Eurocentric categories and habits of thought. The problem is not an *excess* of the 'myth of selfhood', but a crying *deficit* of the humanistic culture which alone can generate and deepen it; instead of viewing themselves as free individuals with a lifelong sense of moral and professional vocation, modern citizens in a 'neoliberal' economic order (not my favourite term, but a useful enough shorthand) are increasingly reduced to the roles of scientistic, technocratic problem-solvers during their working hours, and consumers constrained only by income during their time off. If years of working on and with Tu Weiming have taught me anything, it is to be wary of anyone invoking a centuries-old spiritual tradition with thousands of twists and turns in it in the name of her own myopic and shallow ideology; Gray's pseudo-Buddhist atheism exhausts the possibilities neither of Buddhism nor of atheism, and in reality takes up only one changelessly boring strand of animal silence on questions of justice, which begin precisely where a concept of a human self as a precious and irreducible core existing not only *over* but *in* and *through* space and time takes root in a culture. Otherwise the question of what I am *owed* today for my labour (and mistakes) yesterday - in short, the 'justice' question - cannot begin to be answered.

Max Weber's Blindness to Dialogue in *Geistige Arbeit als Beruf*

> *Weber delivered 'The Scholar's Work' lecture while writing a sociology of world religions. In 1915, he'd described the project (which was never completed) as a study of five world religions – Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Judaism, Hinduism – as 'systems for the regulation of life'. Each of these religions represented different cultures of calculation and rationalisation.*
>
> *[…] In* The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism *(1905), Weber described the daily disciplines of Benedictine, Jesuit and Cistercian monks as rules for living. […] The Benedictine Rule's division of each day into set periods of* ora *and* labora*, for example, is often counted with the ringing of a bell. The Rule gives form not only to an individual monk's day but also to the community and common projects that could stretch over years and unto death, such as copying manuscripts in the Scriptorium. The work of a monk is not paid by the hour. For the Benedictines, work, like liturgical prayer or leisure, has its own internal goods – for example, the joy of discovering an irreverent image in the margins of a manuscript – and is an act of worship.*
>
> *[…] For Weber, vocation had two meanings: a traditionally religious one, as in a calling from God, and a professional one, as*

> *one's job or employment. Vocation referred to both an individual form of specialisation and a social category of organisation. To fulfil one's calling was to act on an individual belief (that one had, in fact, been called to do and serve something in particular) but also to fit into an extra-individual, specialised and rational organisation of the social world. Weber thought that this distinctly Western conception of vocation emerged as a possible solution to the problem of meaning by tying together the need to earn money and the need to conceive of one's life as a coherent whole. Under capitalism, vocation and work had become the primary forms of discipline for modern life. […] The automation of physical labour [however] has an analogue in the formalisation of intellectual and moral activity: the hardening of habits into mechanicalness. When disciplines and rules become recalcitrant and rigid, reflection on why a given rule or discipline exists at all can become impossible.*[2167]
>
> Chad Wellmon

Max Weber was another overdue date for me; as the godfather of modern sociology, he represented, or so I thought, the scientistic worst as well as the erudite best of German academic culture. But Tu Weiming's twin invitations to dialogical 'charity' and philological 'digging' left a nagging sense of ignorance; the work of Chad Wellmon finally pushed me to go back and read Weber properly for myself. As with Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, I was lucky enough to have chanced on what felt like the right way in at the right time: Weber's two lectures in the *Geistige Arbeit als Beruf* (*Spiritual Work as Vocation*) Public Forum Series, organised by the 'left-liberal'[2168] Freistudentische Bund in Munich in 1919, 'constitute not only the most succinct account of his knowledge, but they also express more clearly than anywhere else in his published material his understanding of his own vocation, his own life'[2169] (the 'commanding central project' of which was 'to understand how it is that "in the West alone there have appeared cultural manifestations that - at least we like to tell ourselves this - in their development go in the direction of universal significance and validity").'[2170] Weber ends up thoroughly undermining his own project (and inadvertently revealing, if not outright ignorance, then at least a tragic failure to imagine the creative possibilities offered by dialogical contact with non-Western cultures), but *how* and *why* he fails is highly instructive, both for its own sake and because of his staggering influence on modern academic and intellectual life.

[2167] Chad Wellmon, 'The Scholar's Vocation', https://aeon.co/essays/weber-diagnosed-the-ills-of-the-modern-university-and-prescribed-the-cure (accessed 9/4/2020).

[2168] David Owen and Tracy B. Strong (eds.), *Max Weber: The Vocation Lectures*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), p. xiii.

[2169] Owen and Strong, *Max Weber: The Vocation Lectures*, p. xii.

[2170] Owen and Strong, *Max Weber: The Vocation Lectures*, p. xii.

These two lectures, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf' ('Science as Vocation') and 'Politik als Beruf' ('Politics as Vocation), are essentially attempts to give 'disenchanted' modern souls reasons to get out of bed in the morning in a post-Nietzschean world. Weber is desperate to keep the idea of a 'calling' alive even when there is no plausible (i.e. Christian) God to issue the call; he does this, Wellmon and Paul Reitter argue, precisely by placing the burden for meaning-creation on mature dialogical selves instead of adolescent receptacles for revelation:

> In order to articulate the paradoxical notion of a true calling in a time when the gods who might issue it have absconded or been drowned out by modernity's rational structures, Weber draws on the analysis of Calvinism that he had presented more than a decade earlier in *The Protestant Ethic* but had continued to return to as part of his wide-ranging studies of world religions in the final decade of his life. […] Ultimately, vocation became an end in itself. One worked not only to earn money but also to be part of something greater than oneself. The division and specialization of labor were not problems to be solved; they were moral solutions for a new reality. To lead a meaningful life in the modern West was to commit to a vocation and be transformed by it. Weber considered scholarship and politics two such vocations. The scholar and politician lived, as he put it, not only "from" their vocation, earning a living from it, but also "for" it. They lived from it psychologically, deriving meaning and value from the role they served in a social world. […] If anything binds humans across space and time, it is, according to Weber, their capacity to create meaning.[2171]

Modern scholars in all fields are confronted with the reality of disciplinary fragmentation and the impossibility of a unifying theory of everything; *responsible* modern research in any field, as George Eliot saw as early as 1871, entails a willingness to outgrow the sad megalomaniacal ambition of Casaubon's Key to All Mythologies and overcome the desire to issue premature prophetic pronouncements about the 'meaning' of said research. As Weber correctly intuited fifty years on from *Middlemarch*, such meaning can only ever be created retrospectively by future generations:

> If before the war he had worried about conservatives aligning scholarship too closely with the state, now, as Germany's political and social order teetered, Weber was just as concerned about professors posing as prophets, trying to shape students' souls in the classroom. Professors who sought to fill a void of meaning from the lectern had found an eager audience in Germany's zealous youth. They denounced disciplinary boundaries and intellectual fragmentation in the name of some lost, or future, harmony and wholeness. In doing so, they were undermining their

[2171] Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon, 'Max Weber Invented the Crisis of the Humanities', https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/20200206-MaxWeber?key=mi0Bff1vaLHL09_no2Emg0FewUdN0KH1_AhcOEVmnMMNAWcx-r70GETtxS3wPsCtNlZXN1NEWVhCbEVrSmM0WGJMZDdES2RDRjI2ODZoNmE1ZnhqMzJsY3hMUQ, 6/2/2020 (accessed 20/2/2020).

> own authority and the legitimacy of the university itself. They were overreaching. What they sought was simply no longer to be had, and had likely never existed. Expert knowledge had dramatically expanded over the course of the previous half century. There were too many disciplinary perspectives and too many competing moral ideals, too much pluralism in too many areas, for any responsible scholar to hold out a hope of integrating them all. Weber was effectively declaring that the mission of the Humboldtian university — to lead people to a higher level of moral consciousness — was no longer viable. So, what was to be done? […] Weber argues that to responsibly lead a life of the mind in the academy, a person had to recognize that universities shouldn't provide more than a limited moral instruction. Nor should they impart ready-made worldviews. The purpose of universities is to advance scholarship and to educate students by pursuing knowledge in an open-ended way. Institutions of higher learning would be "going beyond the boundaries of scholarship if they were to provide not only knowledge and understanding but also beliefs and 'ideals.'" Scholars had to exercise self-restraint. Acting otherwise would violate professional ethics and undermine the legitimacy of academic freedom, and also close off precisely the space students needed to develop the highest intellectual and moral capacities and commitments. […] Paradoxically, a form of moral asceticism was needed to protect the particular moral education that could sustain the scholar's calling within the modern university.[2172]

A common theme in both lectures, however - the problem in politics being only more acute than it is at universities - relates to the importance of the distinction between 'living *from*' and 'living *for*'. University-based scholars who, like career politicians, lack independent financial means and owe their material subsistence to work they would ideally wish to do for its own sake, find themselves caught in a state of affairs which Wellmon and Reitter angrily describe in all its corrupting injustice:

> Weber also offered a vision of scholarship as a meaningful and deeply moral way of life. He sought to combine idealism and realism to preserve the ethical integrity and moral legitimacy of the pursuit of knowledge and truth. Weber repeatedly tells his readers that without a visceral passion for scholarship that scholarship itself cannot entirely account for, it makes little sense for young people to subject themselves to the vagaries — indeed, the horrors — of the conditions of labor in the university. Given the poor pay and arbitrary hiring process, scholarship and intellectual work have to generate "passion" as only a not-entirely-rationalizable belief in an ultimate ideal can in order to make any sense as a profession. Scholarship may be an agent of disenchantment, and re-enchantment may threaten scholarship, but scholarship also requires enchantment, a passion that can't be fully accounted for. […] On the campuses of today's universities, especially in the United States, student activists are making moral demands

[2172] Reitter and Wellmon, 'Max Weber Invented the Crisis of the Humanities'.

> and defending ideals, but mostly outside of the classroom and lecture halls and within a bureaucratic system of moral management. While some scholars try to accommodate them, many more simply work to keep these higher-education factories running on their own adjunct labor. And most presidents at our leading universities muster ceremonial acknowledgments of the institutions' past purposes but spend their days overseeing multibillion-dollar global enterprises. Who but a blessed, tenured few could continue to believe that scholarship is a vocation?[2173]

The idea, or ideal, of a life of dedication to (in this case scholarly) work - not for its instrumental or material benefits to you but as a spiritual discipline and freely offered gift to future generations - does not entail that it is *just* to be underpaid for such work. Indeed, the university is only one site of such alienation, exploitation and possible resistance:

> Weber also understood that disciplinary scholarship as practised in modern universities was one of many possible ways of leading an intellectual life. It was an all-too-common 'vanity', he told the audience, to imagine that the businessman or the artist didn't also engage in their own forms of intellectual work. Like most of Germany's cultured elites who believed in the salvific promises of their educational institutions, the students who invited Weber had misapprehended the scope and significance of intellectual work. Instead of worrying about the future of jobs immediately recognisable as intellectual, they ought to think more broadly about how knowledge is made and meaning is crafted. The sorry state of German universities was part of a much longer history of sinecures, patronages and subsidies – the material conditions of intellectual work and cultural authority.
>
> The most urgent questions concerned the forms for conducting a life and the character, habits and virtues that might sustain them. Intellectual work was spiritual work. Anyone seeking to craft a meaningful life engages in it. It is a task for all those who live in a disenchanted world in which meaning is not something that inheres in the world itself or that a job can simply provide, but rather is something to be asserted and made (and contested) by and among humans themselves. […] Adam and Eve's disenchanted descendants work to produce not just food for their stomachs but also purpose for their souls. Intellectual and spiritual goods are no longer luxuries for an already liberal and unencumbered aristocracy; they are now needs for anyone hoping to realise the promise of freedom and not just suffer its discomfiting effects. Spiritual work is both burdensome and liberating. […] In a disenchanted age, we all, not only the self-christened intellectuals, must go about the work of learning how to live. Whoever continues to look out over the horizon hoping for a prophet or history or reason to bring meaning avoids the work of becoming human.[2174]

[2173] Reitter and Wellmon, 'Max Weber Invented the Crisis of the Humanities'.

[2174] Wellmon, 'The Scholar's Vocation'.

Weber begins 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', however, by lamenting the specific economic injustices suffered by mid-career scholars in contemporary Germany:

> The academic career path here [in Germany] is built in its entirety on plutocratic foundations. For it requires extraordinary bravery from a young and unpropertied scholar to expose herself to the conditions of this ratrace. At the very least, she must be able to endure an indefinite number of years without in any way knowing whether she will one day have the chance to settle into a position which pays her enough.[2175]

The gradual and irresistible 'Americanisation' of German universities promised only to shift the problem; the medieval closed-shop guild system was corrupt in one way - you had to suck up to the right professors - but taking the management of university resources out of professors' hands and turning faculties and departments into 'state-capitalist' enterprises, for all the putative efficiency gains of such reform, only adds a layer of alienation and yes-saying precarity:

> The big medical and scientific research institutes [these days] are 'state-capitalist' undertakings. They cannot be run without an enormous amount of capital. The same thing ends up happening as happens everywhere that capitalist production is instituted: the 'alienation of the worker from the means of production'. The worker, or in this case research assistant, is dependent for her work on equipment and resources provided by the state; she is hence just as dependent on the director of her institute as a factory worker [on her boss]. […] Her position is often just as precarious as any other 'proletarian' existence. […] This development, I am convinced, will go further, and reach areas of the university where, as is the case in a field like mine, the craftsman enjoys access to tools (books basically) as if they were her own possessions, just as the artisans of old did in their workshops. The shift, however [to capitalist modes], proceeds apace. The technocratic advantages are obvious, as they are in all capitalistic and therefore hierarchical operations. But the 'spirit' which reigns in them is quite different from the old atmosphere of the German universities. […] Whether a young lecturer or assistant will ever get into a stable full-time position, let alone assume leadership responsibilities in her institute, is not just a matter of chance, but an inherently risky business.[2176]

The old model may have had the disadvantage of depending on the whims and caprices of individual professors (able to wield power to make or break individual careers), but at least once inside, a stable and comfortable living - not as an end, but as a means or base from which to devote oneself freely to one's own true vocation - was more or less assured. The entire logic of 'state capitalism' in a university context, however, ensures that a scholar's service to external capital - or

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[2175] Max Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', in *Geistige Arbeit als Beruf. Vier Vorträge vor dem Freistudentischen Bund*, München, 1919, http://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/book/view/weber_wissenschaft_1919 (accessed 16/4/2020), p. 3.

[2176] Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', pp. 5-6.

at least the exhausting and time-consuming keeping up of such appearances for the benefit of 'stakeholders' (annual reports, grant applications etc. etc.) - never ends.

Compared to the blood-red injustices of the First World War, such bureaucratic and pecuniary inconveniences are as nothing, but it is the roots of injustice, not its branches or flowers, which interest us here; a model in which professors are finally, after many years of study, paid a decent salary to do what they please, and trusted that they will thereby contribute justly to the common weal, is not the same as a system of investments and returns and 'quality control'. Whether or to what extent PhD graduates - or committed 'professionals' in all fields - are *owed* such trust by society is fundamentally a question of *economic* justice, and is the question we are trying to answer here. Weber, for his part, was stung by a kind of survivor guilt, and by the randomness of his contemporaries' destinies:

> Not only does Lady Luck reign [in university hiring decisions], she does so to an unusually cruel extent. I can think of no other career on Earth where she plays such an inordinate role. I can say this in no small part because I have a series of absolute chance events to thank for the fact that I was called at a very young age into a Professor's chair while peers of mine, who had undoubtedly contributed more, were overlooked. As a result I have a very keen eye for the undeserved destiny of the many who suffered the other edge of Lady Luck's shield and who, for all the efforts of various selection committees, did not end up with the jobs they deserved.[2177]

Not everyone can be recognised as the top expert or most popular teacher in her chosen field, but such scarcity does not apply to one's own sense of vocation, which does not depend not on extrinsic status or reward (as Confucius repeatedly stresses, starting with *Analects* 1:1, 'Isn't it a pleasure to study and practice what you have learned? […] If people do not recognise me and it doesn't bother me, am I not a *noble* man?'). If just payment for academic work turns out to be in any way connected to one's private sense of vocation, or kindling such a vocation in others, research 'impact' and student satisfaction metrics will never capture it:

> Whether one is a good or a bad lecturer is typically answered in terms of the number of students who honour her with their presence. It is demonstrably the case, however, that most students flock to certain teachers for extrinsic and superficial reasons: agreeableness, even just the sound of a particular voice. After decades of experience and sober reflection, I have developed a deep mistrust for this anarchic mercantile model. […] Democracy is a great thing, but only where it belongs. Training for a scientific vocation, as we have understood it in the German university system, entails a concept of striving for spiritual excellence. […] The presentation of complex problems in such a way that an untrained but receptive mind can not only understand them but above all else learn to think about them for herself: this represents the highest bar in pedagogy.

[2177] Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', p. 6.

> Whether an individual clears it cannot be measured by the number of students she has.[2178]

Any academic system which rewards charlatanism or self-promotion over honest and humble commitment to one's vocation is, I submit, inherently unjust; the Confucian ideal of equanimity in the face of economic and social vicissitudes may be worthwhile for its own sake, but this does not mean that unjust outcomes should be simply and stoically tolerated. The problem is that the people most willing to fight and strategise to defend their own interests are those least likely to deserve what they get; meanwhile the very nature of injustice means that even the best will eventually be poisoned by it:

> Every young scholar must ask her own conscience: do you think you can stand, year after year, to watch third-rate hucksters promoted over you without in any way growing bitter and twisted? The first answer is always the same: 'Of course, I live only for my "vocation".' But I have only met a handful of people who can stand it without sustaining one form or other of spiritual injury.[2179]

Weber spends the rest of 'Wissenschaft als Beruf' talking about the 'inner calling' itself of 'science'[2180] - not exactly our subject, but deeply relevant to it:

> In our time the individual researcher's inner relationship with science as a calling is above all defined by the fact that science has entered a phase of unprecedented specialisation and will continue down this path forever. This not only affects institutional structures; it profoundly affects the calling itself. The researcher knows that she can only produce cutting-edge scientific work by ploughing highly specific fields. […] Only thus can she enjoy, perhaps for a single moment in her life and no more, the sense of self-realisation which results from having produced something that will last in the world. A definitive and worthy contribution today can only be a specialised one; anyone incapable of wearing metaphorical blinders and convincing herself that the fate of her soul depends on such arcana - making the right inference at the right time - is no true scientist: she will never enjoy what we might call the 'experience' of science. For without this precious ecstasy, this millennial sense of history and passionate desire to make a contribution to it by getting your next piece of work exactly right, no one can claim a scientific calling. No one can embody true humanism without experiencing such passion.[2181]

We do not get to define *what* the contribution is; future researchers and creators will build on our work in ways we can never hope to imagine. 'Science', moreover, is by

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[2178] Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', pp. 8-9.

[2179] Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', p. 9.

[2180] Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', p. 9.

[2181] Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', pp. 9-10.

no means the only vocation which defines itself in terms of the retrospective value our descendants derive from it; as Weber himself recognises[2182], the mature 'professional' in any field commits to her craft for its own sake, or rather for the sense that she is doing her best to create something of authentic value *now*, with unknown and unknowable results for posterity: 'Dear colleagues! Scientists with "character" are those who serve their work. The same applies in all other fields. There has never been a great artist who served anything other than her own sense of self and vocation.'[2183] Compared to the petty 'impresario'[2184] who wastes time and energy advertising her own uniqueness, the true 'professional' leaves marketing well alone and concentrates instead on the business of creating meaning in her own self - not *for* herself alone, but as a potential gift to the future.

Weber nevertheless makes a fatal distinction between the humanities and the sciences, misunderstanding as he does so the very nature of spiritual transmission:

> For all their common roots, there is something which radically separates [scientific] from humanistic work. Science is oriented towards progress in a way that simply cannot be said of art. […] A true work of art will never be overtaken, and will never grow old; there may be shifting and varied feelings among us about it, but it cannot be rendered obsolete by some other masterpiece. Those of us in the sciences, however, know that what we are doing now will be old-hat in 10, 20 or perhaps 50 years. This is the destiny - nay, the very meaning - of scientific work. […] To be overtaken is not, let me repeat, just our fate, but our purpose. We cannot work without the hope that others will get further than us, in principle endlessly so. And here we come to the problem of meaning in science.[2185]

Art is much more like science, at least in one important way, than Weber deigns to admit here: both the sciences and the humanities, understood as vocations freely undertaken rather than as tasks assigned to slaves, depend in equal measure on simultaneous and mutually reinforcing desires for self-cultivation, on the one hand, and shared meaning (a meaning which we cannot fully control) on the other. True artists and true scientists hence depend equally for their own self-realisation on those who will one day surpass them by creatively transforming their legacy; the fundamental difference between the artist and the hack (or the scientist and the 'impresario') is freedom from the need for 'recognition', whether in the form of direct or indirect *payment* from others. The Confucian *junzi* will - regardless of her chosen vocation - always *hope* that others, thanks partly to her efforts, will one day surpass her, but the hope is sufficient: she offers her effort as an anonymous gift, and does not wish to be compensated for it, or in proportion to its outcomes. 'Justice' for such a person means sufficient payment to devote herself to her calling in the first place, not payment for services rendered in the throes of the calling itself: 'How does the scientist explain her own vocation to herself? She claims that she conducts her

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[2182] See Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', pp. 10-12.

[2183] Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', p. 13.

[2184] Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', p. 13.

[2185] Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', p. 14.

research "for its own sake", not only because people might make money from related innovations, feed themselves better, dress themselves better, light their streets or improve their forms of government.'[2186] But what exactly *is* so intrinsically meaningful, Weber asks, about creations with short half-lives confined in perpetually isolated laboratories?[2187] Here the famous Weberian 'disenchantment' thesis concerning life in the shadow of modern science makes its scheduled appearance: those riding the tram may not know exactly what makes it go, but they trust that there are human beings somewhere who do - it is not some magic phenomenon.[2188] The old monotheistic idea that science might provide a 'path to God' in one form or other (traceable from the Greeks and Neoplatonists down through the Renaissance and Enlightenment) is fully and finally exploded by the likes of Nietzsche and Tolstoy in the late 19th Century; no amount of science could ever provide direct help with fundamental ethical questions, which are puzzles of meaning, not knowledge.[2189] Moreover, in a world in which scientific predictions of everyday phenomena - from viruses to earthquakes and comets - are increasingly reliable, the dream of a Truman Show-style escape route from the disenchanted physical universe to union with a still-enchanted God grows more and more remote; if, however, the way to such a God remains open via art and the heart - self-cultivation - rather than physics (or metaphysics), then what does such a 'spiritual turn' entail for scientists? If our need (or greed) for technology does not exhaust the meaning of science, what might be left?

> All natural sciences tell us what we should do if we want technical mastery over life, but whether we should seek such mastery, whether such progress is inherently meaningful - all this is left to one side, or simply assumed. Even a discipline like cultural studies […] does not ask whether the realm of art as a whole is not some diabolical illusion, a kingdom of this world, heretical to its core and, with its inherently aristocratic barriers to entry, hostile to human solidarity. It does not ask, in other words, whether there should even *be* works of art.[2190]

The same reluctance to address fundamental questions of meaning applies to law, history and other university disciplines[2191]: such profoundly political questions of meaning should *not*, Weber vehemently stresses, be addressed by professors in front of captive audiences:

> If you go and talk about democracy in a people's assembly, no one will object to your expression of a personal opinion there: indeed, making your position clear and attractive is the whole point. The words employed are not

[2186] Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', p. 15.

[2187] See Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', p. 15.

[2188] See Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', pp. 15-16.

[2189] See Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', pp. 18-21.

[2190] Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', pp. 22-23.

[2191] Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', p. 23.

> means of scholarly analysis, but political advertising designed to win support from others - not catalysts for contemplation, but weapons of attack or defence. In a lecture hall, however, it is a crime to use language in this way. […] The true university lecturer […] will be extremely careful to avoid [doing this], whether by direct incitement or indirect suggestion, for it is dishonest to impose such views under the guise of 'letting the facts speak for themselves'. […] Of course, no one can scientifically demonstrate what a lecturer's duties are. But a certain intellectual honesty is not too much to ask. […] Neither the prophet nor the demagogue belongs at the university lectern. They need to be asked to go out and try to convince the public in the streets, or in other words where criticism is possible. In the lecture hall, where one enjoys authority over one's audience, students are forced to keep their mouths shut and let the boss talk. I think it is irresponsible to use the fact that students depend on you for their academic progress […] to stamp your political views all over the specialist experience and knowledge that it is your sole job to impart.[2192]

Weber's distinction between 'establishing the facts, mathematical or logical conclusions or the inner structure of cultural objects on the one hand, and the question of the value of culture in general and specific objects of culture in particular'[2193] has not, I submit, aged well: if he was not wrong to be wary of the risks of demagogy in early-20th-century Germany, the solution he helped to inspire - namely, driving the humanities out 'into the streets' and turning the university into a giant technocratic information-delivery system - has patently not worked either. While Weber agrees that 'any worthy teacher will teach her students to recognise inconvenient truths (inconvenient, that is, for her existing worldview)'[2194], he is unable to understand that even though there is no way *scientifically* to prove the superiority of German over French culture, for example[2195], their dialogue with each other can still be more than a zero-sum 'perennial wrestling match among hostile gods'[2196]. Instead of accepting the premise that love can be productive of insight and beauty (in oneself and others), Weber prefers a rock-hard distinction between the 'Tatsachen' (facts) of science and the 'Parteimeinungen' (biased opinions) of propaganda; young people should be supplied with the facts and left alone to choose their own passions:

> The professor who, enjoying the trust of the young, feels called to offer spiritual advice to them, […] to the extent that such spiritual consultancy entails intervention in political struggles over worldviews, ought to do it out in the marketplace of life - the press, town hall meetings, clubs, wherever. It

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[2192] Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', pp. 24-25.

[2193] Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', p. 24.

[2194] Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', p. 26.

[2195] See Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', p. 27.

[2196] Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', p. 27.

> is shameful for her to parade her colours in a university setting where those present are essentially a captive audience.[2197]

Weber's antitotalitarian impulses are noble, but such inhuman fact-value distinctions are a totalitarian trap of their own: the antidote to bad politics is better politics, not refuge in the faux 'vocation' of a despiritualised and depoliticised 'science'; the fact that each individual must embody her vocation in her own authentic way if it is to count as such does not preclude reflection and discussion of what that vocation might be. Weber, however, is adamant that 'life understood on its own terms [… is] an eternal struggle of [different] gods with each other'[2198], and that the corresponding 'fundamental incompatibility' of different worldviews 'forces us to choose between them': 'Whether under such conditions science can be a worthy "vocation" for someone […] is another value judgment which should not be discussed in a lecture hall.'[2199]

It should not be underestimated just how far Weber's opposition to 'demagogy' and 'propaganda' runs here: he is in fact utterly dismissing the possibility of dialogue in a humanistic or spiritual sense. The 'disenchantment of the world' leaves modern man only three options: retreat into mountain-top hermit mysticism; frail comfort in close family relations; or a 'manly' Nietzschean embrace of the 'death of God', which amounts to the same thing as a proud rejection of any 'comprehensive and integrated humanism' in favour of the lonely relativistic freedoms of disenchantment.[2200] Weber could not be clearer in his own endorsements: 'Prophecy from the university lectern may produce fanatical sects, but it will never produce a true community. Whoever cannot face the destiny of our time as a man should be told to run back, in silence, […] to the pitifully outstretched arms of the old churches.'[2201]

Weber's view of the humanities as a zero-sum game becomes even clearer in his second lecture, 'Politik als Beruf': politics is essentially a Nietzschean struggle for power, and nothing besides. The freedom for 'spiritual work' and a 'sense of vocation' independent of material reward (the 'nobility' celebrated in *Analects* 1:1) is not even envisaged by Weber as a live possibility. Fearing the *abuse* of power (not least by 'scientists' in lecture halls), Weber understands 'politics' in general as a sphere of brute struggle for control; 'mutual spiritual influence' and 'dialogue' are illusory, propagandistic means in this eternal war, not real ends in themselves. The 'vocation' of politics is hence defined by Weber as service to a 'modern state' which is

> sociologically rooted […] in physical violence. 'Every state is founded on violence,' Trotsky said at Brest-Litovsk. This is in fact quite right. [… The state] is regarded as the sole source of the 'right' to violence. 'Politics' for us

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[2197] Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', p. 30.

[2198] Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', p. 32.

[2199] Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', p. 32.

[2200] See Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', p. 36.

[2201] Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', p. 36.

> therefore means: the striving for power or influence over the distribution of powers, whether between states or among the [interest] groups which compose a single state.[2202]

What sort of spiritual calling could one have to 'politics' so ruthlessly defined? Having dismissed *a priori*, as an irrelevant illusion, the autonomous sphere of 'noble' self-cultivation characterised by a certain equanimity towards social status, and eschewing a prior commitment to one's own learning over the external trappings of power, Weber henceforth abolishes humanistic dialogue and the corresponding possibility of shared meaning, leaving human beings to struggle forever in an 'animal' world of wolves and sheep:

> Whoever engages in politics strives for power - either as a means in the service of other goals - or power for its own sake (namely to enjoy the feeling of prestige it offers). The [modern] state, as with the [tribal] forms of social organisation which preceded it in human history, is founded on the violence […] which defends dominance hierarchies, leaving some people to lord it over others.[2203]

Weber spends most of 'Politik als Beruf' - and it is nearly twice as long as 'Politik als Wissenschaft' - tracing the history of modern Western political institutions and distinguishing between 'career politicians' - those dependent on politics for their income - and those able to use their existing wealth to buy political influence. It is for historians and sociologists to evaluate the veracity of Weber's narrative; 'Politik als Beruf' interests us, however, because it isolates the central fact we have been labouring for several hundred pages: those who do not have an independent source of wealth are, under current political arrangements everywhere, beholden to those who do, and are demonstrably less free to engage in 'spiritual work' than the masters who decide the size of their paychecks. The 'heroism' of those starving artists who, like Confucius, Jesus and other 'noble' spiritual exemplars in all civilisations, brave the risks of dissidence, preferring an authentic, dialogical humanism and true vocation to the rewards of self-promotion and 'selling out', may be exceptional and praiseworthy, but the outcomes of such supererogation - in Jesus's case, the cross - cannot be said to be *just*. Weber, however, wants the 'politician' of the future to be a different kind of 'hero' altogether: namely, one who has seen through to the reality of politics as raw power and who, like Nietzsche's Superman, can affirm her 'disenchanted' vocation anyway:

> Politics means a slow and steady drilling of hard boards with an equal measure of passion and control. It is quite true, as all our historical experience confirms, that one must aim for the impossible if one is to end up with a halfway decent compromise. Those who can do so are leaders, but they are also - in the strict sense of the term - heroes. […] Only those

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[2202] Max Weber, 'Politik als Beruf', in *Geistige Arbeit als Beruf. Vier Vorträge vor dem Freistudentischen Bund*, München, 1919, http://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/book/view/weber_politik_1919?p=1 (accessed 21/4/2020), pp. 3-4.

[2203] Weber, 'Politik als Beruf', p. 5.

> who are sure that they will not break when the world reveals itself to be too stupid or too vulgar for what they have to offer […] can be said to have a 'calling' for politics.[2204]

This looks like 'noble' Confucian indifference to the superficial 'recognition' of others and a preference for real humanistic dialogue with them, until one remembers that Weber's view of modernity as a disenchanted desert of power precludes it; the 'heroism' in question is that which affirms, with Nietzschean spiritual independence and 'manly' gusto, the worst and most meaningless of all possible worlds: namely, the one in which 'the world is will to power, and nothing besides'. Four years of horrific trench warfare were surely enough to drive Weber's generation to philosophical extremes; luckily our own horizons have been broadened by a century of history and globalisation. Weber ultimately has nothing to say to us about 'spiritual humanism' in the dialogical sense intended by Tu Weiming, because he denies the existence of the problem - or rather, he insists that the only solution is gritting our teeth and accepting the phony 'freedom' offered by existentialism at its lonely worst. There is no 'justice' in such a philosophy, only the will of the stronger; this passed for wisdom in a world ruled, as Weber's still largely was, by outmoded totalitarian religious dogma, but the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and its totalitarian *anti*-religious dogma - not to mention the excesses of poststructuralism and postmodernism at the end of the last century in Western academic circles - have finally helped to prepare the ground for new modes of thinking about 'spiritual work as a vocation' in our own.

Martha Nussbaum and the Limits of the Capability Approach

No justice without us.

WWE Authentic Wrestling Apparel

There could be no lower-brow cultural reference in human history than the fake, scripted 21st-century gladiators promoted by World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. Justice itself is here ruthlessly commodified; and yet the sentiment of the slogan holds us with its purity and power. The Confucian sense of a less than omnipotent Heaven - one which somehow depends on our own self-cultivation and moral effort for its completion, in ways only ever vaguely and fleetingly apprehended by us - survives the 'disenchantment' of Weberian modernity by outflanking the Protestant theology which drove the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution before losing its aura, first under the spell of the 19th-century 'masters of suspicion' (Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud) and then decisively in two world wars: no just and omnipotent God could sanction such carnage, so we must share at least some of the responsibility.

[2204] Weber, 'Politik als Beruf', pp. 66-67.

If Tu Weiming sought to get beyond the worst of the 'Enlightenment mentality' - the disenchanted materialism and imperialism - by recovering the Confucian classics in dialogue with the world, Martha Nussbaum has tried to do something similar (including calls for a 'Second Enlightenment') by going back to the Greco-Roman roots of Western civilisation. The patent injustice of the Protestant doctrine of predestination, for all its industrial externalities, has effectively prevented citizens of modern capitalist societies - or at least Western ones - from grasping the true nature of justice, which was better understood by Greek dramatists than any Calvinist businessman:

> Aeschylus's moral is that a political community must abandon the obsessive pursuit of revenge and adopt an idea of justice that is both law-governed and welfare-oriented, focusing not on hunting one's prey but on deterring bad behavior and producing prosperity. For Euripides, however, moral trauma can cause the collapse of trust and the other-regarding virtues, producing a revenge-obsessed parody of real justice. Euripides's grim drama is part of a long tradition of reflection, in the Greco-Roman world, about the damage that events beyond people's own control can do to them as they aim to lead a flourishing human life. […] Just having the virtues inside, as Aristotle and others stress, is not enough, if one is radically cut off from acting. But *Hecuba* suggests a more radical conclusion: such events can also corrode the virtues themselves, producing moral damage of a long-standing sort. The first sort of damage can be reversed: an exiled person can be restored to citizenship, the friendless can acquire new friends. But Hecuba's damage lies deeper, in longstanding patterns of action and aspiration that form part of her character. Particularly vulnerable are the relational virtues, patterns of friendship and trust. Bad treatment at the hands of others—experiencing a violation of trust—can make people worse.[2205]

Nussbaum's recent work, most notably *The Cosmopolitan Tradition: A Noble but Flawed Ideal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), focuses on the economic dimension of this problem: 'penury' remains a chief source of distortion even in our time of (pandemic notwithstanding) unprecedented economic development. Stuart Whatley's brilliant review of *The Cosmopolitan Tradition* highlights the Stoic roots of neoliberalism's worst pathologies:

> The cosmopolitan tradition has its roots in the fourth century BCE, when Diogenes the Cynic declared himself a "citizen of the world" (kosmopolitês), and insisted on the dignity of all people, no matter their origin or rank. His example would go on to inform Greek and Roman Stoicism, conceptions of international and natural law and human rights, and much else in Western political philosophy. Yet as Nussbaum shows, cosmopolitanism, owing to its origins, has always been vulnerable to a critique from within. 'Precisely because they are so determined to insist that the basis for moral duties is

[2205] Martha Nussbaum, 'The Weakness of the Furies', https://bostonreview.net/philosophy-religion/martha-c-nussbaum-weakness-furies, 19/2/2020 (accessed 20/2/2020).

> never effaced by life's contingencies and hierarchies,' she writes, many exponents of cosmopolitanism refuse to acknowledge the extent to which penury can limit one's capacity to exercise individual agency, moral or otherwise. As a result, to this day, cosmopolitanism—be it in the form of trade and capital market liberalization, the contemporary human-rights regime, or liberal internationalism—tends to make insufficient provision for the amelioration of poverty, inequality, malnutrition, and other socioeconomic deficiencies. […] Nowadays, the Ciceronian distinction between duties is manifested in the difference between "first-generation" religious and political rights and "second-generation" economic and social rights. But Nussbaum sees this bifurcation as incoherent. If one has a duty to prevent aggressive war, torture, rape, and other crimes, one likewise ought to prevent hunger and poverty. And besides, upholding political justice costs as much money as, and usually more than, providing material aid does. Inasmuch as one accepts the universality of human dignity, one must acknowledge all assaults upon it, whatever form they take.
>
> […] As for Grotius, she credits the seventeenth-century legal theorist with bringing Stoic cosmopolitan thinking into a modern world defined by diverse models of human and economic development and competing conceptions of the good. Grotius assigned significant moral weight to the nation-state, but also made an argument for international redistribution that remains radical to this day. In a Grotian system, Nussbaum explains, there are 'certain minimum welfare rights for all world citizens, even when the wherewithal to meet those needs must come from another nation's store.'
>
> But how such claims are to be determined and adjudicated remains unresolved. Nussbaum's intent is not to argue for a world government; nor does she put much store in the modern system of foreign aid. Rather, her purpose is to determine whether cosmopolitanism can be made sufficient for a world in which it has already become necessary—that is, a world of nation-states comprising individuals on deeply unequal material footings, who are nonetheless more interconnected than ever.
>
> Nussbaum concludes that the cosmopolitan tradition 'must be revised but need not be rejected.' She proposes that it be replaced by her own version of the 'Capability Approach' to development.[2206]

The problem for Nussbaum is that, just as Christian theology at its humane and dialogical best was perverted by certain strains of Puritanical zealotry, so too has Stoicism been coopted by forces which eat away at the heart of the Stoic creed at its best, as understood by Seneca, namely as a spiritual humanism which, like Tu's Confucianism, preaches not *indifference* to money, but an understanding of money as a vital *means* to self-cultivation and virtue, not an end in itself:

> 'Insisting that all entitlements have an economic and social aspect,' as [Nussbaum] characterizes her stance, implies some role for economic redistribution. The leading Stoics in the cosmopolitan tradition, however,

[2206] Stuart Whatley, 'After Cosmopolitanism', https://hedgehogreview.com/issues/monsters/articles/after-cosmopolitanism, Spring 2020 (accessed 4/4/2020).

> seemed to oppose redistribution and, in many cases, even taxation. 'Concord,' wrote Cicero, 'cannot exist when money is taken from some and bestowed upon others.' Likewise, as Seneca wrote in his essay *On the Happy Life*, 'The wise man…does not love wealth but he would rather have it...and what wealth is his he does not reject but keeps, wishing it to supply greater scope for him to practice his virtue.'
>
> No less instrumental to a market-oriented outlook is the Stoic view that material needs are irrelevant to the realization of human fulfillment. More to the point, this contention is inextricably bound up with cosmopolitanism's conception of natural equality, because membership in the Stoic 'polity of the cosmos' depends on the one thing we humans share regardless of wealth or status—the capacity for moral reasoning. Precisely because the existence of this common denominator is deduced by stripping away all 'external' variables, any consideration of material means would call it into question.
>
> Stoic advice for conquering the 'passions' and, as Marcus Aurelius put it, approaching 'each action as though it were your last', have long had a practical appeal, which is why Stoicism has been ransacked by corporate consultants and self-help gurus in recent years. But more broadly, Stoic thinking can easily become an alibi for iniquitous socioeconomic arrangements. After all, if true freedom is exclusively available within the self—through mastery of the passions and acceptance of the whims of Fortune—then it is consonant with the natural outcome of 'free markets'.
>
> For the same reason, Stoic cosmopolitanism has long served as the basis for a particularly business-friendly conception of natural law. […] As Yale historian Samuel Moyn has argued, the modern framework for determining duties of justice—the human-rights regime—has 'contributed little of note' with respect to social and economic rights precisely because it refuses to challenge 'the neoliberal giant whose path goes unaltered and unresisted'. Nussbaum's approach could pose such a challenge by rejecting the idea of 'negative liberty' and insisting on an affirmative role for government in securing both first- and second-generation rights for all people.[2207]

The Capability Approach to human development pioneered by Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, however, focuses not on the question of economic *justice*, but rather on improving the fortunes of the greatest possible number on a scale resembling Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Ruskin's question, namely what a person's work is *worth*, is not asked; instead of measuring (and seeking to grow) Gross Domestic Product, the Capability Approach measures happiness by proxy (via Nussbaum's ten 'core capabilities') in the hope of increasing it.

A 'comprehensive and integrated humanism', meanwhile, seeks more than this; Ruskin, for example, goes further than Marx, Adam Smith or even Nussbaum in fixing on an individual's sense of vocation - not the labour theory of value or the invisible hand or the Capability Approach - as the root of justice:

[2207] Whatley, 'After Cosmopolitanism'.

> ‘Nay, but I choose my physician, and my clergyman, thus indicating my sense of the quality of their work.’ By all means also, choose your bricklayer; that is the proper reward of the good workman, to be ‘chosen’. The natural and right system respecting all labor is, that it should be paid at a fixed rate, but the good workmen employed, and the bad workmen unemployed. The false, unnatural, and destructive system is when the bad workman is allowed to offer his work at half price, and either take the place of the good, or force him by his competition to work for an inadequate sum.[2208]

It is worth pausing to stress just how unfashionable and revolutionary this is: whereas Robert Nozick’s ‘Wilt Chamberlain argument’ for libertarianism seeks to legitimise virtually all ‘capitalist acts between consenting adults’ - if I am willing to pay extra to watch a superstar like Wilt Chamberlain play basketball, and if he is willing to appear for such a sum, the resulting distribution (my money in Wilt Chamberlain’s pocket) is a just one - Ruskin’s starting-point is that Wilt Chamberlain should be paid the same out of the common stockpile as every other basketballer (and perhaps every other ‘professional’ sportsman) on the grounds that his commitment to his vocation is its own reward: he should be happy to be ‘chosen’ by fans, but just remuneration in a society of individuals each freely committed to her own vocation would follow a bureaucratic or military model, not a mercenary or mercantile one. Market mechanisms and exchanges may be preferred in the *allocation of resources*, and Capability Approaches may be a better shorthand for measuring true macroeconomic progress than GDP, but the central question of economics - and of economic justice - is not how much a person should be paid, but the extent to which her income allows her freely to pursue her vocation. This depends not only on her own efforts, but also on the state of the society in which she finds herself: one may argue that a society which cannot afford the luxury of basketball will not offer any opportunities to aspiring basketballers, but then again, our individual sense of vocation, to the extent that it is always rooted in the space and time of our own educations, reflects the needs of the society into which we are born, and to which we are organically connected. Mutual trust that each of us, if given the chance to cultivate ourselves via humanistic education, will choose vocations which make sense in our specific cosmic contexts, is necessary and sufficient for a free, equal and fraternal society; Nussbaum is absolutely right to highlight the ways in which such trust can be corroded by the wrong experiences - her 2013 classic *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*, and indeed her entire career, can be read as an extended argument for (and paean to) the humanities - but the question of a truly humanistic economics cannot be answered without understanding what a vocation is, and the (for want of a better word) *spiritual* dialogue from which it emerges and evolves over the course of our lives of ongoing self-cultivation. The instrumental orientation of the Capability Approach, while a clear improvement on the even cruder instrumental logic of Gross Domestic Product, starts from what people in general seem to need (Nussbaum’s ten core capabilities), not what *I* am specifically and justly owed in advance of my own engagement for my freely chosen cause. To answer ‘nothing’ is to force people

[2208] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, p.20.

without inheritances to turn themselves into commodities, such that the lived authenticity and freedom of vocation is placed under a permanent shroud of compromise and doubt. Even Nussbaum herself, as a speaker on the celebrity circuit, can charge thousands of dollars in appearance fees to talk about global justice - a laughably unjust and frankly diabolical state of affairs. The discretion afforded by excess wealth - an overpaid celebrity can start a foundation or finance scholarships if she likes, but she need not do so - creates systems of sub-optimal spiritual dependency, hoops through which it might be merely advantageous rather than intrinsically meaningful to jump. A Universal Basic Income is hence the logical endpoint of Ruskin's conception of economic justice: if good and bad bricklayers should all be paid the same for their services, then the just price for such services can only be set in advance, and somehow built into a military-style scale of salary payments. The good bricklayer, if she is bricklaying as a vocation and not merely as a means of physical survival, will content herself with the pleasure of being chosen, and need not be paid extra; the bad bricklayer - again to the extent that she is bricklaying as a vocation, not just as a money-making means to make ends meet - will be miserable enough at not having been chosen, and will not need the extra punishment of watching his bricklaying neighbour - the Wilt Chamberlain of bricklaying, let us say - getting rich as an extra insult. A moment's pause for reflection will suffice to realise that no country in the world is anywhere near such a state of personal 'nobility', vocational focus and economic and social justice; the perverse incentives of 21st-century 'neoliberalism' preclude such magnanimity - one eye, and usually two, must be on 'what's in it for me'.

Ruskin firmly did *not* believe in forced equality of outcomes - his 'military' economic model, as outlined in Chapter 1, assumes that there will be 'ranks' in society, and that these strata will be paid differently. The problem of unemployment, in such a model, looms as spiritual rather than economic, or rather: if a spiritual humanist economics allows everyone an equal chance freely to pursue her own sense of vocation, then the unemployed person need not fear starvation or ostracism, only a lack of the 'recognition' to which the true *junzi* or 'noble person' is indifferent anyway. The *junzi* does not seek poverty - as with Nussbaum's beloved Seneca, she prefers wealth, *ceteris paribus* - but she accepts poverty if justice requires it; a just society, however, within the means available to it, will prevent her from having to do so.

Figuring out how people might be 'promoted' through the ranks of Ruskin's 'military' economic hierarchy - whether automatically by age, or contingent on some sort of externally measurable achievement - is the central problem for such an economics; there is no way, however, of measuring a person's degree of self-cultivation or loyalty to her own sense of vocation, and even if there were, to make such a metric the determinant of salary would not only be perverse (a sort of 'bonus for proving you love your job'); above all it would be to miss the point of what economic justice is and why it matters: not to *reward* people for pursuing their own vocations, but to *allow* them to do so. An anecdote from my own school days will illustrate the problem. As I was graduating from high school I briefly considered medicine as a career option. I was lucky enough to have the grades; a routine interview would have been enough to get me into Auckland Medical School. One of the reasons I chose not to pursue this route was precisely because it would have been too easy to do so - a sort of guaranteed path to the kind of cheap 'recognition'

to which the true *junzi* is supposed to be impervious. Doctors are well paid and well respected in New Zealand society, and the restricted numbers accepted to medical school ensure that demand for doctors remains strong and salaries correspondingly high. Secondary school teachers, by contrast, are underpaid and overburdened with the sort of bureaucracy for which no one could have a true vocation. Neither of these career paths, then, seemed open to me, though not because I did not feel that I could have realised my highest self in either medicine or high school teaching; I was perhaps afraid of being lured by the trap of 'recognition' in the one case, and of being buried in bills to pay and boxes to tick in the other. The humanities degrees I took instead, the languages I learned, and the experiences I accumulated felt like the most authentic fulfilment of a 'learning for the self' which began at high school, if not earlier, in the specific circumstances I faced as I entered the adult world in Auckland, New Zealand at the end of 1999. But the point is that this sense of 'learning for myself' could easily have manifested as a vocation for medicine or secondary education if the economics of my choice had been different; realising that there was a global shortage of doctors, I felt it made more sense to pursue the humanities - and try to reform the social system which leads to a global shortage of doctors - than to devote myself - one mind - to medicine. The key point is that medicine, by its very nature as an altruistic pursuit and an organic part of any human community, is not something that healthy young people will need the extra motivation of money to pursue; on the contrary, the wrong kind of people will be attracted to medicine if it is overremunerated. For the true doctor it is enough to know that there will always be enough money coming in to allow her to raise her family and carry on being the best doctor she can be. We are not accustomed to thinking of overpaid professions as economic problems, but to the extent that economics is a humanistic or 'spiritual' discipline, that is exactly what they are, just as much as the underpaid ones.

Nussbaum's Capability Approach measures the extent to which a person's paycheck - received at the end of the month for services rendered in a market economy - allows her to enhance her ten 'core capabilities'; a spiritual humanist economics, by contrast, pays people at the start of the month, or in advance of their actual economic activity, on trust that they will, to the extent they are able, be true and useful to themselves, and by extension true and useful to the cosmos around them. This is a Copernican shift in economic thinking: intellectual property would be abolished in favour of the more meaningful financial dividend - more psychologically comforting, if less numerically stable - of membership of a just society. Such justice can only be rooted in an ongoing and individuated freedom to define our own spiritual callings, not in outdated materialist notions of either blanket equality or pitiless commodification.

Towards a 21st-Century Left-Liberal International?

> *One of* Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s most memorable, and least pessimistic scenes, finds Winston staring out of the window of the love nest he shares with Julia above Mr Charrington's antiques shop and watching the prole woman singing as she hangs out the*

> *laundry. Inspired with a feeling of 'mystical reverence' that is somehow mixed up with the pale, cloudless sky that stretches away over her head, Winston reflects that:*
>
> > *It was curious to think that the sky was the same for everybody, in Eurasia or Eastasia as well as here. And the people under the sky were also very much the same — everywhere, all over the world, hundreds and thousands and millions of people just like this, people ignorant of one another's existence, held apart by walls of hatred and lies, and yet almost exactly the same — people who had never learned to think but were storing up in their hearts and bellies and muscles the power that would one day overturn the world.*[2209]
>
> D.J. Taylor, citing George Orwell

Along with Camus in France, Orwell is perhaps the most enduring warts-and-all hero of the mid-20th-century antitotalitarian left; the iconic milestones of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* were nevertheless preceded by such forensic studies of poverty as *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) and, most alarmingly for our purposes, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933):

> People seem to think that there is some essential difference between beggars and ordinary 'working' men. They are a race apart - outcasts, like criminals and prostitutes. Working men 'work', beggars do not 'work'; they are parasites, worthless in their very nature. It is taken for granted that a beggar does not 'earn' his living, as a bricklayer or a literary critic 'earns' his. He is a mere social excrescence, tolerated because we live in a humane age, but essentially despicable.
>
> Yet if one looks closely one sees that there is no *essential* difference between a beggar's livelihood and that of numberless respectable people. Beggars do not work, it is said; but, then, what is *work*? A navvy works by swinging a pick. An accountant works by adding up figures. A beggar works by standing out of doors in all weathers and getting varicose veins, bronchitis, etc. It is a trade like any other; quite useless of course - but, then, many reputable trades are quite useless. And as a social type a beggar compares well with scores of others. He is honest compared with the sellers of most patent medicines, high-minded compared with a Sunday newspaper proprietor, amiable compared with a hire-purchase tout - in short, a parasite, but a fairly harmless parasite.
>
> […] Then the question arises, Why are beggars despised? - for they are despised, universally. I believe it is for the simple reason that they fail to earn a decent living. In practice nobody cares whether work is useful or

[2209] D.J. Taylor, 'Brief Encounters and Romps in the Park', https://thecritic.co.uk/issues/march-2020/brief-encounters-and-romps-in-the-park/ (accessed 8/4/2020).

> useless, productive or parasitic; the sole thing demanded is that it shall be profitable. In all the modern talk about energy, efficiency, social service and the rest of it, what meaning is there except 'Get money, get it legally, and get a lot of it'? Money has become the grand test of virtue. By this test beggars fail, and for this they are despised. If one could earn even ten pounds a week at begging, it would become a respectable profession immediately. A beggar, looked at realistically, is simply a business man, getting his living, like other business men, in the way that comes to hand. He has not, more than most modern people, sold his honour; he has merely made the mistake of choosing a trade at which it is impossible to grow rich.[2210]

The truly 'Orwellian' dystopia, it turns out, is the one where it doesn't even matter what one does, as long as it pays; in such a society, a humanistic, dialogical sense of vocation has no chance of survival. Poverty is not the only enemy of 'justice' on this definition, but it is certainly one of them; another is the idea that such 'spiritual humanism' is not scientifically possible for human beings. Darwinian biology, for one, has yet to shake off its old Social Darwinist stereotypes; as Win McCormack argues, the role of group selection in the evolution of morality and religion - the idea that we might be wired for more than filling our own bellies (even as Orwell admits that 'a man who has gone even a week on bread and margarine is not a man any longer, only a belly with a few accessory organs'[2211]) - has not yet been properly digested by the Left:

> The revolutionary theory of group selection is one of those ideas that, once it has been broached, seems obvious, and makes you wonder why it wasn't more apparent all along. But what is the Left to do with this new twist on Darwinian thought, which posits both selfish and altruistic sides to human nature, equally potent, and often, inevitably, in conflict?[2212]

The humanistic education trumpeted in various forms by the Axial Age civilisations as a means of resolving or transcending such conflicts, however, threatens to run aground in the shallow waters of 'neoliberal' postmodernity; even the novel, the modern art form *par excellence*, faces an existential crisis in the age of Amazon, as John Waters describes:

> Most of all, the novel grew into a great art form because it promised something more than detailed stories of modern selves. [… The great 19th-century novels] were describing, with increasing urgency, what seemed the crisis of those modern selves. And at their highest and most serious level, they were offering solutions to the crisis. […] The novel as an art form

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[2210] George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, (published in Japan through Messrs. Charles E. Tuttle Co., Ltd, 1986 (1933), pp. 252-254.

[2211] Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, p. 20.

[2212] Win McCormack, 'Turning Left at Darwin: In Search of Civic Evolution', https://newrepublic.com/article/156393/turning-left-darwin, 14/2/2020 (accessed 18/2/2020).

aimed at re-enchantment. It hungered to find or create with its stories a kind of glow to the objects of the world, a thickness of essential meaning in realities that had been rendered down to nothing more than thin existence by the modern world's turn to technological science, bureaucratic government, and commercial economics.

If the natural world is imagined by modernity as empty of purpose, then the hunt for nature's importance is *supernatural,* by definition. If the physical order is defined by its sheer scientifically measured presence, […] then the search for meaning in the physical order is necessarily *metaphysical*. And if the secular realm is understood as merely arbitrary social arrangements enforced by the powerful, then the attempt to uncover social value must prove to be religious.

But novels no longer feel like they are practical devices for addressing an era in which metaphysics have lost their traction. 'The decline of the novel's prestige reflects and confirms...a new crisis born of the culture's increasing failure of intellectual nerve and terminal doubt about its own progress.' As modernity marched on, 'the thick inner world of the self increasingly came to seem ill-matched with the impoverished outer world, stripped of all the old enchantment that had made exterior objects seem meaningful and important. […] This is what we mean by *the crisis of the self*: Why does anything matter, what could be important, if meaning is invented, coming *from* the self rather than *to* the self?"

[…] The art of writing, too, has undergone a metamorphosis. Once a way to engage with reality, it has become primarily a status-seeking activity. The idea of 'being a writer' nowadays seems more important than learning a craft, perfecting a talent, or honing a worldview. The wannabe writer now offers himself to the ideological architects of the media and academe, providing fodder for their deterministic interventions in a discourse increasingly more about remaking the world than investigating it.

[…] In sum, in abolishing God, man obscured mystery, including the mystery of himself. Marooned in his self-created world-without-wonder, hunchbacked by the low ceilings he had installed above his own head, he became more convinced of his growing intelligence, until his imagination shrank and dried up.[2213]

Emergency exits from this crisis of the Western humanities offered by non-Western additions to the canon - the Salman Rushdies, Naguib Mahfouzes and Orhan Pamuks of World Literature survey course fame - may be dismissed by some leftist intellectuals as distractions from deeper structural problems in the global cultural economy[2214], but the dialogical impulse is not, surely, itself corrupt; even battle-hardened left-liberals like Barbara Ehrenreich in the United States still cling, if not to 'optimism', then at least to 'hope', even in the midst of a pandemic:

[2213] John Waters, 'Books About Next to Nothing', https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2020/03/books-about-next-to-nothing, 10/3/20.

[2214] See Gloria Fisk's *Orhan Pamuk and the Good of World Literature*, (Columbia University Press, 2018) for a strong example of the genre.

My mind has been full of grim and rageful thoughts, many of which are about the lack of paid sick leave. We turn out to be so vulnerable in the United States. Not only because we have no safety net, or very little of one, but because we have no emergency preparedness, no social infrastructure. In other places—Barcelona, for example, where my son is now—there's much more of a community feeling in how you face disaster. We have a little bit of it—Rebecca Solnit has written beautifully about the subject. But we don't have enough. From the prehistoric perspective, people have gotten through a lot of stuff by cooperating and sticking together. We built cities, we irrigated fields. Whether we've lost that capacity, I don't know.

[…] I made money running around the speaking, lecture circuit for years, which combined well with activism for raising wages, to the dismay of the people and the administrators who invited me. [… But] I have a hard time, as a writer, picking an audience. I mostly just write whatever I'm comfortable with. I remember, writing *Nickel and Dimed*, thinking maybe I was using words that might not be familiar to some people—like 'glossolalia', speaking in tongues. And I thought, Hell, I feel like using it, you can look it up too, dammit. […] In 2009, I was appalled by the *New York Times'* coverage of the recession, which was all about people on the Upper West Side who could not afford their personal Pilates trainer anymore. So I approached them and said I want to do some things about people who had already been struggling when the recession began. They agreed. I got space in what was then the Sunday Review section and got to work. In my mind, to do this I had to go to different places around the country, see different people. So it was costing me money, and, at a certain point, I realized that what they were paying me was so much less than what they'd paid me five years earlier, when I did a column for the same section of the paper. It was forty per cent of that.

And I thought, Geez, I'm losing money on this, but I guess I made money on *Nickel and Dimed*, I can afford it. And *then* I thought, What kind of bullshit is this? Only rich people can write about poverty? […] Like in journalism, in all the creative occupations, there's no stability unless you're a superstar of some sort. […] In the seventies and eighties, when I was very involved with health workers, beautiful things would happen when the doctors aligned themselves with the struggles of aides and orderlies—saw them as people they would make change with. For example, if you want to understand what's actually happening with patients, it's the person who cleans the rooms who might know more than anyone else. That's the terrible thing about capitalism: not just its exploitativeness but its refusal to let information flow uphill. That's how we get things like Boeing, where the engineers know that things are really fucked but no one listens to them. And we make that mistake again and again.

[…] We need solidarity, but we also need to face the differences between those classes. How have they come about? How are they maintained from generation to generation to generation? And what can be changed about that? […] In some deep way, as somebody pointed out to me recently, I am a Maoist. He was the first of the revolutionary leaders who recognized these divisions and decided that had to be something the

> revolution focused on. […] I only mean that there was something inspiring about the rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution—this idea that the contribution of the manual laborer is just as great as that of the engineer and the scientist. I kind of like that. […] So many people have […] mystical experiences, and we push them away. I think they're worth investigating. I'm not done yet. [… But] it's the absence of God that inflects this great moral responsibility on us. […] All I've been aware of is passing down the centrality of helping other people. […] But I'm not saying anything about any God requiring you to do these things. There are no rewards. Don't ever expect a reward. […] I don't think you can be a Christian and believe in Heaven like that. Jesus taught that you don't do good things to show other people how good you are. In fact, don't even tell yourself you've done these good things. Forget them. I love that—the freedom of that. I think if you are a Christian and you are told, 'Hey, you get to go to Heaven,' you have to say, 'No, I'm giving up my place to that bum over there.' […] But I have friends and family, and we talk about these things. The idea is not that we will win in our own lifetimes and that's the measure of us but that we will die trying. That's all I can say.[2215]

Ehrenreich is clearly only half-serious about the Maoism; what she really means is that every human being, however humble or foreign her background, is the owner of an autonomous spiritual life to which we are connected if only we can dig down far enough into the wells of ourselves. This unexpected and belated breakthrough of modernity - the shift from magical to instrumental to 'reenchanted' dialogical thinking about the social world - ought to be reflected in global economic arrangements fit for a 'Second Axial Age', but there is by definition no instrumental or 'scientific' argument to prove this, only the force of individual art and example.

[2215] Barbara Ehrenreich, in Jia Tolentino, 'Barbara Ehrenreich is not an Optimist, But She Has Hope for the Future', https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-new-yorker-interview/barbara-ehrenreich-is-not-an-optimist-but-she-has-hope-for-the-future, (21/3/2020).

Afterword

One world on my watch
But not for me to enjoy.
The sincerity of the
Sacrifice is what counts;
If my name is anywhere
On it then it's just another
Megalomania. Do the
Work and disappear
Into the rice of posterity.

J.P.S.

An odd inertia grips the author as he reaches the end of this trilogy; he must surely publish it, but to do so he must enter the very system of mercantilised cultural exchange he has just spent several hundred pages decrying. He cannot possibly, after all this, stoop to 'marketing' it himself, so if the work is not 'discovered' and 'shared' by others, then two years of effort would seem to have been wasted. Except, of course, that they have not been entirely wasted; the compilation has been its own private reward, even if the outcome is also intended as a gift to any others who stumble upon it. One can only begin to offer such 'gifts', however, to the extent that one enjoys an independent source of income, as I have been lucky enough to do, admittedly in a minimal and nervewracking sort of way, for most of the last two years. How is this book a 'gift', however, if it costs $40 (or $140) from the publisher who ends up publishing it?

The most sinister form of slavery is to convince the slave that she 'loves' what she is nevertheless forced to do; large slices of the management training and wellness industries are devoted to squeezing just such 'power-of-love' productivity from more or less captive workforces. Spiritual Humanism, however, at least as I have striven to understand it, is not a corporate training tool; only *you* can define your own calling in the world. The goal of any humane economics is that we should all be paid justly for pursuing such freely chosen vocations. We may accept poverty and unfairness at different stages - a true 'calling' requires no less - but that is no excuse for the enormous and enduring structural injustices which lead some of us to be overpaid, and many more of us to be underpaid, for pursuing meaning in the world, all while the vast majority are left behind in humanistic poverty and partial or total wage slavery. Advance payments for membership of a dialogical human community would cut through some of this injustice, but our age does not yet trust us with such freedom; in the meantime, we must each steal it for ourselves and our loved ones, as and where we can.

In the end, a former employer offered me an elegant publishing solution and a permanent job contract which, while not exactly reflecting the principles of a spiritual humanist economics, at least allows me the sort of imperfect freedom for further creativity that my forebears and compatriots, from Alan Mulgan to C.K. Stead and Tony Beyer, all variously enjoyed in their working lives. The organisation

stands for ‘the improvement of leadership in business and society via humanistic values’, so there should be ample scope for me to build meaning into my future career as I pursue writing in parallel to various organisational duties. Returning to my life in China has proven bureaucratically impossible this year because of the Coronavirus, but I endeavour to make the best of my luck at a time where millions have suffered more damaging upheavals.

Stuttgart, December 2020