

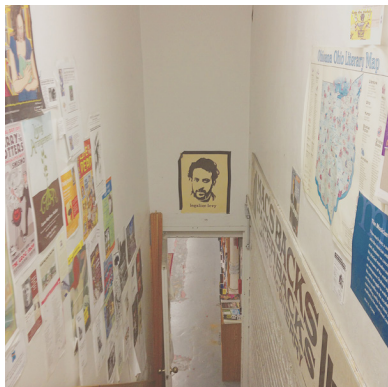
JEREMY BENDIK-KEYMER

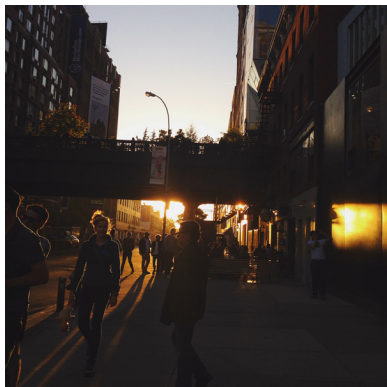
SOLAR CALENDAR

AND OTHER WAYS OF MARKING TIME



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JEREMY BENDIK-KEYMER



PUNCTUM BOOKS

2017



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Earth thought 27 of 365: I need a literature that speaks to me and makes me feel at home on Earth — neither philosophy which argues, nor poetry that wishes, nor religion preaching. A voice like a family member's, reflective at the pace of Earth time, arising with the part of us that isn't destructive or blind.

for Malka Espagnet

N'allez pas trop vite.

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PREFACE

a. original academics

“There is a radical opposition between the ancient philosophical school, which addressed individuals in order to transform their entire personality, and the university, whose mission is to give out diplomas which correspond to a certain level of objectifiable knowledge” (Hadot 2002, 260). I agree. And I object to what has happened. At the same time, we should not go back. Now is thankfully not then: who besides a control freak would assume that people ought ever to be totally grasped and completely transformed? The democratic assumption, true to every child, is that we come into the world with much that is powerful and right. It is not total transformation that we need, but humanity and, through it, capability. So we need something from ancient philosophy — learning that seeks to humanize and open up our whole being — but not its authoritarian residue. What is philosophy today if we take seriously what the ancient philosophical school got right?

At the end of his life, Pierre Hadot was a professor at the Collège de France — a “professor’s professor” — and he helped Michel Foucault, most famously, conceptualize ethics. Hadot devoted his career to recovering the ancient conception of philosophy, according to which

the discourses of universities are but a fragment of what philosophy is. His engagement with this theme helped me understand and develop a personal counter-culture to my academic work in the period leading up to and directly following my tenure as a university professor. Today, I understand this counter-culture as a kind of original academics, that is, an academics truer to the idea of the philosophical school Plato first developed in his *Ακαδημία*. Ironically, it is tenure that is now protecting me as I use it in the open.

Imagine the kind of philosophy book you might have wished for when you were growing up. Seeking a reader who would be patient and open-minded enough to live with her own questions and to walk around town with her thoughts, this book would not have a single thesis but would rather work through multiple problems and be an experience, born out of life experience. It would not be summarizable. It would be larger than the reader and open onto different kinds of readings. This is the kind of philosophy book that was at home in the nineteenth century.

In that brutal, colonial age, something amazing barely broke out—an unstructured chorus of the impulse inside Renaissance humanism: the power of people to “fashion the form that they prefer” (della Mirandola). The irony of history was considerable. The non-arbitrariness of people’s power came from the realization of the layers of significance that there are in the cosmos when we engage it with the ideals of justice, truth, and beauty—things that concern *every* human being and about which one can *object*. While half the world was in shackles and most of the canonical, European thinkers were still racist and sexist, here was faith in the power of thoughtful reasoning about what is good, and especially in the power of freedom to release human beings into their intelligence on many different levels. Moving between intuition and dreaming, cognition and bodily perception, experiences and fantasies, sense trickles inside our

shale and calcified pains; reaches to justice, truth, and beauty. And these values demand certain kinds of clarity in life by which we can live with dignity. And this dignity demands that we overturn subjection, counter-throwing the very discourse that educates us.

On these grounds, to the extent that the nineteenth century exposed the range of consciousness involved in European subjectivity *and intimated what would exceed it*, it is a century that primed democratic academics today for a world that demands a more thorough decolonization of people's minds to respect the plurality of people's intelligences. Hence, I take it to qualify Hadot's conceptual archeology, as I fully believe Foucault did as well. One day, I hope, decolonization will qualify it again and more deeply—there are communal ways of knowing academic culture has barely grasped.

What culture should the academy have? Whereas Plato was in some ways one of the first egalitarians by merit (especially concerning women), he was also deeply classist in his categorization of intellectual potentials. He effectively thought some people were stupid by nature having no *philosophical* worth (Rancière 2004). Hence the Ἀκαδημία existed outside the city, in practice exclusive and somewhat sequestered. It took me a while to get this geography right—see how ambivalent it is about people. Plato was traumatized by failed democracy. Understandably, but tragically, he overreacted. All of democracy was at fault, and people could not be trusted. They needed to be totally transformed and, when unable, to be kept in their place. We need only to follow out Rancière's analysis of political economy in Plato's foundations of policy to see how the academy was founded on class division and exclusion—on the very notion of a class of people as opposed to people in general. It was founded on the inequality of intelligence.

That was trauma, and trauma is not the origin, but the negation. Hence, it is not accurate to call Plato's idea of school "original academics." Original academics

would be found if we looked at a non-traumatized relationship with democracy, an accurate picture of people's power of intelligence. Hence the Renaissance—or as I have called it “nineteenth century”—qualification on academics, which I also think of as a priming inside the colonizing mind to decolonize the mind. Truly original academics begins with the power of people to find and make sense in the world out of freedom and a profound trust in our capabilities as human beings. It negates Plato's *Ἀκαδημία* at the point of its negation—where trauma and a rejection of democracy, a distrust of people, occur. Instead, let us demand justly democratic schools and original academics born of the power of humanity to find and to make sense in the cosmos. Let this, naively, include *everyone*—because that is right. Let it, *maturely*, always be self-critical. Whatever is of worth in Plato's academics must be saved within a thorough rejection of what is deeply distrustful of people and misunderstanding about democracy in that same *Ἀκαδημία*. Whatever is right in democracy must still pass through a critique of the subjugation still in democratic society, including its school systems.

Plato's vision of philosophy—at least as explained by Hadot—has the *practical* point of philosophy right, but this point needs to be rendered thoroughly democratic in the polyphony and multiple intelligences of people. Here is a point about method. Out of respect for people, Plato's method—called “academics”—must relinquish its traumatic repetition of violence in the need to control people by grasping and transforming them completely. Making people slaves to reason is still making them slaves. It is unreasonable. Despite obvious disanalogies, Plato's academic mentality coheres with the religious bondage of the Church and its Lord, the racist mentality of colonialism, and the insane pressures to perform that characterize capitalism today.

We do not need to be remade to be intelligent. In the openness found in trust in our power of sense-finding

and sense-making, we might experience a philosophy that—among friends formed just by grappling together with the work of making sense of life—aims at wisdom in an egalitarian life. Doing so coheres with what Foucault was after in his application of Hadot. It is also what I am after. We should welcome what is good from foundational academics and make it democratic, that is, opposed to dumbing down, complete control, and the creation of intellectual classes. We should learn from the anti-colonial current of the nineteenth century and explode the range of intelligence. We should oppose the latent traumatic-Platonism of the disciplinary academy, while preserving the *ethos* of a life centered around wisdom-seeking. Original academics via the birth of poly-intelligent being. Let us deepen the conditions for equality.

Just so, in the spirit of poly-intelligence, this book before you contains six oddities: a family portrait, a parody essay, a time-capsule poem, an exploded essay, a poetic record of an act, and an aphorism journal for a year. Their inspirations come from my Eurocentric educational system, where I found them *formally unnerving*: Epictetus' notebooks, Tarkovski's *Mirror*, and Apollinaire's roving "Zone." Also experiments in ecology—the study of home—the six originate in rifts that challenge us as growing people. They alternate between environmental problems and tensions within families, as if the fissures in love and in society wash back and forth between each other as we try to make a home in the world. Multiple times layer over each other like the sounds of a large, democratic city. The personal and the planetary intersect. The space before, and against, policy where politics arises as assertion opens up in glimpses, fragmenting the body and inertia of oppressive orders. Philosophy arises as a homely and idiosyncratic practice of multiple forms of intuition, reflection and intelligence for muddling through life. In solitary communion with oneself or with community out in the world, and

in much loved lands, we can open up the contemporary and tragic forms of power that keep everything in its awful place hurtling toward something that makes no good sense. Painstaking exercises in being human are *grounded* in the places we have tarried with our lives in unconditional love and in truthfulness—in the desire to become. They arise through the body and within the day as assertions of voice born out of long silence within the landscapes of our intimate time. Summoning sense is what it means to have a conscience.

Art, practice-work, literature—these serve as fragments of a larger whole, keeping life broad and open. They serve as resistances against the narrowing specialization and functionalization of mass economy, an economy that began by colonizing the labor and diverse minds of much of the world's people and continues today by colonizing the atomic fragments of our lives—the production of our bodily organs, the nuances of our self-styling, even the currency of our dreams and visualizations. This economy today over-determines the contested and contradictory place called “the academy” and shackles intelligence. But like early childhood learning, the expressive arts I here employ are imaginative after having first been experimental and seek to unfetter by creating a *human whole* first, a relational—not simply theoretical or practical—space, or actually, *time*.

I wanted to throw into the spin of text and image my whole human being, incomplete and fragmented at the edges and in its midst, summoning a world of trust in ourselves, against one that began in violence, expropriation, and competition.

*

One of France's most erudite classicists and a translator of Plotinus, Hadot first came into the English speaking world through the bibliographies in Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*. In 1982, Hadot published

a volume on the history of ascetic practices in antiquity—practices he called “spiritual exercises,” a kind of work on the self. Two years later in *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault placed “practices of the self” in the foreground of his theoretical material. Though focused at first on ethical training, Foucault’s idea applies more broadly to self-development and the ways we fashion ourselves and modify our practices thoughtfully (Nichols 2014, ch. 6). If we looked at the United States of America, for instance—a limited example—we could find many instances and applications of what Foucault studied—yoga, self-help, religious exercises, interest-based groups organized by social media and taking place offline for the purpose of self-realization, multiplayer virtual gaming, athleticism, various modes of art as practice, and many others. We would also find them in many ritual practices among the indigenous of the land. But ironically, the contemporary university has not been explicit about spiritual exercises. It relegates practice work to student life and cordons off theoretical discourses within the disciplines.

Why should it? Discernment depends on practices, and knowers must develop virtues. Professionals are lost without character rooted in having a strong sense of self, that is, the ability to own beliefs, desires, intentions, and feelings. *All* of these crucial things—discernment practices, intellectual virtues, personal character and a sense of self concerning what one thinks, wants, pursues, and experiences are developed by spiritual exercise. As Hadot emphasizes in *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* the original schools of philosophy did not think of learning as theoretical discourse, but as a way of life. Philosophy, the center of learning, was as much practice as theory and was exemplified by a passionate love of truth and a restless attempt to be virtuous in one’s life. It is hard to see how such passion and restlessness, how excellence of mind and character, are not exactly what great science and professional leadership demand. So why such ignorance

in the structure of the university? Why so much technology without soulful technique?

In a remarkable essay, “Philosophy and Philosophical Discourse” (2002, 172–233), Hadot underlined the contrast between ancient philosophy and the contemporary academy. For ancient philosophy, discourses of truth were but a *mode* of the overall philosophical life—the heart of which was living wisely. One could be a philosopher without theoretical discourse, but *never* a philosopher without trying to live wisely. Now we live in an inverted world. The academic today who thinks his academic work is to try to live wisely is considered immature. In original academics, the life of the philosopher was essential, the theories not. And this life was fashioned through spiritual exercise—*askesis*—a concept that is at the heart of this book.

I love the tradition of irruptions in original academics, and Hadot marked them. They should be guides to our practice now. Petrarch and Erasmus wrote about the philosophical *life*. Montaigne practiced “the art of living” (263). Each of Descartes’s *Meditations* is a spiritual exercise (264–65)—reducing one’s life to a lucid skepticism through which one lives. Only an academy ignorant of Seneca does not see this. Kant—far from being the merely professional scholar he is often made out to be by the lovers and haters of theory—distinguished a philosopher from a mere “artist of reason” (i.e., a theoretician) (267). “...Schopenhauer, Emerson, Thoreau, ... Marx, Nietzsche, William James, Bergson, Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty and still others...conceived of philosophy not only as a concrete, practical activity but also as a transformation of our way of inhabiting and perceiving the world” (270). “There is an abyss between fine phrases and becoming genuinely aware of oneself, truly transforming oneself” (279).¹

1 Hadot believed that the way Christianity absorbed Greek and Roman philosophy neutralized its practical elements by conferring

The history of the academy has a counter-history, more vital to its humanity than the trumpets of theory admit. While Aquinas lectured in Paris, Bonaventure wrote poetically about the life of St. Francis—a discourse clearly intended for emulation and, so, a form of practice. Rousseau insisted that the *Académies* destroyed virtue, and he incited people to become Romantic. Kierkegaard spent every cent he owned to chastise his community for its hypocrisy. Frederick Douglass confronted people over and over again with a *living* fact. Woolf used literature to *show* the subjugation of women. Sartre suggested that any philosopher who only wrote about freedom was a fraud. And Freire developed thinking *co-constructively* with the rural and urban poor blighted by famine from a neo-colonial world of “structural adjustment.” The ancient conception of philosophy reappears whenever people realize that loving wisdom takes more than writing a theory, however true it may be.

This counter-history is more vital to knowledge than the loudspeakers of technology admit. To train ourselves to be objective demands a rigor of mind and of procedure. It demands that we accustom ourselves to fastidious searching. The ability to take in many different viewpoints and penetrate them, or synthesize them, takes habituation. We have to *grow up* to be capacious, vulnerable and receptive while not being reactive. We

the *ethos* onto the *habitus* of the monastery. Monastic practices, Christian in form, took over the practice-work of philosophy. Philosophical practice was supplanted by the Christian way of life. This left philosophy with only theory. And as philosophical discourse was drawn into theological dispute, the monastery gave way to the Medieval university. Philosophy became Scholastic. And it was this scholastic, exclusively theoretical mode that provided a frame for the modern research university to adapt to theory-driven technology applications in which work on oneself was irrelevant. Capital could easily colonize this, and it has. When knowledge is driven by the market and personality is converted into performance, original academics are left far behind. They become radical.

must cultivate the independent space for truth and curiosity as ends in themselves to actually advance knowledge. The situation is indirect, never merely direct as the instrumentalization of education would mythologize. There is simply no way around the need to develop yourself. Even if all that goes into being human were the production of knowledge, you would still need a sense of self. And of course there is way more to being human than simply being a big, cogitating mass. Technology means nothing without values that provide its ends. And these values are shams if they are not expressions of humanity. The counter-history of the contemporary university is necessary for anything resembling knowledge, let alone humanity. Spiritual exercises are necessary.

As old school style sometimes does to the new, Hadot's work rejuvenates what academic practice is. In the early 1990s, Hadot wrote a book on Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* called *The Inner Citadel* (1998 in English). There, he painstakingly showed the ways Aurelius disciplined himself through his nightly writing of notes-to-self. These notes-to-self were the *Meditations*. They involved theories—often confusing ones—yet the *Meditations* was not primarily useful as a work in theory. Instead, it was beneficial as a *practice*. A journal based on the ideas of Epictetus's Stoicism, the *Meditations* documented Aurelius's self-transformation, accusing his faults with his conscience, focusing his emotions for the day ahead. It showed him owning what he thought, wanted, pursued, and experienced. Here was vivid work in habituation to uphold the public good. It was profoundly human and frequently brave.

I worry that the contemporary academy makes us cowards. If academics has lost its grounding in spiritual exercise, is it any wonder that it instrumentalizes students as it instrumentalizes learning? Then what is outside the academy in actually human ecology is more vital to wisdom than the academy itself. Democratic spirit becomes the promise. What if philosophy were around

us in the homely intelligence of everyday people — that is to say, in democracy? What if the original impulse to philosophical practice were found whenever people search restlessly to live more wisely, more virtuously? Could we “define the philosopher not as a professor or writer . . . , but . . . as a person who leads a philosophical life?” (Hadot 2002, 274) Here is a critical thought that manages to make something useful of Plato’s *Ἀκαδημία* and its reactionary intellectualization. Bravery lives in the carved out spaces of freedom that keep us human — and not in the exam.

Yes, I think so. Why distrust people’s minds? Why repeat the colonialism haunting our intellectual hierarchies? Why shackle yourself to the scale or the curve? And this: without the elitism that Plato’s *Ἀκαδημία* inaugurated in the figure of a sage who conforms to the ideal, living a philosophical life as the equal of anyone else implies nothing more nor less than muddling through the difficulties of our social ecology as just one person among many, living with friends and with family, being with many — neighbors, fellow community-members, citizens, far off people on this planet, the riotous polyphony of other forms of life — and hearing the voices of future generations, and past ones, as cardinal minds. This muddle involves poly-intelligent modes of exploration, and it involves bravery — descendent spiritual exercises fashioned in semi-successful and searching ways to carve out spaces of freedom. There, we begin to feel, desire, believe, act and be human.

Please imagine me, *zanni* that I am, riding next to you on an above-ground metro line in Cleveland, New York, or in Paris — places I’ve lived or tarried, these minor and major nodes of the colonial world-economy across the last centuries. As you read, I’m standing, looking around at the city in the evening light. What cities are there inside you? What lives are here around us? Everything circulates around when people try to understand each other.

b. Chicago Commons

I used to walk to school in the early morning in Rouen, France. I was eighteen. It was Fall. I was studying as a Rotary Exchange Student at the Lycée Pierre Corneille. I had no real idea about the violent subjection that constituted, and still constitutes, the history of my world. As I walked from the LeFebure's house out a side street to the busy avenues, the light would be deep blue-lavender between the buildings.

This book attests to the consequences of early childhood environments on adult development and to the validity of democratic education. But, at first, a lot of it has to do with trying to approximate something I glimpsed when I was an exchange student in France and later a young member of the literary scene in college. What I think I understand better now is the *political* dimension of what I glimpsed—especially as it applies to academic politics. By “academic politics,” I do not mean in-fighting within departments or university committees. Nor do I mean the international, polemical exchanges between professors with different research agendas. I mean the *structural conditions* of academia, in particular with regard to the *equality of intelligence* (Rancière 1991)—the moral axiom of learning in a democratic manner.

This strange axiom, so easy to misunderstand, holds that the point of learning is *to discover and to construct the sense of the world*, and that every single person—and other forms of life as entrusted to our interpretation—have a role to play in that. None are ruled as incapable of having something to contribute to thought—which is shared and public. The “you can't think” (“yet,” or “quite”), so typical to academia's hierarchical subjection of intelligence by an illicit act of will, is ruled as the major moral violation of this philosophy. We need only read hooks (1994) or Douglass (1994) to see how this violation constituted colonialism—as well as Plato's

political economy (Rancière 2004). Our world—academia especially—is drenched in it. Can't we think yet?

I know I can—I always could, from the moment I cried for breath as a newborn, rending the space with need and awareness.

Eighteen years later, I lived in Rouen, France for a year, fraternizing with both French friends and the Section Norvégienne that was lodged at the Lycée Corneille. I immersed myself in a world of literary culture where people discussed philosophy in cafés as part of being a teen and where difficult writing was promoted institutionally, taken as the lifeline it can be between people.

The following year, I began college at Yale University and was lucky enough to fall into the newly revitalized scene of the *Yale Literary Magazine*, the oldest college literary magazine in the United States of America. This heterogenous community met nightly at a table in the Alternative Food Court of the Yale Commons. At the table, I found people who aspired to a literary culture similar to the one I had found in France.

I wanted to find people who were both literary and philosophical, who engaged in the difficult communication of writing while searching for justice, truth, and beauty in this life. I could sense that some of my colleagues were roaming; yet the cynicism of the United States of America and the corrupt power of Yale stank up the air. The Yale Literary table risked corruption despite itself by aspiring to the status-conscious life of the aesthete.

I had to find a way to use the literary mind to ground me in existential relations. Writing can be a lifeline. Right after I graduated from college, I met the philosopher and painter, Megan Craig when she took the course, *The Problem of Evil* with Susan Neiman in 1994 (Craig's first book oddly falsifies this date in its preface, covering over the wonderful, nineteen-year-old freshperson who walked into Connecticut Hall's seminar room at Yale's Department of Philosophy). For several years, Megan

and I wrote back and forth to each other in different media: letters, postcards, paintings, drawings, notebooks, sketches, photographs, subway poetry placards, pieces of daily life, leaves, and philosophy papers intended for our respective classes. Megan was working at and painting the life of a daycare center called Kid Space — it was lovely and reminded me of my own family's environment when I was a child. The experience with Megan of philosophy as a daily, interpersonal correspondence stretched my sense of what is possible and marked the outer edge of the literary mind that I'd internalized. I wanted something egalitarian and democratic that stretched through New York City and Chicago — the places I and my friends lived at the time. Not snobbery, populism. Not simplification, people's real complexity.

But this intense discovery made me feel *dissociated* from the University of Chicago, where I had gone to study due to its seemingly being the most rigorous and scholarly place to study philosophy in the United States of America at the time. The University of Chicago's philosophy department seemed more open minded than any other program without sacrificing objectivity. But its mind was open *conditionally*.

You can get a sense of this environment by reading an exchange I had with the chair of the program over twenty years after I entered it:



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Dear Professor Richardson Lear,

One of the things I learned while earning my Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Chicago was the importance of constructive criticism. After many years, it is clear to me that the Department of Philosophy of the University of Chicago in the period when I attended (1994-2002) deserves some constructive criticism. It took me many years to realize how degrading aspects of the experience there had been to me—many years, and much work. I write this note in the hope that your department is different and is working to make a respectful and supportive environment for graduate students.

When I arrived at Chicago in 1994, the Anscombe Lounge had the following slogan on its door, "Possibility is the destruction of contentment." What reigned in the department under that slogan was an idealization of harsh criticism as a mode of philosophical education. But given the hierarchy of the relationship between professors and students, given scarce opportunities beyond school in the market and in school with departmental fellowships and prizes, and given the hands-off attitude of much of the faculty, the ideal of harsh criticism easily became a rationalization for disrespectful behavior, lack of recognition, and the inevitably repeated hierarchies attempted by subordinates over each other, in this case, graduate students. The social environment of the department was judgmental, competitive, and fear-driven. It was frequently degrading, and one could not speak freely. We know these environments to be abusive ones.

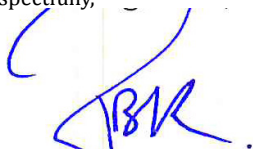
I wish to underline that I experienced a number of individual faculty members to be supportive. The problem was in the *ethos*.

As an alumnus of the program, it is my wish that the University of Chicago Department of Philosophy creates a warm and respectful environment for everyone who works there. That I can anticipate a snicker at such an elementary human request suggests that my memory of the time there still has the capacity to trouble my faith in human relations.

More generally, the discipline of philosophy is beginning to wake up to its abusive mode of operation, the way it has historically normalized

degrading conversational patterns and the ways in which its unexamined life has adversely affected graduate students, minorities, women, and other “abnormals” (!). I sincerely hope that your department is taking a lead in changing the discipline.

Respectfully,



Jeremy David Bendik-Keymer
Beamer-Schneider Professor in Ethics

Apr 4

Gabriel Richardson Lear <grlear@uchicago.edu>

to bendik-keymer

Dear Professor Bendik-Keymer,

I'm sorry to hear that your time in graduate school was not a happy one. I have always found this to be an unusually supportive department and do hope—and believe—that it is a supportive environment for our graduate students as well. But of course, ethos changes with the individuals in the program, so it is something that needs continual attention.

Best wishes,

Gabriel Lear

Gabriel Richardson Lear
Professor and Chair, The Department of Philosophy
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How often are we willing to be horrified about our own institutions? Of course, my time wasn't simply unhappy in graduate school, nor was my point about personal happiness. Assuming that it was minimized and displaced what I wrote. I wrote my note, because there were problems of basic decency between people camouflaged as licenses of intellectual rigor. These involved degrading conditions.

My letter was also not about individuals. It was a call for clarification from an alumnus of the program about the *institutional structures* in place to protect graduate students—that is, the structures in place to *protect the equality of intelligence* (Rancière 1991). There could be many things said in reply to such a probe and piece of constructive criticism, but the Chair's note said none of them.

More typically, the letter showed a lack of interpersonal wisdom. When you are dealing with someone who has been traumatized by an institutional failure, you should be careful not to minimize that experience acting as an authority figure of the institution in question. This risks what is called, “re-traumatization.”

I believe that all three of these conditions—turning disrespect into a temperamental choice, pinning anxiety and depression on individuals rather than on subjugating structures, and lacking interpersonal wisdom—are common to what I am calling “academic politics,” especially in philosophy. In various ways, they each reinforce the *in*-equality of intelligence—camouflaging the abuses of will, hiding the inegalitarian axiom, and ignoring the human truth.

Half a decade after I entered graduate school, however, I found a learning environment that cultivated communication that is both philosophical and artistic through a range of exploratory and expressive media. I consider this learning environment my first truly *liberating* school system. Interestingly, it reminded me of the early childhood environment my parents had made for me (and

for others in my mother's Head Start school) and of the socialist school I attended in Ithaca in the early 1970s, the East Hill School. The places where education happens in my country are the places of early childhood.

The effect of meeting a liberating school while at the University of Chicago was amazing. True to the best in my country's democratic culture, the Chicago Commons was a public school system in Chicago woven as *family-centers*. I was fortunate to study it with two amazing researchers, a married couple who had made their life exploring learning among the underprivileged and the ostracized (Scheinfeld et al., 2008 — I helped co-construct some central chapters significantly). The family centers — adapting and developing what they had learned from the Reggio Emilia Municipal School System — saw children as *centers of intelligent agency seeking to explore the world and become a part of it*. They promoted inquiry through *all* our expressive modalities and believed in dialogues across many different media. They were also *challenging*, but as a way to share the world together — what Rancière (1991) would call the necessary supposition of the object to create true equality.

Minds were absorbed here, emotions quiet, everyone with more space in *their* minds than any theory could contain. When I first entered the Chicago Commons Family Center across the Dan Ryan Expressway from the now-gone Stateway Gardens projects, I thought I had entered utopia. Here was *understanding* around the walls and in the hundreds of representations of different kinds making up the common and evolving mind of this school that joined children and their families with staff from the very community the center served.

Time circles around our development like years around the sun, and the simplest, humane acts can create the profoundest effects in a life. When I was a child, my mother and father created a kinesthetic and imaginative environment for me — something for which I will forever be grateful, especially to my mother who led the

way as, literally, a coal miner's daughter from Southern Ohio. Looking back at my early environment, I have to ask: what are the consequences of growing up feeling that exploring human meaning, in whatever way works with one's imagination, is every person's *right*?

The Chicago Commons, the Scheinfelds more generally, and the presence of Martha Nussbaum's attention to capabilities and philosophy of education (a saving dignity in the University of Chicago) gave me the *outside* to the normal system which did not *deserve* to be normative. They reminded me of a *decent upbringing* made in an environment of human kindness.

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There is a scene in ordinary life and a space in families and friendship circles where philosophy most properly lives. That the academy knows it from the books we read but hardly crafts it institutionally is both frustrating and at times tragic. Personal responsibility, clumsy human immaturity and humble human maturity; rolling with the ways friends and family can speak with each other and help each other see and feel — these are needed in a philosophical life. They are humane realities.

If this book works, I have thought, it will leave the reader turning to growth and truth in her or his own life. That is what it means to philosophize, as all ancients intended to, from oneself. I want to give the reader a chance to construct the conditions of a personal relation to philosophy — location of voice, then crafting of speech; affirmation of humanity, belief in a world where together *we* make sense. I want us to speak about difficult things in a loving way — something I will do in the first study of this book when I explore true kindness with my family. I sometimes feel that in our smooth, performance-subjected culture, people do not know how to go through difficult things anymore.

Against the kind of colonization of philosophy that extracts labor through subjection and makes humanity off limits in its *form*, I want you to feel that you can explore *anything* through reading and writing and *in any imaginative way*. I want you to see how philosophy can be an expressive and flexible medium, satisfying the greatness and breadth of life. At the same time, I don't want to promote irresponsible avoidance of what matters in life—the tough objects, or rifts, that face us, and that provide us with the challenge by which we can truly grow. Everything, everything human comes down to communication—soulful, embodied, intelligent, objective, free.

Mostly, though, I want to talk with you. Because this book has been a collection of studies in a musical sense, of *études*, because it has been a sequence of “spiritual exercises,” it has always involved my person, or as Charles Larmore (2010) would say, my “self.” It has acted as a *book of becoming* that deepened my life and my relationships. I am grateful for its power, the power of philosophizing in the ancient sense that I unknowingly practiced during my first years as an adult with a literary mind.

We can create tragedy in our lives by stopping searching, by no longer crafting the conditions for the lives we truly love. Committing ourselves to our feelings, beliefs, and intentions is the still turning point, the center, of accountability in each of us from which we can relate with, and be accountable to, each other (Larmore 2010, Hadot 2003, ch. 11). As we err, our commitment to self-accountability and mutual understanding is comic. Even if we have not yet found the worlds we might idealize, we can still stumble toward a more humane reality. Here is a teleological art.

Jeremy David Bendik-Keymer
early July 2016
Shaker Heights, Ohio

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THE IDEAS START
IN THE KITCHEN

Family portrait

The walk from Alésia

was made of many things,
A coronated bird
with lavender feathers,
the sixty-year-old woman,
herself, alive.

Even a tree was lop-sided,
making noise in
the wind.

28.7.06
on a postcard
to Sardinia.



Alésia is a metro station in Paris, on the purple line 4 out near Porte d'Orléans. I was walking in the direction of Parc Montsouris at night in late July 2006. The window, above, is from Porto. Reminds me of my Aunt Irene.



Bottom of Paris Rd., New Hartford, N.Y., 1978.

What is kindness? When I was a child, I learned to read slowly. I was in the brontosaurus reading group. I spent all my time in wood shop or drawing. The way I drew was to take an elementary writing book with broad lines next to a blank page. I wrote either *home* or *war* on the right. Then I action-drew on the left, blank page. “America” was coming out of the Vietnam War. When my parents separated for a year in the mid-70s, I remember a collage at the home of my mother’s friend: a charred, melted toy baby on a field of paint and scraps.



Graffiti in Porto against the war in Iraq taken weeks before the war between Israel and Hezbollah broke out, 2006.

Some common sense becomes radical when it extends through the details of life. The development of kindness takes us to support human rights and a form of biocentrism: attitudes, customs and policies that express respect for all living beings. The extension of kindness also modifies a range of institutions—e.g., education, science, business, the law, punishment, and politics. It makes us utopian out of common sense. It leads us to respect a being's drive to live and to be free.



African Hoopoe in Sharjah, 2007.

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Imagine me at thirty-seven. I live in the United Arab Emirates. I teach philosophy, learning it over and over with students like myself. Philosophy is an organic part of my life, and I am happiest when it is alive in me.

I don't think philosophy is first and foremost a theoretical subject or even a discipline. It is the part of us longing to create a better life in a world that makes more sense.

Philosophy is my love for the often overlooked or bypassed order in the world. Figuring something out can change the world—and so can realizing what matters and why. Often I've disagreed with my academic discipline. I trust it to make me skeptical. What keeps me thoughtful is people who are insightful in daily life and the possibility of the world making more sense, especially when I work with a group of people who are creative.



Zlatan and Amir—two Bosnian friends who made it through a war, 2007.

Kindness is my new idea — not mine as in “I own it”, but mine as in “I belong to it.” I’ve had two other ideas like this before. They probed the details of how war ends and home begins. As an undergraduate, I wrote on forgiveness, because I felt that the act founding human community is the act where we repair and move beyond a failure that hurt someone. Being forgiving became the virtue for interpersonal life and the heart.

Later, in graduate school, I began to write on healthy imperfection. Someone who is healthily imperfect brings his imperfections to light and works with the imperfections of others. That establishes trust. “Healthy imperfectionism” became the name for my outlook.

Kindness fits people who are healthily imperfect, and there can be no kindness without being forgiving. Home is made of imperfections that work together, and war is made by refusing to give an inch.

These are ideas that could feel alien in the Middle East and looking back to the geopolitical strategy of my country that marked the world into which I was born. Yet without some version of them, I doubt society anywhere would be sustainable. Humane realities exist relatively incognito in the fabric of everyday life, even in authoritarian states. In my country, they ease the relentlessness of competition, the lock of perfect images; the long, grinding shadow of colonialism, and the sad undertow of distant explosions in a country perpetually at war. We seldom acknowledge them — the explosions, the shadows, the imprisoning images, and the realities — fully.

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My classrooms are usually in a semi-circle so that we can see each other's faces and be people to each other. It depends on what the class wants. I rarely lecture. I'm just not suited to much besides conversation. I like comedy to be a part of the subtext, because we can connect around our imperfection. Teaching is a balance between relaxing the pressure of competition and refocusing interests once they pick up within the space of trust. People learn naturally, resisting only from distrust or tooling themselves in their own heads. Students come to class with insecurities and want to feel at home. What makes you feel at home?



Macaroon on the nose at Deira City Center, taking a break from preparing for departmental accreditation, 2007.

From my family and friends, I've seen the centrality of giving talk for any formative relationship. By "formative", I mean what humanizes us, for we—as Kierkegaard wrote—have to "form [our] heart[s]." Some relationships humanize us by forming our hearts, and while the most significant are intimate, there can be formative classroom relationships. Anywhere and everywhere we are, we are human, and it is possible to connect with most others in realness and fellowship. Giving talk (not "giving talk" or "giving talk" but "giving-talk"—talk that gives) is communication in its best sense. There is then a space between us, a ~ , as a friend of mine, Dan Scheinfeld, drew one night on the paper cover of a table at a restaurant in Chicago.

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I want *humane reality* to be my *principle of construction*. As when a child builds a large structure on the floor, stretching from wall to wall and door to door on the strength of long, solid blocks — so I try to build my world in blocks of giving talk. I hope environments with giving talk form the societies of the future.

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Window in San Francisco, December 2006. When I was fifteen, my father suggested a book I might like for my first research paper ever, a paper in Advanced Placement Western Civilization. The book was Thomas More's *Utopia*.

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I grew up with talk happening around the dinner table. Sometimes, there were meta-arguments on meta-arguments or the fearsome, recurring volcano. Mostly, though, we had good talks. My mother endured a condition that went unnamed. She would often get overwhelmed and upset. My father did not know what to do and approached things intellectually. This wasn't always the best way, but he was trying to be helpful. We lived in a world that did not understand, where we couldn't be open without risking judgment. None of us knew what to do. The table anchored me.

It was round, white, modern, and had a single, round and thin, concave base. If my body tensed up, I could always look at the smooth and the round, touch the cool, white tininess. *Ting. Ting.*

And then on most nights, we had such interesting talks at the table.

* * *

I return to words. The feelings are undeveloped, but they circulate to the side, spreading over the words as the words dip into them. Every "I" a "You" injects in a rotating void of mental space trying to come to terms with the feelings as they soak through and exceed words.

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I could tap my feet at the edge of the white, metal base rolling smoothly around just a foot in from the table-top's edge.

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In my family, we cooked good food. So the table would fill with experiments and staples in cooking, there under the lamp suspended down from the ceiling.

*

And the greeting cards would flutter in the windows of the winter storm, multi-layered with cutouts of Norman Rockwell sent from my paternal grandma, Miriam.

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In that circle of blizzarded light, we'd talk about the day, its meaning, politics, art, books, music, family, worries, ties, hopes, vents, schools, works, and more. I'd stake the search for meaning and truth—the coming to light of things.

Sometimes, I'd be blue. Sometimes Mom would be, too. Outside, the streets were soft and impossible in the grace of death.

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What makes a “philosopher?”

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The streets filled up with barely a rut that could thread them. Cars drifted sideways at the corner and the mote of snow colled in. In me, praising my family in a protected fragment the other side of which was anxiety, did I idealize love because I found only fragments of sense? What good was idealizing? But I also *felt* a great deal of love. It was confusing.

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How have you found sense in your life? How have you loved? What words do you have for “wisdom”?

The conversations I had with my parents settled in my peculiar mind. They were complex. Usually about interesting topics both intellectual and emotional, they could also become unstable and scary. As a result, I am hyper-attuned and show elements of what I call “Attention Surplus Condition” — ASC.

For the most part, I am sunny and loving. But sometimes I have very little tolerance for things. When fear settles into the body, it lives there as unease. You forget it. Then some memory is stirred — and the anxiety swells up. But you don’t know why.

When life is stable and I feel safe, I am intuitive, full of life, popping with connections, excited by the day. There is a calm center to my mind and things fall beautifully into place. Then I am somewhere — here, in fact.

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I married my fear. I found a situation to break me.

I overcame it when I had no self-respecting choice but to give up. My fear surfaced as shadow morality.

Divorce.

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As I’ve grown, I love with less immediacy and more understanding. I see what another can do, what I am capable of too. I disengage.

Today, I want to be thoughtful and to take distance on what is chaotic, so that I can respond well and co-create humane reality through it.

There are many voices. Listen.

* * *

When I was little, my family lived in Aurora, New York. Aurora is a small town by Cayuga Lake. There are hills rolling down to the lake, a boat dock and glassy water. We lived in an old house renting half of the second floor. The house was named after its architect of some note.

Mandel House had angles. Its stairwell was lit by one translucent white curtain of a window. The stairway was broad, dark wood with a square banister to hold onto. The apartment bent around in a C: first the living room; then a long, thin kitchen to the right, next my parents' bedroom, a hallway to the right, and finally my room.

In my room was *a stump for banging nails, a balance beam six inches from the floor and a tire-swing hanging from the ceiling*. Imagine the world.

The playground in my room was mostly the invention of my mom, who drew from her work in early childhood



Mandel House in Aurora, New York, 2004 — the front, second floor windows lined our apartment in 1973.

education to give me the best environment possible. That environment let me feel okay as the person I am when I am creating or experimenting. It let me try things out at my own pace. The troubles for me entered when I felt that I had to please people whom I sensed were either self-centered or bullies. I had trouble picking my battles. On my own, I was content. The environment was a block of kindness.

Later when I studied early childhood education, I learned that you can't overestimate the effect of early environments on children's possibilities. We didn't have much money when I was little, but my mom went to the lumberyard and asked for buckets of wood pieces that were waste from the production process. As a result, I had a vast collection of building blocks that I used to create cities on the floor of my room large and intricate enough that I could not leave my room except by jumping from the bed to the nightstand to the door. I referred back to this experience of building cities when I wrote the introduction to my dissertation twenty-eight years later.

I think we should build a society that accommodates our varying abilities and which gives us time, space and understanding to acknowledge our own vibrant reality. This would be humane: a space where each is allowed to be her own kind. Call that "kindness."

Today, children grow into a world that wants them to perform according to models that micro-manage each part of their productivity and success. Perfectionism becomes anathema to humanity. I am arguing for an imperfect space.

Pascal wondered whether we are angels or beasts (leave to the side that beasts are never demonic). We have this sublime ability to love each other in deed and in creative form — to make institutions that are humane. Yet we have not created a society that accommodates uniqueness.



My room in Paris—Summer 2006—where I switched from the idea of conscience to the idea of kindness.

What was most important is that I was loved unconditionally as a child. Trauma is a source of philosophy, especially in Plato, but I believe the memory of love is more important. Without it, I would not be building this block structure along which you are running, trying with your eyes, hearing with your ears.

How will you use it?



My mom, Esther, came from a working class, Slovak family. Isn't her name like quiet rain? A family like that sticks together, can be both fiery and humble, and has strong religious and moral views—although not necessarily reactionary ones. A family like that also does not have language for its darkness. There were generations of darkness in that family. I see it in my mother's sisters

with ripples I identify in my cousins as well. We never talk about it. The silence continues, but I have observed how everyone in the family has made choices throughout their lives to cycle free parts of their lives. We move in half steps.

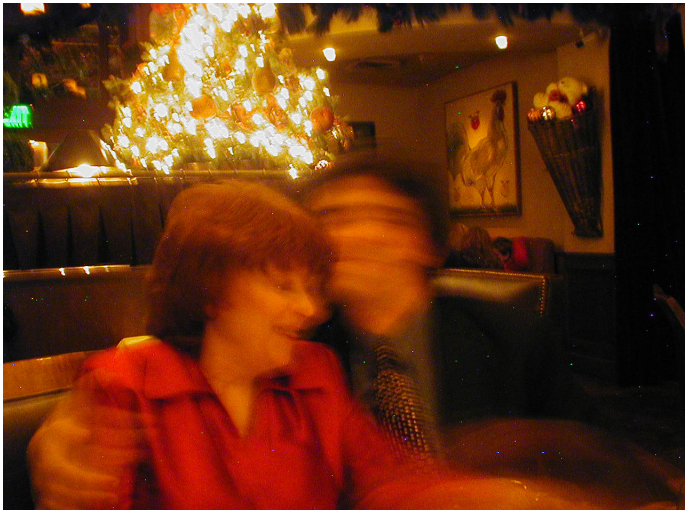
The Bendiks are a social, tight-knit family. There is a spark of independence throughout. Grandpa Bendik insisted that it is all right to dance in the Slovak meeting hall with a partner other than your spouse: who are you to know what goes on in another's mind? He also thought it was all right for my mom to go to New York City to sing and to act when this was seen as almost sacrilegious in their community.

Like her dad, my mom had music in her bones, and she was a singer before she went into early childhood education. Highly intuitive, she can sense a person with foresight that is remarkable, and she is known to light up rooms when she enters them on social occasions. Esther reflects her surroundings — like the crystal bowl of water in which she floated bougainvilleas for a time.

They grew up on a farm in rural, southern Ohio — not far from West Virginia. Grandpa Bendik worked in the coal mines, having had to leave school before ninth grade to help support his siblings. They were all formally uneducated and relied on their Lutheran church to provide a framework. My mother was the first of anyone in her extended family to go to college. She won a scholarship. When I imagine how far she had to walk to develop a sense of her inner landscape, I understand her better. The world emerges from half-light on green, lush hills with interiorly scored mountains.

At a certain point, my mom left the theater. She wanted to have a child. She became involved in low-income early childhood education with African-Americans. She became aware of psychology and joined women's consciousness raising groups. She turned from expression to development, from pleasing others to trying to grow. How did motherhood help her?

When my mom decided she wanted a child, she gave a great deal of thought to it. She wanted to create a world for me that unworked the constraints she had felt. If she'd had a language for her darkness, I believe that she would have unworked that as well. History isn't an idea. It takes time, and only the perfect see time as an enemy.



Giving my mother a kiss on her hair at my parents' 40th wedding anniversary, 2004.

Often when I am teaching or writing, I try to relay the core realization that I felt through my parents' care. That memory comes largely from the environment my parents provided for me and which was a central intention of my mother. We have dynamics within ourselves that can counteract dynamics outside ourselves.



Students from Sharjah—themselves from numerous countries— at the Harvard Model United Nations, February 2007. Caught at times between the material excess of the U.A.E. and traditions that deny their autonomy, I wanted them to have a life of possibility like the one my grandfather wanted for my mother and my mother for me.

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I have not told you about my father, Dave, whose name I carry as my middle name.

Animals love him. Dogs quickly sense his body language, non-threatening and relaxed. Cats decide that their independence can hang out with him. He used to send me letters marked with stickers of insects and had a tree frog tattooed on his upper arm when he was sixty-five. Without his being an environmentalist of any kind, there is a kind of Earth ecology spreading out along his being as if he had never left the origin of species. A mid-twentieth-century, Cleveland intellectual, this one.

He has often been my friend, going together to movies or to the bagel store before school, hanging out over coffee, taking a drive up to Gold Country in the Sierra Nevada Mountains to enjoy the day reading, talking, playing music and goofing off. I remember one time we had a great conversation by a lake with fresh, cool water far back in the mountains. The conversation was about all the people who deserved Nobel prizes in literature but never *got* them — our bad grammar.

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When I was married, I helped raise a boy, Isaiah. Careful not to confuse his relation with his dad, I loved him as “pop” — Isaiah’s name for me. My dad loved him too — my dad had also been a stepson. He wrote *The Many Strange Adventures of Isaiah Egg* and the *Sockman* detective stories for Isaiah — complete with scanned pictures of socks and videos of sock hand puppets. He led Isaiah through the complicated Master Detective’s license with *Sockman* that involved shadowing me around the house without my knowing it and learning code with a decoder ring from the 1950s.

When I think about these things, I want to hug my dad.



Before he shaved off his beard, after having finished his portrayal of Mr. Green in the play of the same name, Dad did “the mountain man,” 2007.

Yes, him.

I think of Isaiah, too, who thankfully has a loyal dad who loves him. Isaiah is a part of me that I keep protected and quiet. I rarely talk about him.

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Perhaps because my dad had to develop a strong will to interact with his single mother, he assumes that others will be as strong-willed as he is. His own father left when he was young. He turned to books.

This self-protection contributed to the dynamics of my family growing up. I grew up with the feeling of a larger-than-life-size task that, if only I could conceptualize and figure it out, would clarify the situation in which we lived and make everything well.

I want to have a tattoo on my inside forearms where the skin lies gentle. On the left it will say, "It is there," and on the right it will say, "but we lack understanding."

^ ^ ^

My dad wants people to figure things out for themselves. This has good and bad sides. I developed an inner layer to my personality where fear settled, beneath which my personal dreams would circulate. I often felt that I was not really sharing who I am with people, because it was dangerous to do so. This was mostly in my head.

Yet one of the things that most mattered to me growing up is how my dad quietly, indirectly gave me support when I felt down—sending postcards about nothing, doing this every couple weeks when he knew I felt lost in my twenties, that identify-adrift time that also included grad school. The entrance of those messages into my hermetic world reminded me of the humanity outside myself.

My dad has been a straight shooter whenever I seek practical advice. I go to him and lay out the problem, and he helps me sort through it, honest about his limits and practical.

What from my father is in my understanding of kindness?



Being especially serious in an unguarded moment in Moscow ~ you know, it's OK to be serious. This self-portrait is the picture of me to which I feel closest from my mid-30s. I think it shows what goes on underneath my social persona and the way I at bottom am registering some undercurrent of my world most of the time when I am awake. Maybe this is why sometimes I don't fit in. Or maybe it is because I don't fit in that I am this way underneath. I felt calm in this photo. Maybe what was surfacing was old — family-structural — searching. 2006.

When I was in high school, my dad averaged close to a book a day — also finding time to cook after work while talking with us in the kitchen. Philosophy, arcane history, science fiction, detective stories (especially those), popular science books, natural history, fiction, poetry, plays.... The only major gaps I see in his reading are Kant and Hegel, whom he read but who didn't grip him. Diderot, Erasmus and Guicciardini are more his style.

I grew up wondering where my father was when he disappeared inside a book. What went on in his mind? How did he see the world? How did all these words connect up in his world? How many layers did he think in?

At the same time, my mother went deep into questions. When she read, she read slowly and deliberately. While my father took in books at stretches and drew connections between them, my mother looked out windows. If my dad showed me intellectual texture, my mom revealed the depth.

Here were people growing out of fairly uneducated families in the Great Depression. How did they live throughout the twentieth century and its cycles of difficult self-consciousness?

What I'm trying to say is that philosophy comes from families, too. There is a tendency to view philosophy as the outgrowth of raw intelligence, or rebellion, or as a sublime art that some initiates have learned how to practice. But I want you to understand how philosophy comes from home. The ideas start in the kitchen.



Peaches in a Moscow apartment, 2006. I love Tarkovsky and Dostoevsky. Dad thinks Tarkovsky is painterly but boring. Ach. (He loves Last Year at Marienbad, however, however; he loves Last Year at Marienbad, at Marienbad; He loves . . . etc. [Last Year is one of those modern films that repeats itself endlessly, endlessly; it repeats itself . . . etc!])

Ideas for living—the useful ones—are expressions of the facts that people are complex and that our complexity can become beautiful if given time, space, and *challenges*. The book of becoming is not always quiet, but sometimes becoming is the quietest thing, and our complexity is the most mundane unfolding, as the sea absorbs the sky and the sky absorbs the sea in their lapping, eddying movements.

In the kitchen, quiet, settled after school and long before night begins, with parents elsewhere and light coming in through the broad window by the side road, you might find yourself thinking unexpectedly, surprised by a sense of the world. This is the world's childhood,

and it comes to you around the kitchen's things, around the bowl of peaches, apples, and plums.

Here, it is complex—your family, some brokenness. Here, it is possible too: the mending out of the backdrop, the allowance, of love.



Dad and I clowning around during my visit to their home in Modesto, California, summer 2007. This is probably why I clown around in class. I loved it myself as a kid and found it lightened me up. Mom took this photo.

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I want to end with some remarks about two near members of my nuclear family — my mom’s cousin, Ruth, and my emotional brother, Steve.



Aunt Ruth is kind and philosophical. Will people like her in the future support the drive of all living beings to live and to be free? Summer 2008.

Aunt Ruth is what I call “relatively incognito.” An everyday person in New York City, you wouldn’t normally find her in a tabloid—although in 2009, she made international news when her wallet was found in Central Park inside a tree that they were cutting down. It had been stolen 27 years previous during the New York City marathon she was cheering.

Without people like Ruth, the world would go to hell. She is a nurse, has a web of friends, and was active in her church. In 2001, when the airplanes became missiles fired into the World Trade Center, she was on a bus to go downtown to provide medical care.

When I would visit, we walked—often through Central Park or out to a restaurant—and talked about everything that mattered to us—just as I am doing with you now.

Before it closed, Ruth’s and my favorite place to go eat was a Hungarian restaurant with waitresses that looked like they would either insult you or offer you timeless wisdom. Here was a dinner table in New York City where we could talk about anything.

The educational psychologist Lev Vgotsky called a region where you can grow without focusing on it a “zone of proximal development.”

Visiting Ruth, I experienced the itinerary of people who seek independence.



Ibn Arabi quote, twelfth century: "I follow love's caravan wherever it goes, because love is my religion and my faith." Calligraphy by the Iraqi-French Hassan Massoudy. 2006. My one concern with the quote is something Immanuel Kant located six hundred years later: if love is the guide for our will and if by "love" we mean a desire, then the caravan follower is amoral. However, if by "love" we mean a sense of moral duty, then the caravan follower is worthy of being religious. The problem is that people today, I suspect, pick up Massoudy's postcard in France and think, "Great! I will follow my heart's desire!" But is the heart best characterized as a site of desire, paradoxical as it may sound to question that? I think we are neither in desire nor in duty primarily, but in relationship. And that is why love involves duties and also desires.



Questions: Dad and I at the Guggenheim, 1986.

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In summer 2006, there was a clearing in my life. I lived and walked around Paris and rode the above ground metro as Edmond Jabès had done. My friend, Steve, had introduced me to this poet of overlapping voices.

As I walked and rode, shaking free years of graduate school and my first disciplinary job, I began to think about kindness.

I turned over ideas, composed short statements and many book outlines. Mostly the city was loose around me, writing quiet.

I no longer heard the judgmental voices of my discipline telling me to shut up if I wasn't producing knowledge according to their schema. I trusted that people of independent mind will read a note written even on a napkin and see all the experience that goes into it. Relays are the building blocks of humanity.

I walked to hear voices around me. I had done this often. One of my favorite memories from college was of reading Derrida's *Limited Inc.* — a book that I did not particularly enjoy — while walking around the old campus's main quad where Derrida had taught and from where he had been fired.

Walking made the book fun. The tedium of open academic warfare was released into the air by the sounds coming from dorm rooms and feet on the walkways.



Esther Bendik and her son, Jeremy. 1970, New Haven, Connecticut.



Picasso's sculpture as an old man. Jeremy walked into this museum in summer 2006 in Paris.



1986, New Hartford, New York. Jeremy at fifteen rebelling against a conservative town, also being a typical teenager. Since his family tended to work things out, philosophy made sense to him.

One of the amazing things about us is that we can look at ourselves as another. I remember my dad explaining this to my class on Aristotle's ethics at American University of Sharjah when he sat in sometime during the Spring of 2006. We can be just to ourselves. Aristotle didn't say this exactly, but I agree. Looking at oneself allows one to try to be objective, and it also allows one to be more kind.

Being kind to yourself is a condition on being independent. When I was a graduate student, professors spoke as if kindness and independence conflicted, or they implied that independence was needed first. Typical to the stultifying academic environment in which they unconsciously lived, they denied the originality of kindness, its core role in an uncertain and stable human life.

After all, it's hard to be free without feeling it's alright to be yourself, and I don't think that such a feeling is possible without kindness to self. The place where independence and kindness begin is in self-openness.

By being open with ourselves, we show kindness to ourselves in trusting our personal intelligence as a strength. Just so, we are in that self-relation independent.

It is funny, I say this and think about the many people with whom I have worked who are thoughtful and purposeful, disingenuous and aware. I think of each of us solitary in our worlds in a moment, creating the conditions of accountability by being kind to ourselves—and being kind to ourselves by being *accountable* to ourselves.

Kindness is neither hard nor soft. Made with integrity, it is forthright.

* * *

So during one evening in July 2006, I walked home from the Alésia metro station to the Cité Universitaire. The sky was deep blue-lavender fading to dark. Rousseau showed that to become who we are, we should get out of the house, not sit sunken in a room like Descartes. Ideas mixed with cities are alive. Philosophy comes from the neighborhood—the sounds of kitchens coming across courtyards in the evening air.

I think of Steve, birdsongs in his tree-crown of an afro, coming around the block. When I was twenty-one, he was the first person to suggest the connotations of the word “togetherness” to me. Mixing what I think are two memories together, I remember one night saying good-bye on the steps of his apartment and alluding to Emerson like we were mentioning someone nearby.

When I was twenty-one, I gave Steve my kitchen table. He took off its base and for years used its top as a low round, covered with African cloth. We read Plato there; Edmond Jabès too. Steve drummed on it—*ting ting ting*.



Still in the talk, we discussed justice in a café, surrounded by pigeons, people and traffic. Summer 2007.

Togetherhness. Togetherhness grows through conversation, provided that the conversation is open and that the people have loving integrity. Then the world in a certain light: the glow of sun-fall in the photo, not unlike Plato's Good.

Be within it and range freely.



End of a walk in New York City, 82nd and Third, Summer 2007.

*Annotated monologue
by a university professor /
essay by a neighbor*

2 / I
DON'T
WANT
TO BE
THOUGHT-
LESS

The air around me is light, moving through my hair and along the collar of my sweater even though it is zipped up tight. Cars far off accelerate, and brake. Finally their swell subsides. The moon makes pale patterns on the voids of earth in the deep blue grass.

*

The textbooks sit silent back in my apartment, beaten at the tip of the spine. Grades and credit hours, the loan debt numbers of my students tighten my memory. Can philosophy be learned in the classroom?

I can breathe, here, now, but there is no security with what we're doing. Big children shell inside genitals that work as pumps and motors. We've done this; we do this. I teach "virtue" without any of us growing. These aren't score, I mean scare, quotes. They are something merely mentioned, seldom used. For the life of me, I am not singling people out. I accuse myself. The *form* of schools, of my classrooms—even the progressive ones arranged in a circle—are not virtue prone. They are misshapen verbs. If virtue is above all a habit, to teach virtue without habituation is not to teach virtue. Plato's Ἀκαδημία wasn't this way. It, it was hylomorphic.

The personal and the professional peer at each other across the thin, black line of a contract. When do the soldiers leave the trench? In second grade, my stepson fills out bubbles, boxes and half-written lines. Under-surface your mind. Later, Sunday, he runs onto the diamond with my old, leather glove, the opportunity he fields. Sunlight is everywhere, kids colliding.

"Exercise" comes from the Greek *askesis*, the root of *ascetic*. Wiki will tell you that. What are professors for? It depends on whether we are only laborers of industrial theory. Form delivers content, a game of sudden opportunities within lazy life. Run and run, until your shins are green and the glove bends away from you with

swollen weight. Lopsided, what's consistent. The form of a credit hour learns the game. Old white man clicks the Powerpoint.

What is powerful? The *Ἀκαδημία* put the form of a way of life into practice: call it “hylomorphic.” Is there an orchard in the mind beneath the mind? And how do we walk in it?

You're on board a corporation, schooled in the midst of commerce, professor to the test. BP wants PR; professors, orthodoxy. We need right *belief*, not BP's appearance. But it is possible neither appearances nor propositions are the scene of learning—a strange and demanding thought. Suppose ethics were a groove in the body, before and beyond abstraction. Am I concerned with “ethics” or with ethics itself?

The moon makes pale patterns on the voids of earth in the deep blue grass.

Sometimes, I feel as deranged as a cubicle in industrial theory. I imagine hylomorphs running their backs along the underside of the floor, quieter than the city in an office high above the ground. I can't tell what the university is after. Only the universe we sense. Theory's point becomes power. Where is truth in our limbs? If I were concerned only with propositions, I would be content with concepts. If appearances quieted me, I would hear voiceless words. In my body, the reason is so silently inscribed. When the couple danced on the dance-floor with her hair run down their arms, no proposition spoke the truth of it, though they danced as blue truth in the depths. Knowing how, not knowing. And so knowing. Words fly out the room.

The context, the city. The industry, the globe. To grow, I need to approach learning personally, in a way that allows me to be, or to become, a person. No soldier shout: ethics taken ethically, philosophy philosophically. The space of the person—it will be hollowed out. Can writing serve original academics?

My point is that someone concerned ethically with virtue will be concerned with virtue itself. The point of virtue is to live excellently, or well, and, for a person concerned with being ethical, the point of investigating virtue is not to know virtue, but to *become* virtuous. That Aristotle took this as self-evident shows he took his investigation ethically. The point of learning is growing. The thing itself, philosophy, wisens. Erosion until curves. It's more weather pattern than mastery. And I see no difference when it comes to love or to democracy. Braking even won't do. Step out of the car. I want to study original academics, just as musicians study music by playing it.

Forms of life are more important than any point in theory. Something is more important than this point. King, no clanking of concepts around personless space.

Industrial theory

Now I am back in my apartment. I have to read my neighbor's *attempt* at philosophy. What was *he* thinking?

Philosophy's not the love, but the *appropriation* — the making personal — of wisdom (Schürmann 2003, 634–35, n. 26). In its ancient form, the point was to wise up.¹ *People* wise up, not footnotes, not rabbits. Rabbits learn how to go through the fence, evade predation. Footnotes, we chisel them into shape! Neither develops the triangle of conscious thought, unconscious body, and the mixed zone of our longing. The question is whether theory, and in general *the theoretical life*, seek the same goal as philosophy and *the philosophical life*? If they do, then the life of a theoretician seeks to become wise above all, and the practice of theory has in view wisdom in all instances.

1 See Hadot (2002, 220–31, 42–50), where, for Socrates, wisdom appears as an unattainable ideal driving one onward.

The conclusion is a simple consequence of the relation of means to their ends, the end being wisdom.

Does the life of theory seek wisdom above all else? The answer to this question requires a definition of theory and a definition of wisdom. Theory seeks a comprehensive concept of things, a grasp anticipating (and so not needing) fact, the mental handle that in fact organizes fact. By contrast, wisdom speaks to us entirely and in many voices: goodness (for deciding), truth (for believing), and beauty (often hard won and taking work in the most important things, our relationships). The different lights of action, knowledge, and connection. Listening for far off sounds in the grove where the traumatized and eccentric Plato tried to learn something different by talking with friends and exercising the body around that talk, should we understand attunement as beauty? Only if we are willing to de-aestheticize beauty, a noble goal (Harries 1998). *Goodness. Truth. Beauty?* Theory is at most a third of wisdom. A third of wisdom, theory-industry. At your best, you want to understand comprehensively and to seek truth. But wisdom.

I am deranged tonight. I am a fool. Once you realize the logical point of philosophy, it is obvious that a theoretical life needn't be a wisdom-seeking one unless it is *taken* philosophically. Whereas wisdom implies an acknowledgement of theory's place in the pursuit of a life well lived, one could pursue theory without pursuing wisdom. Welcome to the industrial university, certainly the desert of the ideal. The grove outside ancient Athens would be an oasis, today, a shimmering mirage (and my hand, mirage-writing).

If you are a theorist trying to do philosophy, the question to ask yourself is whether you aim to become wise. If you do, then you do philosophy. If not, then you do not. And this is a separate question from how students learn "philosophy" — that subject — in university. What classroom leads one to take theory philosophically? The

textbooks sit silent, beaten along the tip of the spine.
(The hand that threw them)

Weathered being

In the context of being ethical, my worry about industrial theory is not that it's useless, but that it's *pointless*. Theory can certainly be useful. But theory seeks the true. Ethics, by contrast, seeks the good (then, in morality, the right). Theory concludes in truths (or realizations that truths are not forthcoming, a move in the space of the true). Ethics concludes in *deeds*. If I am trying to become ethical, to approach virtue merely theoretically is to make a category mistake, and—from an ethical standpoint—it is to risk the vice of being abstract with oneself, perhaps even self-deceived. Another way to put this concern is that if I want to do the right thing, it won't be enough for me to think about my character. I should *do* the right thing, make it my *way of life*.

How do we study philosophy philosophically then? Think about what *ethos* itself is; it is a way of life, it is character. If *ethos* itself is X, then a discourse that does not develop X does not develop *ethos*. Let us say, then, that *ethos* itself is—among other things—a living form of responsiveness in the body. And let us include the mind as an expression of the body here, a way of thinking as a way of doing or being. Why not call this “habit” and not put down habit as if it were merely bourgeois or as if it were something rigid, thoughtless and fixed? Even scholars of antiquity have come to understand that the habit that was implicit in classical philosophical conceptions of virtue is something *improving*, growing, as an artist grows in her craft (Annas 2011). Then a discourse that does not develop *ethos* as a living habit does not develop *ethos*, period. You'd have to develop virtue's bodily groove to study virtue ethically. What kind of study is that? It would be more like a musical *étude* than a textbook.

Suppose that philosophy is a living habit just as ethics is a groove within the body. Aristotle distinguished between two kinds of ways that thoughtfulness can become a living part of us. These ways could *be* idealistic, expressing an inclination weathered into us to become wiser. This weathered being was *ethos*. It consisted of virtues of thought and virtues of character (Aristotle 1999, 1103a5–11). The distinction corresponded to parts of the soul. Aristotle believed that a part of our psychology is purely intellectual, another part intellectual and part emotional. A failure to grasp logic due to a blunt mind is a different kind of failure than a tendency to erupt into angry outbursts. The outbursts are part of one's character, and Aristotle apparently thought that only matters of character are habits (1103a14–15).

This doesn't give enough body to mind, though. Aristotle was of the mind that only character requires habituation. Habit made quasi-rational emotions stay in place serving reason. Character needs a kind of behavioral reinforcement, whereas intellectual excellence is simply in the mind once learned (1103a14–15). Really? Aristotle wrote that the emotions must learn to *obey* (1102b36). Habit? Habit is obedience for unruly hearts. But he thought that the mind does not need to obey reasons — it just needs to see them. Aristotle created this picture of humanity: truth belongs to intellect; but emotions must be weathered into us.²

Is this anticipatory industrial theory? Learning how to think requires habituation, just as learning how to be courageous does. It doesn't take the arduous task of writing the *Critique of Pure Reason* to see this. Being objective — for instance, seeking criticism of one's own position — that is a habit of mind just as even-temperedness

2 But notice how Aristotle himself throws the division between mind and heart into question at 1144a29–1144b1 and 1144b31–2. The virtue of intelligence as well as wise judgment both require habits of the heart.

is a habit of heart. I discipline myself to analyze arguments and consider objections using much the same *kind* of method—a practice—as I do when I discipline myself to stay level headed around disrespectful people. The practice results in habits: look for reasons; detach oneself from the goad of impulsive reactions in one's heart. On this one point, Aristotle's picture of the intellect is too disembodied, too unemotional.³ Grooves of the body run all the way down beneath the mind.

Suppose, then, that we say simply: We will take learning *personally*. Suppose that the learning that we seek forms the person.⁴ Then the learning that forms the person is personal. The way of relation would underlie truth. We'd change our way of being when we truly learn. We'd grow up.

Ancient philosophy had a tradition of writing that accomplished the complex, formal goals of philosophy suggested here. One school—the Stoics—called it “the examination of conscience” (Hadot 2002, 198–202). Like a shoot working toward the light, original academics—originally spoken—took this form of writing, moving

3 Consider Dewey (1916, 142) on this point, remembering Greek gymnastics: “It may seriously be asserted that a chief cause for the remarkable achievements of Greek education was that it was never misled by false notions into an attempted separation of mind and body.” Here, there is a gymnastic insight that a trained mind is habituated like a trained body, a point Thomas Jefferson also held.

4 Happily, many ancient philosophers shared these assumptions. Generally, ancient philosophical schools aimed to train the whole character of people. According to Pierre Hadot, the primary method was “ascetics”—exercises designed specifically to develop virtuous habits in someone (Hadot 2002, 189–90). Wisdom came in the *form* of these “spiritual” exercises, which ranged from gym to dialectical drills and had at their center such things as the examination of conscience (Hadot 2002, *passim*). The most famous written examinations of conscience in the history of philosophy can be found in Seneca's *Letters* and—interestingly—in Descartes's *Meditations* (themselves modeled on Seneca's *Letters*?) (Hadot 2002, 264–65).

from the grove of the *Ακαδημία* to the orchard beneath the mind.

I am so upset this evening at the university and at myself! The hylomorphs are quiet in the night. I hold these papers in my hands, my neighbor's thoughts washed out by moonlight and carried back under my lamp. Why? Why give them to me, the failed professor? I imagine that under the tree cover and between the slats of porches around the park across the street from my apartment, the hylomorph's cold, green eyes blink.

Hylomorph

"I do not try to change much in the world. But you have to be a decent person if you want to live a decent life. So if I wrong someone, I change my plans and make things good. And I have had some bad habits; I've tried to change them. These reasons are why I think that I am basically responsible.

"But I am confused. There have been times when I tried to do the right thing and had no idea what that is. Like ligament and bone, two things I thought I had to do pulled against each other. I'd want to protect my friend from pain but know I had to respect his freedom. These kinds of tensions are normal. Maybe some strain remains, but it fades after some weeks as we work through the consequences. This is not really confusion.

"Recently, I've encountered something different. I do not know what to do at all. I feel that something is wrong. My heart is bothered in the way that a series of hot nights build up slowly stripping away sleep, making me a little more, and then some more, irritable. I feel I have a mosquito buzzing around me, waking me up when I drift off. The mosquito is so small that while it keeps me dimly awake, it does not make me sit upright and deal with it. I feel edgy.

“Today I decided to deal with this junk building up in my body and gradually scattering my mind. I have time. It’s the weekend, and my kids are gone for a funny dad day with my husband. (I’m the *serious* dad.) The church a few blocks away just sounded ten A.M. It’s early June. A fan keeps me cool. I am going to do something I learned from the Jesuits. I am going to write for discernment. The technique goes back to Seneca.

“I want to make some progress figuring out what I am supposed to do. I am going to try to quiet my mind in decision.

“I turned off my computer. My phone is set only to let through my husband. I do not need to fix something around the house that doesn’t need fixing. The run can wait. So can the Internet. I want to shift things *in* me now.”

• * *

“What bothers me came in flashes—not new flashes, but antiseptic stories buried deep in the science section. Like far off lightning hidden high up behind the clouds, I knew something was there but did not focus on it. Oddly, these stories lit up something in my chest and stomach momentarily and then overlaid each other until a residual feeling kept. I came across them trawling the Internet, scanning magazines lying around the office, or in snippets of talk before lunch arrives and between the weather and sports: “hey, did you hear?” And I picked up one of my daughter’s course books when she was home for Spring break. The author—a professor at New York University—wrote:

Many biologists believe that the sixth major wave of extinction since life began is now occurring, and that this one, unlike the other five, is being caused by human action (Jamieson 2008, 6).

“My mind has been on mass extinction. I feel that we are undermining our home. I don’t want to exaggerate. At the same time, I do not like to think of humans as ultimately destructive. Mass extinction seems to point to our basic destructiveness. This reminds me of original sin all over again, but I left the church years ago in part because of the doctrine of sin. I believe that we can change the social world to protect our Earth inheritance.

“Over the last months, I did some amateur research and found that there is a range of estimates for the number of species that will go extinct during this century. Neither end of the range leaves me comfortable. The worst estimates say the planet will become like Mars with only 200 million *humans* left on it. That is insane. In such a scenario, most of our inherited life on Earth will have been wiped out, mostly due to climate change. I don’t trust these predictions — not because our technology couldn’t wipe us out, but because one thing I learned in my science classes was that there is a lot of uncertainty when we get to the level of the planet. Science is neither certain nor unstable.

“A more moderate estimate by a celebrated biologist at my nation’s oldest and most renowned university suggests 25% species loss over this century. Then there is a much-cited United Nations report from 2002 predicting that 25% of the world’s mammals will be extinct by 2032. And there are dire things to say about other kinds of species, too. One report discussed in *National Geographic* in 2004 put 1,000,000 kinds of land plants and animals extinct by 2050 due to global warming. Finally, on a more cautious note, I have heard of 20% of all species at “increased risk” of extinction over this century if the planet warms as it has over the past 50 years. But these old figures are superceded and adjusted all the time, almost always for the cautious worse.

“The general picture is clear, and it troubles me. There is a trend. Sometimes it grows less alarmist and

sometimes not, but its conclusions come through with increasing clarity. It goes like this: *we as a species* are pushing out of existence the species that came with us into our geological era, our inherited home. We have colonized the living world and squeezed out whatever we do not use in our system. We have off-loaded our waste, our unseen form of life, onto other lives — and we are killing as we do.

“The respected biologist thinks that we will lose at least a quarter of all life forms throughout this century. That is staggering. All I have to do is go outside or look through my window and imagine that out of every four varieties of plants, insects, birds, and the occasional mammal I see, one will no longer be found on Earth by the time the grandchildren of my grandchildren see the light of day. Certainly as I have read, many of the species that will go extinct include odd forms of life I never see: strange insects and remote salamanders — even things no human eye can see. But that doesn’t help. I find these beings fascinating and part of life. Who am I to play God and say that they are worthless? We all came out of this stuff; we are all in some — very — extenuated sense kin; we are all part of a process so vast and ancient as to exceed human imagination. The least I can do is be amazed.

“I think about these things, looking at my hands paused over this paper, and the day becomes strange. A car rolls down the street, techno out its windows. My neighbor experiments with his electric clipper. Dogs bark. The lawn of my backyard is flat, green, and uniform to the eye, and I am erasing with my mind’s eye one out of every four species.

“As I look into the thick, green texture of summer here in Central New York, instead of the four kinds of leaves I see, there might be only three found on this planet at century’s end. Which one goes? All of them are pleasing to the eye and fascinating to look at more closely. And they overlap each other on this lush, summer day. I want

my children to see them. We can study them together and make comparisons.

“Of course my subtraction doesn’t make sense. Species don’t disappear in strict proportion. I’ve learned that species loss occurs mostly in ‘biodiversity hot spots’—areas such as coral reefs or tropical rainforests where life-forms co-exist densely. Also, I’ve learned that mass extinction will not work as proportionally as I’ve imagined due to the way that in mass extinctions, entire ecosystems disintegrate. Syracuse may not be affected so severely, whereas biodiversity hotspots around coral reefs already are. People at the United Nations talk about ‘uneven development.’ Ecologists should talk about ‘uneven extinction.’ A sizable chunk of estimated extinction concerns insects, amphibians, and so forth—‘ugly beings.’ I am showing my ignorance when I subtract species from my backyard. My backyard is already species poor compared to a wetland.

“As I did my research a little bit better, I found out that we *cannot* know for sure whether we are in a mass extinction. Even my favorite museum in New York State, the Museum of the Earth in Ithaca, got this wrong. The celebrated biologist at Harvard is an alarmist. Mass species extinction developed with paleontology and was understood through evidence from the fossil beds of former seas and oceans. There, water creatures with shells hard enough to fossilize left their mark and then disappeared from one thousand years to the next. To call something a ‘mass’ extinction implies a marked disappearance of ‘durably skeletonized sea creatures’ well above the ‘background rate’ of normal extinction. But the alarm currently being sounded comes from other kinds of evidence. We haven’t had time to see a new fossil record emerge! So we can’t know whether we are in a mass extinction.

“But this indeterminacy does not help. I am trying to imagine something unimaginable. Take the songs of birds I hear nearby. One of my favorites is the cooing of

wood doves. Will it go? Climate change throws off the hatching cycles of birds and insects, sometimes making it harder for birds to find the insects they need. Also, without birds and insects, much of life comes to a halt. Plants aren't pollinated as readily. And on the back of plants, so much life rests. What will protect the dove, or any of these sounds that remind me I am part of the vast process of life and shouldn't be self-absorbed? What will make me human by taking me out of the human?

"Should it matter whether my favorite species are still around if we humans have been massively destructive? And is it *fair* to pin this issue on our *species*? Isn't the problem my industrial civilization, my shortsighted, industrial economy? Why, too, think of these things as *mine*? Also, the fact that I have such ignorance about ecology—and that my society has even more—this bothers me. I am not representing things well. My science is a jumble. It is like I do not know or care for my home.

"I think these things. But I am unclear about what I should do. I don't hear the people on TV or around me at work talking about the unknowable risk of mass extinction—not beyond the brief blurb or casual remark by someone who picked up Kolbert's book. Extinctions weren't an item of politics in the 2008 or 2012 presidential election—and good luck for the 2016! There's a disconnection. My society is off. There are only 10,000,000 recorded species, but apparently countless more unrecorded. One weekend naturalist I ran into at a dinner party told me recently he'd read that there are as many as ten times more. Even if we lead a quarter of the known species to extinction, that is over two million species killed. I do not know how to think about this. I do not know my responsibilities here. I do not hear people discussing these problems in everyday life.

"Life flows about me in a wave. I love being part of it. But I feel that I am in a dream. Is this life we're living in the United States of America the anti-life?"

• * *

“My hands are tired. I sat on the porch for a while. It’s afternoon. I realized that I am writing this for you, Amina and Rasaan. You are my kids. I love you.

“As I’ve read, the main causes of extinction come from our population growth, transportation, consumption: mining and logging, fishing and monoculture, clear-cutting and real estate development. Then there is climate change, ocean acidification, nitrogen run off, increased UV radiation from depleted ozone. As we reach 9,000,000,000 by mid-century and continue an industrial form of life in a poorly politicized capitalist economy, our effects spread into every nook and cranny, depth and shoal of planet Earth.

“Yet a good portion of people hold life to be sacred, rare, respect-worthy, magnificent, or wonderful. We school our kids in it. For instance, Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus all agree that non-human life is worthy of reverence. The indigenous nations of this state—the ‘People of the Longhouse’—are *grounded* in it. Reverence for life would appear to be justified to a large portion of humankind. So the duty to treat life decently is certainly *known*. What are we doing then?

“When I think about these things, I feel drained. My morality and my life do not connect. Am I just selfish? Is this how my society raised me?

“But I know that we do care, and I am not going to personalize the problem this way. People are roughly conscientious, and I take pains to do the right thing. So where does the problem lie? I am not wicked. But I am part of what’s wiping out so many processes of life.”

• * *

“When I look at the life-processes we call ‘species,’ I realize that there is a moral split between species and individual living beings. It’s like thought goes in different

directions. The individual life calls out for the attention that anything living deserves, while the species elicits something different—awe. Here is a process patterning over generations, slowly changing, then one day fading from time.

“Suppose a living being crossed my path, a kind I’ve never seen. It has a strange set of traits. Its skin is as smooth as a worm, but it has legs. They are soft and malleable, unlike an insect’s legs. In addition, it has a coloration unlike any worm or millipede I have ever seen. I am so surprised that I take a picture with my cell phone.

“At the same time, this thing is going to get smashed on the sidewalk. I am not the kind of person who leads an ant outside the house when I find it inside, and maybe it’s better for this weird thing if only those members who don’t walk on sidewalks survive! But still. I think twice before going on my way. In this case, I don’t see why I shouldn’t usher it off the sidewalk. I don’t think it is the kind of thing evolution will help *not* walk across sidewalks. The sidewalks are our obstacle here. Too much thinking. I lead it off with a twig to which it attaches.

“I have a friend a few blocks away. He’s a weekend naturalist who is also a philosophy professor. He moonlights in entomology and knows scientists. Imagine he showed the picture I took around to colleagues, and imagine it seems I saw a mutant, what people a thousand years ago called a *monstrum*—an individual without a species. Does this mutant being species-less make it any less respect-worthy?

“I do not think so. If anything, its uniqueness calls for more consideration.

“As Spinoza said, every living being has its *conatus*, its drive to be. Why should I overlook the striving individual when the universal kind—the species—is abstract?

“Then what of species? The species is an abstraction. It’s even a biological convention. Species are rough placeholders of an organizational process happening between

ecologies and individuals through genetic lineages over millions of years.

“Could we say, then, that my concern for individuals involves *justice* — an attention *to* them — but my concern for species involves *wisdom*, an awareness *of* what matters? Take this geological process, ‘life.’ On our planet, it arose — seemingly singular of chemical events. Order constellated over millions of years — biochemical systems and evolving rules of life as my philosopher friend describes them. There were crashes in the system, mass extinctions a hundred million years apart for various reasons, and then life redoubled in their wake. Life is fecund as our planet is. All human beings are just a moment in its time. Here is a moral feeling — why?”

“I am bothered by two things. I am bothered by our unintentionally and thoughtlessly killing — our civilization a ‘maelstrom of killing’ as this guy Rolston wrote. And then, I am bothered by the *scale* of extinction — an *industrial* scale even — by the way we have managed to jar the planet, interrupt its flow, shift geology itself. Yes, it is either alarmist or inaccurate to claim we are in a mass extinction, but we *are* doing massive things, things that on a smaller scale would concern me, but which on an industrial scale unnerve and trouble me.”

• * *

“It is late afternoon, and I am just getting to the core. I have read arguments claiming widespread species extinction is bad because of what we might lose when losing species. Suppose a species provides the future cure to cancer, but we make it extinct now. Therefore, we should protect species from going extinct in order to protect potential but at present unknown benefits to humankind.

“But this argument’s reasoning can be used against it. Any species *could* be useful to us at a later point in time. Yet protecting a species might block the way for

new species to come into their own, and the new species might just as easily help us, even better than the ones we protect.

“The deeper problem is that these kinds of debates do not grasp the gravity of a true mass extinction cascade. One scientist I talked with at the Smithsonian when I visited there last year said matter of factly that if a true mass extinction cascade begins, first, we won’t know it until it is too late, and second, the human species is almost certainly doomed. He wasn’t alarmist in tone. He said that the rules of life are so profoundly rearranged during periods of mass extinction that you cannot expect the ecological order on which species depend—especially dominant ones—to remain stable.

“Should we be debating our self-destruction?! But even if we are not yet in a mass extinction, not yet lost, I am concerned with how we are *being*, not just what we are *causing*. Saying extinction is bad because of what we might lose doesn’t get at what our actions say about *us*. *Our* obliviousness to what we cause, including our potential self-destruction, including our moral relations with species and living individuals—*that* obliviousness is also a problem! We should not be oblivious to abuse. After all, if species can be useful to us, it doesn’t matter whether we put them at risk or something else does. The risk is bad all the same. But there is a moral dimension to what *we* are doing that is different than the risk caused by mass extinction—from us or from a meteor strike.

“I do think that if half of the world’s species go extinct, it will hurt us. I believe that it will destroy us over a long, slow death increased by wars over what is left. The United Nations Environmental Program predicted in 2007 that by mid-century, we will see 150,000,000 people fleeing environmental problems in the world. These refugees will suffer, and the political and economic instability they are likely to cause will expand the circle of suffering beyond them. Where do you go when there’s no more livelihood or food? Whenever there is massive

species loss in the history of life, a point comes where food chains and then whole ecosystems collapse. This kind of collapse—what ecologists call ‘trophic level collapse’—is risky for us depending on how widespread it is. Think of our imminently deserted oceans. The UNEP report was focused on climate change—and so rising oceans and desertification—but you just have to iterate the problem out with a mass extinction cascade to imagine how bad things could become.

“Yet even if these warnings end up being alarmist, even if we head off the worst that we could do to ourselves, what bothers me is what we *are* doing to other forms of life, not just to ourselves. The beetles and bees, the microscopic lives in the sea, the many plants and birds—I am in awe of them whenever I stop to look closely.

“Friends have told me to stop being sentimental. They say it is ironically egocentric. They say that the narrowing of life’s lushness now leaves room for future life, for life-blooms then. Just as we emerged out of the shadow of extinct dinosaurs, so a mass extinction would clear the way for future development, for *new lushness!* There will be *new awesome beings* in another ten million years. What we do to life on Earth is insignificant from the standpoint of geological time unless we destroy the Earth itself. *Life keeps going!* If form gives way to form, devastation shouldn’t bother me. I should get over it.

“Is it just that I am attached to this world, to my species, to what has come to be? It seems arbitrary to hang the protection of species on what I happen to like, even deeply. Am I simply being selfish for the sake of my kids? Yet I am *bothered* by the scale of our destruction, and that destruction takes in countless species of which I do not even know, much less feel attachment.

“I am bothered by what all this says about *us*, about *my* society, and so about *me* as a part of it.”

“A thought occurred to me while writing. My speaking of ‘us’ is problematic. Who is this ‘us’? Your dad is African American, and I am Irish American. There are many indigenous people in this land—right here in Onondaga country—who do not deserve in any way to be part of this ‘us’ that is being cited as clueless in my writing today. Onondaga society is structured by a different kind of thinking that is mindful of future generations and has space in it to discuss mass extinction much more thoroughly than the United States of America, which colonized—and still colonizes—the Onondaga Nation and its sacred lake. We see this lake, ringed by private property, a mall, remnants of the industrial economy that polluted it. That’s ‘us.’

“Even your funny dad would have a different viewpoint, because to be black in the United States of America is to see how domination’s disrespect for lives works. I need to get to the bottom of something bothering me in the mainstream culture of my society’s economy and politics.”

• * *

“I haven’t solved my problem, and I haven’t dissolved it either. I don’t have a clear conscience. When I try to turn to the species themselves and find a reason why they ought to be part of my reverence for life, counterexamples muddy the stream of my reasoning and prove that I do not have a sound position for revering species just as they are over future ones. I feel that my instinct to protect them comes down to my attachment to them, and yet I also know that my conscience suggests that I am doing a moral wrong—not simply a denial of my preferences—by participating in the cause of the increased rate of extinction on our planet. I feel groundless, and yet worry I am being unreal, misguided by abstract reasoning away from what any decent person would see looking at the scale of destruction we are slowly causing.

“So I am going to forget dinner and push on. You kids and your dad are still out having fun. Maybe I can be a little lighter by the time you all get home.

“What would a decent person see looking at the civilization I am in causing so much extinction around the planet? The speciation process is indistinguishable from the history of life. It is astonishing. Just there, on its surface, it thus deserves some respect. What kind?

“Decent people do not destroy thoughtlessly. They are not what we would call ‘destructive’ people, even if they at times have to take or destroy for well thought-out reasons. I think decent people would approach the loss of species through the prism of a vast, inherited order bearing the work of countless past human lives and bundled together through the ecological transformations of countless species that have evolved alongside us *humans*. I think this awareness of a vast, inherited order would allow decent people to grasp the gravity of species loss as it is currently happening.

“Countless species and the work they have done to create their environments form the historical and ecological order of the world as we’ve inherited it, an inheritance also inseparable from the vast amount of human labor it has taken to find a way to make a home on Earth, to develop agriculture, to figure out how to interact with the planet and its species. It’s not that everything we have inherited is perfect—or even good. Some things are awful—and life is largely inhuman, often cruel, and certainly indifferent in countless ways. But we have a fairly stable and workable world, an environment we can call ‘home,’ because we have not destroyed it but have rather *integrated* it with our flourishing in imperfect but some powerfully good ways, too. It’s *this* order that my civilization is playing with, risking an ecological collapse through the loss of species.

“I have an intuitive respect for order, unless good reasons apply to change it. Not only is living order more complex than what our best science can yet fathom,

living order is an especially wonderful thing *on the whole*. I don't know how to think of home or humankind without some awareness and gratefulness for it, including the order of species that have co-evolved with us. It's not just that this order is *useful* to us. It's that *humankind* is bound up with it and has made a home in it. In this way, the species around us are more like our kin than our objects. But my civilization seems to treat them as objects to be used up or as things that can be disregarded, like gravel on the side of its road.

"Being of this vast order myself, I feel moved by it as one moved by distant kin. The mass extinction of species is not simply a *reduction* of life as we know it. It is the *destruction* of our hard-won and hard-worked *home*. When we lose many forms of life, we lose their interrelationships, which make up the order we've inherited and on which many forms of life depend. We lose the efforts of living history that have profoundly shaped who we are. We undermine our own ancestors' having worked so hard to make a home in this world. In other words, we destroy the *quality* of life, not just its quantity. We are like descendants who dance on the graves of our parents by dancing on the graves of species.

"As I've said, there may be reasons to think that the species themselves that we render extinct might be balanced in some sense by future species that will evolve, that a new kind of sound will coalesce millions of years from now. Yet we are not presently considering the loss and the intervening silence. We are not discussing the loss of history, losses in the macro-order of life. We risk dead seas, deserts, and silent Springs—a world that is so unstable it is hard to know how to consider it except with dread. A decent person would therefore see that we in the United States of America—and in the global economy more generally—are *chaotic*. It's our thoughtlessness about all this that is most troubling. We thoughtlessly destroy an order we are lucky to have worked well to *inhabit*, and do so without a whimper.

“What does it mean to be a *destroyer*? It has taken millions and millions of years for the world of life as we know it to evolve, and in the last tens of thousands of years humankind has worked unimaginably hard and long to fashion a home in the world, to pass on wisdom about how to do so mostly through practices and technology. The forms we have inherited—including our own—are survivors of chance, ‘momentary cosmic accidents’ as Stephen J. Gould wrote. And we are also hard workers who have made the Earth *together*—not just us alone, but the order of life around us, with us, and *within* us, too. Even so, we hardly understand how this order of life fits together. We learn more about it every day, and we have more to *remember* about how our ancestors and fellow nations have learned about it, too. This vast order of life currently threatened by the risk of mass extinction is beyond anything we have ever created. We should show some *reverence*.

Reverence is awareness of human limits....You’re in the grip of something vaster than you are (Neiman 2008, 232–35).

“I read that long ago—it was recommended in the *New York Review of Books*. It describes what strikes me as a decent attitude: awe and humility before the complexity of life and the sheer *effort* it has taken for us to get here. That this order has come about both by chance and by unimaginable work is even more reverence-worthy. So at the least, hurtling thoughtlessly toward—even the risk of—the sixth mass extinction is wrong, because it is irreverent—of *the life out there* and of *us*.

“Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote that conscience is the love of order, understood by him as a kind of hard won harmony of practice. Irreverence is seen in how we unintentionally tear apart, hard-won, fortunate order. It is shown in not really talking about and deciding together what we are doing, what should be changed, what can

be lost, and what should be kept, including kept off limits. These omissions show a flawed, societal conscience. We're not taking things in.

“Order that

feels
 stirs
 moves
 breathes
 swims
 flies
 grows
 spreads
 reproduces
 blooms
 drifts
 becomes
 labors
 stabilizes
 considers
 interacts

...

“If a species led to the death of much human life, there would be a reason to render it extinct. If, collectively, we have good reasons to change our environment, we have good reasons—but are they good enough to respect our fellow humans on Earth? There is a big difference between this kind of justified, deliberate destruction and chaotic, thoughtless destruction. Our public sphere has almost no serious discussion of what we are doing, and there is very little awareness of the extent of the spread of extinction. My point is precise: thoughtless, *without a thought*.

“Especially since the industrial revolution began, in the space of only two hundred years, some societies have managed to set in motion a massive rending of our world's fortunate order. They (we) have done this on the backs of other, colonized societies, and without regard

for what most of the world thinks. Even if I can't argue that each living species today has a reason that it must be preserved, and even if chance will absorb our destructiveness in its branching proliferation of time, the way we in my nation are acting legitimately bothers me. It is shocking behavior, the kind I would never permit you or myself. Too much is at stake, we know too little about what we are doing, and we haven't stopped to think *together*.

"The manner of our living, the way we are heading into the unknown area where even serious scientists start shouting 'mass extinction!'—that is the problem. The thoughtlessness of how we act displays obtuseness to something meaningful in so many ways.

"Early this morning, I wrote that most people are conscientious and that most have reverence for life. Now I see how the problem goes deeper. We in the United States of America are acting chaotically. Our convictions and our behavior disconnect. But responsible people do not act this way. We shouldn't believe one thing in our hearts, then contradict it.

"If the problem is a failure of responsibility itself, the problem is located *behind* conscience, before we ever listen to it or think that we do. We have, first, to be in the habit of stopping and thinking for conscience to guide us. We have to be in the habit of listening to conscience. Irresponsibility undercuts both habits. Irresponsible, we're not in a position for having conscience. And when it comes to alarms about the sixth mass extinction—or simply widespread, planetary extinction—we show that we're in no such position. We have not stopped to think, not as a people, and nowhere in the capitalist global economy where I've lived. I am beginning to revise my view that we're conscientious, because I don't think we appear to be in a position to *be* conscientious. But that is an even worse kind of socially organized irresponsibility.

“Where is the source of the chaos I’ve been feeling these past weeks? I think the root disconnection is between effect and cause. Consequences matter when they convert our actions into something we don’t want them to be. The effect is widespread extinction, and we in this global economy are the cause, *because we support this economy, because we support the business as usual of the United States of America and many other nations*. But we are not owning up to the effect, taking it as our own, because the effect emerges from all of us in poorly organized society. We are acting as if we were not acting. Though the rumors of our effects have been in major media sources now for over a decade, we do not hear them and then go to confirm or to disconfirm them. Practically speaking, they do not matter to us, for as a Russian philosopher wrote (your dad had a t-shirt with this on it when I met him):

Do not listen to what they say — look at what they do!

—Vladimir Jankélevitch

“Alerted to the effects of our actions, until recently, I did not bother to find out if the rumors are true. I did not think I was causing anything, even by *supporting* something off. I did not have time. And politics is so difficult and so filled with corruption.

“But decent people resist. I’ve been mindlessly contributing to a society that destroys the vast order that our ancestors made into our home. This society shows little thought collectively, does not even attempt a deep discussion and qualified justification. Its idiots and moguls enter the elections, but *we* have to change this.”

Aporia

“What a good sleep follows the examination of one’s own self! How tranquil, deep, and free it is, when the mind has been praised or warned, and has become the observer and secret judge of its own morals!”

—Seneca 1995; in Latin, III, 36, 1–3

Will *I* sleep tonight? I feel like a fraud. See: Non-academics do think — while I’m complaining about students who are legitimately scared. Should this come as a surprise, king? His exercise is not rhetoric, while mine often is. His goal is living itself. He is thinking about his kids.

I’m not thinking. But I should be: about the *form of questioning*. Hylomorphic, questioning that seeks know-how and reconnection is different than questioning seeking only knowledge. *The living person* thinks, rather than simply the intellect. *The living person* thinks.⁵

I could put it this way: the important thing is not just to make a person *think*, but to make sure that the *person* thinks.⁶

There is a world of difference between thinking about a detached intellectual problem that does not emanate from our hearts and an intellectual problem growing from disquiet deep in the chest, if I may put it like that.⁷

5 Cf. “No longer are my intimate impressions ‘personal’ in the sense that they are ‘merely mine’ or ‘subjective only’: they are footprints of hyperobjects, distorted as they always must by the entity in which they make their mark—that is, me” (Morton 2013, 5).

6 I remember here bell hooks (1994), whose story of how classrooms compartmentalize ourselves *within* ourselves struck me.

7 One might object that a neurotic theoretician can feel heart-felt disquiet at a purely intellectual problem with no clear relation to wisdom. True, but I would say that he is approaching the problem philosophically, although making a mistake. He *thinks* his problem makes or breaks the world. Protecting the world is a good motive, but he is mistaken that his problem actually does that.

My neighbor's exercise came from—and seemed to orbit—heartfelt disquiet. That is its form of questioning. In so doing, his exercise made sure his reflection brought in his whole existence,⁸ rather than just some part of it that can easily be compartmentalized as an intellectual pursuit and forgotten. But by bringing in his whole existence, he was *already* seeking practical and relational wisdom, whereas my so-called “academic work” appealing just to our intellects does not imply seeking any kind of knowledge of how to live. Existential connection is then key.⁹

Theory can have a practical effect on a person. But it is another thing to take theory in such a way that it has a practical *point* and a personal *connection*. That is what taking theory ethically—thinking out of an existential connection—does. Sometimes it's good to take things personally. If in philosophy the point of theory is living, taking theory personally is a requisite for using knowledge to become more human.

So the point of the exercise was in the writing, not in the reading. The ancients shared their spiritual exercises to spur each other to do their own. Keep your own notebook, said Plutarch. A reader can take most anything ethically, but in making the distinctions I have, I have focused on what the writing seems to do. It had a

8 An existence that seeks some view of the good. See Aristotle (1999, 1095b15–17).

9 This is a point Kierkegaard understood well (1988, 1983), making his writing far more fitting for virtue ethics than most virtue theory. He called his style “upbuilding”. See especially *Either/Or* (1843), vol. 2, “A final ultimatum”, where the style was first attempted. Also, note especially his invocation of the heart's disquiet in his most mature and elegant work, esp. *The Sickness unto Death* (1848), preface. Kierkegaard learned to write either from disquiet or from love. In either case, he wrote from conscience. Whatever the merits of his theology, his understanding of the *point* of virtue ethics, like Nietzsche's, is unparalleled today.

Again, see hooks (1994), too, on the role of *personal emotions* in the classroom space.

transformative point. If the writing aims, then, at wisdom itself, it proves that aim in the form of questioning. Thus, these pages from my neighbor are a different kind of thing than, say, a science textbook taken ethically by a reader or that same textbook happening to have an unintended ethical effect on a reader. They are deliberate work on his life in society.

Oh god, maybe I can go to sleep.

3 /

I

WAS

IN

THE

O P E N

THEN

*Moth-eaten time capsule
for the far future*

1.

Immed

The moon is in the gutter.
—Nick Cave

iate_{task}

or third or fifth or seven thousand
arc coughing litany and void

wavelength of a storm in thunder

with hold

this process. In the dust room above the corner of
53rd & Kimbark,
it's summer, sleeveless, wet.

[...] auma in a room of notes
Acanemic hylomorph, industrial arm

At 19,

Herr Stern sketched while
a hunter in the sky with belts
sang cave-light symphony of the Holocene.

At 40, I held the letter they sent in my hands.

*

Lars' tape came in 1998,
four years before defense.

I had no way to include '89

that fresh, open time

when the Norwegians mixed

their three hundred year bent streets with gone, drunk
legs

at Big Benneth's clock & barre.

Gothic polyp of dyed black hair
& Max Von Sydow's intelligent dying lit Julie Delpie at a
distance.

Tarry & *Traum*, they gesticulated mildly
and fretted

Tarkovsky the ceiling round

the wavelength of a storm,

later alight over the bridge I crossed daily on clouded
water.

I didn't know how to include, and so, I write this
now.

*

Earth thought 66 of 365: “All one needs is a system. Once a day to do some small thing: fill a glass of water from the tap. Flush it down the toilet, only that. The world would have to change.”

*

Earth thought 27 of 365: I need a voice that isn't philosophical and isn't poetic. Which isn't religion. Which is experiment. At the pace of Earth time, with the part of us that isn't destructive or blind.

*

I need to tell you why I writ this thing.

A pall — in air — strained, we carried
 branch and bronze.

Years of frost.

The first things are fresh weather.

Slowly heard and cavernous –
 their history scratches out chalk,
tic, tic. The kid-bearing Summer,
 the kick.

Century's early, crawler.

Supper's late, *bawd*.

Open-end the cry & never ever-
stop.

I stood on the floor, the rain of Europe behind me.

Who

wept as you walked through Paris?

Only Beckett heard
your sky-zinc slouch, the reflections along the bar in a
room of sweating men.
I was nineteen; you were Folio,
a pocket-book bought on the ark of dying animals.

*Cloud tasting souls of cinder.
Ash in the stones along the shore.*

With St. Sebastian, we cracked the spine. Was
that his name? I sat near the spire, silent near noon and
waves of air flowed from the clock. Street, knock,
Nick
Cadavrous:

*Pigeon dripped from vine.
His dirty beard soaked in time.*

With that bum I red — a stranger thing. I *lift your hands
and sing
together. We loved* the elements
or tossed hair,
sunlight in busses, the forgetful café
with plastic seats.

A car gear-shafted patiently, &
you poured out, and
out, you poured
wholly out
the wavelength of a storm, all

*

Euphoria

Three days past tenure, I
 started hearing drone. The
 main was bad shoegaze
 from the globalized nineties.

Lars sent
 phylogeny as high art was Nan Goldin.
 Mine energy was spentlet

me tell youlet
 announcements fade.

O there is nothing like dozing in a mystical city.

6 A.M.

On mixed tapes from my last four years to defense,
 I'd often place the song near
 The End. Farther,

blue room and clouded time.

historia. My

[...]

*

Earth thought 3 of 365: We have a right. But this morning
 like last night, I have no idea where to turn to find the
 world beside me as it should be. Or it should be of each
 and every one of us.

*

Only industry has grown and human population.

Or Earth's tense coil, the why that doesn't
drift aimlessly for those who sense it.

Of course, no, I can't be right. "Transcendence,"
floats. Behind all signs, life declines.

My room was narrow, heat-knicked, and long.

Almost nothing in the fridge. Iced coffee in a
condiment jar.

and summer again.

Endlessly footnotes	mote
on waves of	sound

beat box cars shaft gear so patiently, say:

*Small peas
made from sugar bees*

nursery tease

of my last memory.

*

Earth thought 65: Individualism in the 70s made the
world inside the rage, while around us all, industry
spewed junk into the

sky.

2.

Histo

ria

Child of the '70s

Feathered hair and flesh on hand,
'77 was hot. I was a kid, but
you could sift evaporated
care.

Corvettes swooned a teen-age back
unconscious in the sheets. If
troops sinned, weather-
men underground. Way
gay love on the side.

All blocks, tall cities
popped corn to Skywalker drops.

Or ozone made a hole inside
our kind, releasing
mental night. Rococo
Foucault, *so*
rock-n-roll
trigger. I
am loud, my
armpits shag,
breasts unhassled
twice.
And T-shirt company's equal you
suited corporate ducks.
So come, boss,
multi-orgasmic
you
friend your partner's last
(Freud's asked). Our
bacon days are
shipped. And
Anna brings home
groove in buckets crude
from oily trips.
Our hips feverish in her
neon pants.
Untethered worlds are lies.
I cannot believe that sweet
infinity made linguistic
tapestry
travesty. Desire's a
self-help book.

*

Earth thought 126 of 365: I sat on the floor with students last night, revising their semester-long work. Harried and laughing, once near tears, they tumbled out of industry with barely time to lose. And we post-students are like them with our home improvements and loan accrument, our tasks, competition, dinners. We tumble out of time with barely life to lose.

*

1945, '50s

A star of death invaded France
 and engraved the Russian front.
 History's in ruins. Civilization
 cries — *on you, on all that I
 love, on all the old memories.*
 Fond, long bitterness—
 my necrophilic bile.
 The bureaucratic crime has just begun while
 we were bleeding in
 the streets of Normandy.
 Coldness will set in. The winter of
 our silent killing
 beneath a planetary hush,
 dying ocean.
 And the water of the lapping shores
 sends soft messages to overseas lovers.
 We're concussed within our new-made homes,
 appliances a whirl of light and humming.
 My temples are drumming in
 this new-made life. I
 am so busy, I do not
 see that I have spent intention.
 My husband almost died while
 my father lost his job and

my children will be full with
 food and images:
 a new made T.V. set.
 There is money to be made in our appeasements.
 There is money to be made in advertisements.
 I know, Tom
 told me, if
 he made it home from work.
 Things take off.
 Big times win.
 And all that we've wanted I've
 forgot.

*

Earth thought 114 of 365: Moral heroism needs new things.
 Organizational decision puts the future incrementally
 at risk. Don't stop a bullet with your body. Unlock the
 patterns!

*

Rachel Carson, early '60s

The housewives were the first to freak.
 Birds died everywhere —
 a carcinogenic binge.
 War II's crew of industry all-
 for-profit in
 the chemical dawn. We
 didn't know. The silent foe invades our bodies
 as we slept. It was there
 in dewy sunrise, calculated on the flowers and
 the stacks of dying wasps.

Rachel'd had enough. Her breasts undone
 as they metastasized, she
 wrote clear messages in *The New York Times*.
 Spelled "pesticide":
 "cry."

*Dust the nightstand at a chosen time, and
 make the lawn a green and uniform expanse –*

Then *your* family.
 At sunset at dinner, *Tom!*
 In mailrooms in noon, *Senator!*

We'd never have thought that man has all
 the means to wreck our order. Once,
 from blow or chains or hunger it
 came. A soldier with a bright and steel-hard cask,
 a nationalist. Or unhinged man alone
 along the cold, wet streets at night, a
 threat. But
 how things change. They
 slighten in the waning century,
 are infinitesimal addition born
 by Tom and Mary, the Senator, the shopper.

*

Earth thought 52 of 365: City of homes. Life passes
 through like utopia. And this city is real, a billion years
 of strength. The doorway, the species. The species: evo-
 lution's stream of life. Phylogenetic tapestry. Portal of
 time.

But we throw the wavelengths off. Doorways shut. And
 we close down the city for many million years.

*

Paleo-geography, 14,000 years ago

It is windswept,
 the forests all a roar of air like oceans
 as mega-fauna falter
 spear by axe and
 hands eat the mastadons,
 letting the carcasses fade to ground
 half-done.

Atlats are points of time.

They, they are future.
 Shaken rod stuck deep in bone, it
 bled there
 in the ice-chilled moon

*

Dubai, 2008

I AM HAPPY though I didn't know
 that beach and sand are served
 as caviar in a tray that's
 couched along a bay of ice
 and bubbled by champagne brunches
 made accessible to the *hoi polloi*.

Or

those from England, France, and Spain—
 (while India's mostly off limits) and the Philippines
 send thin-boned, gentle faces

to take our orders and our shirts.

Sri Lanka's there! China, too! Bangladesh!

And high Nepal.

The workers live together all in six foot rooms, a trunk
 beneath them

with burners for cheap lentils.
 “HISTORY RISING” said a sign stretched
 far across the sea.
 But time begins to shrink infinitesimally.
 There’s a loop in
 this scene and others.
 I feel frenzied at
 noon beneath the shade of three tall buildings.

Nightly, soft service girls pull men far out all along the
 line.
 They pinch them. By and by, they say:
 “Take me.”

Do not
hit me.

*

Earth thought 163 of 365: Recently, the Alaotra grebe of Madagascar went extinct—another bird kind, an increasing number. The causes are clear—we took their home, moved in new species. Alaotra had nowhere to go, couldn’t cope.

Globalization’s just another name. Globalization is mass

extinction

•

3.

I was in

the [• • •] then.

The macro-perspectives of geological time and of planetary ecology make it hard to keep in view, simultaneously, the human. I look at a book bag I bought alongside my father from Strand Books. On it, profiles of all different sorts of people. The warmth of that memory which goes back to when I was young. Every one of those faces holds different stories.

From within each of our worlds, our loves are so intense, and it would be inhuman to forget them.

*

New York, 1989

Broadway began on 92nd nearby Symphony Space.
The buildings were a shadow in the street.
We paused
 along the median waiting for the sign to blink.
Charred coffee burns
 inside paper cups.
The homeless sift through ashcans seeking
 stubs and stuff.
Above, the sky was cloudless, blue, and inside March.

We weren't yet overrun.
Do you understand?

Windows glowed when the sunlight died.
Families fit together on the street.

~

1983. I felt the Rothkos in the room.
Museums are not busy at 3 in the afternoon.
Outside, Utica was cold with winter.
Time to go to church and sing.
There is more to life than what goes on
beyond the richest family on the block.
Like this space and song,
an intimation of people, think.

Along Grace Avenue, snow rolled into slopes before the
 plow.

~

Then, Chicago in the 90s. A blue line at sundown.

Hold yourself to grain where
light begins to crack apart. A
wracked, repainted wall, an
apartment with old heating. I do
not believe in cheating and the
market never was.

Everything was inside, nothing to show for it.
The sounds of marimbas mixed with backbeat
as ghettoized selves rolled to red octagons.

O — O

there is nothing like living in a genuine city.
The incognito life is lost on houseplants.
You steam cylinders with exhibit.
Innocence is realness with no news flash,
nor repayment in cash.
No eternity ever was soundbit.
But the people, the people are everywhere.

I once crawled down an apartment closely
owned by a soul.
She was searching for her way to give.
In the cold, we went to eat in a rusty bar.
Locals collected on Saturday and ate vegetarian soup!
O truth be told, I remember you
and November.

*

What I first thought
when I saw you off—
the taxi said goodbye.
I rode on.
And on — you
disappeared around
the block

Your hold in pink-red fabric
 a dress with roses
 against your almost blue black hair.
 When you talked,
 you were alive,
 twins inside,
 your natal glow a mood
 I could not cast off.

That is why you kept me
 inside this memory of silence.
 Seldom do I know
 how to map existence.
 Here is a corner in New York
 where young lovers we once were
 on the grass of the Munstitute.

You walk out of my life
 _____→ away.

*

14th Earth thought of 365: The look on my parents' faces
 that night before their 45th wedding anniversary.

Money makes little difference beyond modest means.

Status likewise is a joke.

There isn't even pride in contentment. Quiet is the
 need.

You'd think we'd approach our planet, indeed, through
 the Significant.

*

And then there was the translation, looking back.
 Somewhere still in summer, I rang an old friend on the
 line.

Cell-less, booted inside a phone,

the sun was old, yellow, alone, the city anticipating
night.

Not a thing.
Outside, the street, pavement, quiet.

It doesn't matter.

I was in the open then.

*

A wedding, 2009

... subways, shot, sleeveless, wet ...

kitchens,

tubs,
sinks,

child-washing,
news, links
sprawled
photos
bright colored toys, dark

tolls

long halls
Mom Dad
basket of

cries.

[adapted from a poem on May 18, 2009
for Chris' and Mary's wedding]

4.

The psyche **sh**

atters slowly.

Pink Angels (Willem de Kooning)

Pieced, lean, inaccurate,
events derailed time.
Work is not an engine; know
that the shape of pink is home.
Willem stoved a studio
as sex and Elaine slept.
Rose and turned when images stay
aligned in your mind, you wake.
It took ten years to make
the psyche shatter slowly.

I, no, you . . . am there.

Beneath us, the senses unbound,
stalked on splinters, we allied broken with light.

Say what you want — it wasn't confessional.
The mean and stuff of bodies seldom is.
——— whether they are souls or limbs ———

*

Earth thought 1: We are individualistic. We have missed it.

*

Earth thought: The child's face in light.

*

Aurora

The lake open in the afternoon light.
Tufts of wild down seeded wind-side into air,
while grass wears a gauze of fine off-white.

We were *becoming-cloud* without anger and evolved.
Water see-says the shore between lapped elements
as scales silver bowl beneath green waves upturned.

*Do you see the graduates, long thighs along the dock?
A boat stops near them, chats or calls. A shell
catters softly beyond their point. Then
the wake comes inward and the rocks splash black and wet.*

How could we be without animal order?
Our shift beyond our border which the Buddhists try
to make is something true,

where something softer,
unspoken
gives.

Wind lives as movement,
sidles unsuspecting into ours.

Once
I lay here at the landing's edge and heard the story of
the drowned.

I was struck soundly by the sad, sure truth.

How could some one in such a pure, lost water
cross silt to the billowing
plume of
forgetting?

Knock.

The summer day says we should become a festival.

Children splash wild shallows all a ring while spent flies
flick their legs on
tables.

Cool the clouds
blue wavelength of
a storm in wondrous
hunger.

Now there are voices!
carload headed for the leap

We run too.

5.31.10
Aurora, N.Y.
Walt Whitman's birthday

*

Earth thought 131: See the strata where I once lived,
underwater, ocean, & strange. Overlays compel in ways
advertisements do not. Shells don't seduce. They are
coolish fact.

*

The impossible cities party

Center and non-center. And similarly in
ecological life.

How we maintain
stable vision
is that we bend sense to fit.

In our world,
and beside it,
then in yours,
above.

We should outlive, but we die inside these tasks.
Dexterities bound our funneled work,
round and round in Earth.

Across the dusty galaxy, fists
sky-scraper cranes and the dead,
dozing, worker's eyes.

Some far-off place
was spent.
Dirt-street and florescent shop
phone-card, plates of rice.

Sympathetic ears save silence.

We talk resistance. Let me be clear.
This must stop.

*

Suppose the sixth mass extinction were caused by us. A species is like a poem, but we erase genres. We pile up the library to the *auto-de-fé*.

*

Then in a dream, I climb
a stairway behind
a friend
whom I used
to love.
We
hit Lex & 51st
with the open
life all around.
That was the
innocent
disposition.
Time, voice & life
were one.
How
to make of
weeds
what sidewalks

do.

5.

Ben

jamin

*Earth thought 146 of 365: A million year form of life. [. . .]
how it has weathered and been weathered.*

*

(untitled: text poem to friends)

I often wonder if or when
 the newspapers will stop
 —will they ever stop?
 The busses outside roar past
 a cold, November day.
 Coffee on in the kitchen,
 words on the steps,
 the courtyard.

All time in this city
 explains no thought.

[May 15, 2006, Paris]

*

I used to feel the sky's vastness unaffected by us. A
 slow moving glacier of light. Now things are differ-
 ent — effects we cannot steer just as we can barely steer
 ourselves.

*

Extinction

Like a nineteen year old with crammed feet, we
 cast off caution and made our daily rounds. Impossible
 to find the air nearer, it's
 cold,
 pale yellow on the old brick walls. Some say
 the day like any others, the heat came through
 the ventilated shutters. We watched a lecture on *scrape*.
 Song was exhausting, the otherworld quiet.
 My students scrambled. Where is the

box? I must find the box.
*came to a street. She told me about the
 cars swept by. I
 've lost my sense of
 emptiness. That should be good. Damn
 equilibrated touch when
 she walks through the door.
 The porch screen slams. Echo night along the block.
 Come to me in our room. Light from the hallway
 made your body a burning shade. You
 smell of soap and your hair is
 cooler than outside. Arms
 on backs this is
 the warm corridor of silence*

The bus's hydraulics squeaked. We
 descend.
 I have as many small things within my mind
 as an overcrowded table, a desk whose stacks of once-
 live memos
 became a folded range. *Why
 don't you make our dinner? I have to go and clean
 the backyard deck. What
 night are we asking the neighbors out to eat?*
 That six o'clock news speaks on
 small manners of new found things — like
 travel to the islands and
 how to make quiche. *Then
 I remember how it was when
 Carson felt little. He'd watch carrots
 fall to thin, neat piles beneath the life.*

*

Another Earth thought: Between character and conse-
 quence, decent people breathe in the gap. Thunder rolls
 daylong through the sky.

*

Benjamin

This Tasmanian wolf, or tiger, he died inside a cage.
 1936 was 3 years after he was filmed, last known mem-
 ber of his kind.
 If he died in April, then he did the month my father —
 Dave — was born.
 Ten tens of thousands years have ended
 when a studious man began.
 Which individual's aware of wide disorder? As I
 write now or live
 the summer and the year, some form sluffs off,
 a disheveled skeleton there in leaves against thick rocks.
 Not even a naturalist would know, or sense,
 the canopy in silence.

These are things that I do not own.

Benjamin ranged around these lands, haunches ribbed
 from time's design.
 His tail bent hard to tell a tale sent back.

*What was like your almost night? Dry
 of leaves, the hollow where you slept, your Eucalyptis
 forest,
 tides of wind and hunger . . .
 How was the riotous smell of everything?*

1936.

Hitler'd come to power. All eyes focused on his front.
 The world economy spun and grandpa Bendik jumped a
 truck
 of elbows every dawn.

Able-bodied men did some such thing.

They dug, and the Thylacine knew
nothing.

Into Earth ran
its Holocene memory of cells.

moth-exter cast of unknown ch[...]acters

53rd St. In the 1990s, an integrated street in the Hyde Park neighborhood of the South Side of Chicago where the University of Chicago is. Malik Usef, on Common's *One Day It'll All Make Sense* (1997): cars "rolled to red octogons."

5.31. Walk Whitman's birthday, when he came out of the cradle, endlessly rocking.

Guillaume Apollinaire. From the beginning of the twentieth century, a French-Polish poet. "Zone" is his long ramble through Paris while processing historical and personal time ("Sur toi sur celle que j'aime sur tout ce qui t'a épouvanté"). It's also a work of compassion ("Tu regardes les yeux pleins de larmes ces pauvres émigrants / Ils croient en Dieu ils prient les femmes allaitent des enfants / Ils emplissent de leur odeur le hall de la gare Saint-Lazare / Ils ont foi dans leur étoile comme les rois-mages / Ils espèrent gagner de l'argent dans l'Argentine / Et revenir dans leur pays après avoir fait fortune / Une famille transporte un édredon rouge comme vous transportez votre cœur. / Cet édredon et nos rêves sont aussi irréels.") Samuel Beckett wrote the only good translation of "Zone" yet. I wrote an *axe de lecture* (close reading exercise) on Apollinaire's "Autumne Malade" (ill Autumn) as a Rotary exchange student in France, 1988-89.

Marcus Aurelius. A Roman emperor and Stoic philosopher who wrote spiritual exercises designed to do inner work that would change outer life indirectly. Resignation to our mortality was one of his themes.

Aurora. A village in Central New York. It borders Lake Cayuga and has the small Wells College in it.

Auto-de-fé. Death by inquisition, in a bonfire.

Benjamin. The last known living Thylacine or Tasmanian wolf (or Tasmanian tiger), a now extinct marsupial which used to range in Australia and New Guinea. He looked like a strange, striped dog, and died inside Hobart Zoo, Tasmania on September 7, 1936.

There is also the German literary theorist, Walter Benjamin, who used literature to do social philosophy and to criticize the oppressive contradictions of our capitalistic world.

The Blue Line. One of Chicago's elevated train/subway lines.

Buddhism & anger. Buddhism proposes that (1) we should acknowledge anger, that (2) we shouldn't act from anger, but from compassion, and that (3) ideally, we should come to feel only compassionate, not angry about injustices.

Rachel Carson. A science writer woke the U.S. up from its chemical slumber by decrying the misuse of pesticides.

Nick Cave. P-punk-raconteur / who got his start in / an Australian combo. *The Birthday Party.* Ritz thru them owt cuz Cave thru amplifiers in the pit. (A *Birthday Party* song → "Blast off!")

Ceremony of the Dead. A Buddhist practice of chanting and meditating in compassion with the dead.

Coffee in New York. Is often served inside paper cups with an ancient Greek theme on them.

The Cold War. Mid-1940s to the end of the 1980s. Rise of the slow moving, silent bureaucracy with long-range effect.

Corvette. A long car in the '70s, a swooning hood.

Willem De Kooning. An abstract expressionist painter of the New York School, mid-twentieth century. His painting was in layers, hard-etched, scrubbed, weathered and alcoholic.

Defense. The closing rite of a Ph.D. — the defense of one's thesis or dissertation before a committee of scholars, open to the public.

Julie Delpie. Starlet from the '80s and '90s, seen outside France in Krystoff Kieslowski's film, *White* (*Three Colors* series).

Dubai. City of extreme consumption whose logo is a sail-shaped building called the Burj al Arab. Workers from all over the world built Dubai, often on small wages in poor living conditions, but often better than those found back home.

Earth thoughts. Begun on December 24, 2009, numbered 1 then.

Folio. Inexpensive French brand of paperbacks. In kid knapsacks.

Andrew Forrest. Served in W.W. II. Deceased now. He taught regular and honors English at New Hartford High School near Utica, N.Y. for thirty+ years. Would read and teach a poem per day unless the work was long. *The Waste Land* was a month's analysis (April 1988). Even the reading took the hour. You could hear the silence when sound and sense left off.

Michel Foucault. Poster-child of post-structuralism, saint of Gay Liberation.

Anna Freud. Daughter of Sigmund, she shaped American self-psychology.

Grace Avenue. Does not exist in Utica, N.Y., although Grace Church does. There was an old men & boy's choir in it. I sang there.

Lars Helge Strand. A member of Lycée Corneille's *section norwegienne* (Norwegian section). The *section norwegienne* was established in the nineteenth century to honor Normandy's ties to Norway. Each year, sixteen Norwegian guys begin their sophomore year of high school in *pension* (dormitory) (the gals are boarded at a school in Bayeux where the tapestry of the invasion resides). Lars liked comics, loud beer, music, punk communes, and the environment.

The Lycée Corneille is a high school in Rouen named after playwright Pierre Corneille —whose statue has bird shit on it in the main courtyard. Stéphane Mallarmé taught there. The L.C. dates back to Napoléon.

Rouen, a larger, French provincial city about 80 minutes from Paris by train. Monet painted its cathedral at different times of the day. Maligned by Gustav Flaubert who lived there. Rouen's where Jeanne d'Arc was burned at the stake. The "ville de cent cloches" (city of a hundred spires): filled with gothic churches. A downtown of cobble streets. A central clock. She overhangs the street, a Medieval arch. Next to that clock in the '80s: a *brasserie* (beer bar) named "Big Ben."

High Art. A film of the late 1990s whose central character—a drug addicted, lesbian photographer—shoots photos similar to Nan Goldin's.

Hitler. The leader of the National Socialists in Germany (the Nazis) who rose to power during what, in the United States, was called “the Great Depression.” Most people knew who he was for many centuries until the mass extinction made his evil appear anachronistic. His was pure evil for most of the twentieth century while they mostly ignored the invisible war.

I stood on the shore, the ruins of Europe in back of me. The opening line of Heiner Müller’s *Hamletmaschine* which I first saw at the Yale Drama School in Fall 1989.

Impossible cities party. Going away and 38th birthday party in Dubai, May 2008. Each invitee brought an impossible flower, a story of an impossible city, or a memory of utopia in the frustrations of urban life. Many people performed while Zlatan showed videos on the wall.

Janus. “An ancient [Roman] deity, guardian of doorways and gates and protector of the state in time of war. He is usually represented with two faces, so that he looks both forward and backward.” (*Oxford American Dictionary*, Apple Version, 2005–07) I learned how to time-travel through him.

Lex. Lexington Avenue in Manhattan, New York City. The E train stops there at 51st.

The market. The job market for academic jobs—notorious among graduate students.

Munstitute. The nickname of the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, a museum in Utica, N. Y.

Never stop. The name of a song by the band Deerhunter.

Rap. In the 1990s, a predominantly African-American musical and poetic form from ghettos with roots in African oral traditions.

Robin. A common bird, rust-breasted, in central New York.

Rococo. “Extravagantly or excessively ornate, esp. (of music or literature) highly ornamented and florid.” (*Oxford American Dictionary*, Apple Version, 2005–07)

Mark Rothko. Known as a “color-field” painter of the New York School. He said he painted “color objects.”

Second nature. Associated with Aristotle and his idea that habits, which are not instinctual, become second nature as if they were instinctual.

Shoegaze. A kind of post-punk, sometimes electronic music (*My Bloody Valentine* or sometimes *Sonic Youth* — post-punk shoegaze; *Scala* — the electronica variety). *Scala* was on Lars’s tape in ’98 (the album *Compass Heart*).

The sixth mass extinction. An alarmist worry, but you knew it was not impossible. It was caused by us humans. Alarmists thought it would be as deep as the deepest-cutting two mass extinctions in the history of life — the end Paleozoic extinction (250,000,000 B.C.), and the end Mezozoic one (65,000,000 B.C.). They were almost right.

Luke Skywalker. Character in the 1977 blockbuster *Star Wars*. Blew up the Death Star.

Slovak. My mother’s heritage. Andy Bendik was my grandfather who worked a pick-up labor crew during the 1930s in the Great Depression in Southern Ohio.

Patti Smith. '70s feminist rocker — braless, bush armpits, “Rock N Roll Nigger.”

Herr Stern. “Mr. Star” in German; an intensive German teacher at Yale College circa 1990.

Stop signs. In the United States of America, they are octagonal, red and with white letters, “STOP.”

Strand Books. If you walked down University Street in New York City, you would have seen the sign: “18 miles of books.”

Symphony Space. A world music concert space in the 1990s on Broadway in New York on the West Side. World music is music from non-Western traditions played in the West, or Western music mixed with non-Western music. These were old, colonialist categories.

Andrei Tarkovski. & 12 miles of moving painting. *Offret (The Sacrifice)* was filmed in Sweden while he was in exile from the U.S.S.R. Edited in Paris on his deathbed, it was dedicated to his son. I saw it in Rouen in 1989.

Tenure. Old school practice reminiscent of Medieval guild apprenticeship. A university procedure whereby an assistant professor earns a life-long job, barring illegal behavior. Time to tenure after college: usually fourteen years. Odds against it.

The word comes from the French *tenir* from the Latin, meaning “to hold.”

Tom. A generic 1950s man. Mary is his wife. You don't know him? In 2010, their son was Carson.

Tragedy of the commons. Biologist Garrett Hardin created this concept to explain common resources

unregulated well by custom or by law. With such resources, it is rational for some people to take more than is sustainable for the whole community, since taking more will in the short term pay off for these opportunists, leaving others in the future to deal with the increasing scarcity. The planet's atmosphere is an unregulated commons whose resource is its ability to trap pollution. Our grandkids dealt with our pollution, but too late for the mass extinction.

Victoria's Secret. A mass-market lingerie shop begun in the 1980s.

Max Von Sydow. A Swedish actor, known for work in Ingmar Bergman films of the 1960s, Von Sydow appeared at the Nordic Film Festival of Rouen in March–April 1989, where *Offret* was screened. Under T.V. lights, he was inside a glass atrium visible from the street.

Wasteland. A long, overly-complicated poem influenced by French symbolist poetry — e.g., Stéphane Mallarmé, Guillaume Apollinaire, Gérard de Nerval (a proto-symbolist). The poem was about cultural extinction, among other things.

Weathermen Underground. A Maoist terrorist organization of the '70s. Militant against U.S. military intervention abroad, they destroyed government property. Once, a faction tried to kill policemen and their dates at a New York City dance. They blew themselves up by mistake.

W.B. Yeats. An Irish poet who bridged the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His "Sailing to Byzantium" says at one point "soul clap its hands and louder sing." Shall we?

Exploded talk

4 / I WANT TO MEET YOU AS A PERSON

“My heart was a storm in me as I went.”
—Homer

In Kierkegaard and in the Enlightenment

I want to talk to you about freedom, freedom through self-reflection, and through this topic, I want to talk to you about what would be called “idealism” if it were not more simply imperfect, committed love. The way I want to approach this constellation of topics is through the morose, mentally ill writer and philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, who hardly survived—and then only until middle age—the abuse of his father and the genetics of his mind. He seems a strange choice. Since Isaiah Berlin (1997), Kierkegaard has been categorized as a counter-Enlightenment figure. But I want to ask a transformative question about him: What if Kierkegaard were instead an enlightenment writer who had surpassed the anti-authoritarianism of the Enlightenment and was instead interested in human deepening and maturity? This is not the way I want to talk about Søren Kierkegaard, whom I never knew, but who somehow managed through his writing and the effort I put into reading it to be a good teacher. As all good teachers, he did

what anyone given momentary authority in another's mind should do: he erased it, gave it up, did whatever he could to become irrelevant once the lesson became self-seen, self-taught. In fact, he took no credit at all: it was grace, it was me; no, *not* me; it was "life" — it was the reality of what I'd just seen as an intimate part of my life. I would like to talk about people like this as distant family, not as objects of academic inquiry.

A question about a historical moment and its relation to a cultural tradition may seem a dry question to ask, while the questions of love, self-reflection and freedom are real and interesting. Nevertheless, in this talk, I want to propose an interpretation of Kierkegaard's work under which he continues the Enlightenment, rather than discontinuing it, and in so doing, I want to explain how his version of Enlightenment self-reflection complicates the maturity involved in exercising one's own understanding. Kierkegaard complicated and developed one of the most central aspects of enlightenment, at least as Kant and the subsequent tradition has defined it. Kierkegaard was an enlightenment thinker (lower case "e"!). And therefore it is misleading to see him as opposed to the heart of the Enlightenment (upper case "E"). It is strange to think that he would be concerned with any of these historical distinctions. He seemed to want to meet people as people and to work their relationship out slowly with them. When I think of the way he deflected his lost marriage into an impossible intimacy he projected through his writing, I feel sad for him. His was a strange life. It reminds me too much of myself.

The Enlightenment — capital "E" — was a historical period. In it, so-called *Aufklärers* challenged people to become responsible authorities in their own lives, especially concerning matters ethical, political and religious. The key to this internalization of responsibility was considered to be the advancement of one's own understanding. People had to become connected to their

own capacity to know. According to Kant, this movement from accepting external authorities to using our own understanding was enlightenment—lower case “e.” The imperative beginning Kant’s essay “What Is Enlightenment?” (1996, 58) reads: “Have the courage to use our own understanding!” This is an elegant restatement of the central message of Rousseau’s “Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar” in *Émile* (1978). Seen in this light, the tradition of enlightenment—lower case “e”—began as a tradition of self-determination exercised through our capacity to understand independently enough to own what we each believe, that is, to assert oneself.

This tradition was fundamental to our democratic culture, whether in the form of declarations of independence or in proclamations of human rights. The notion of asserting oneself is basic to democracy, because only in it do we each have a separate voice. On the reading of Foucault two centuries later, what the Enlightenment promoted philosophically was a self-culture found precisely where we displace convention’s authority enough to assess what we each believe ourselves. This was an *ethos*, a style of living. Foucault thought that the practice of enlightenment—lower case “e”—expressed an anti-authoritarian ethos by seeking to test the limits of what was considered possible in being normal. Foucault’s historical analysis of the normal was a way of showing us heteronomy. Here was a commitment to open up the world to a plurality of voices and of intelligences and to expose the fact that norms always depend on consent—that much that is normal is not normative. **I went into the academy to create with people and to understand. I think Kierkegaard preserved the personal and buffered me from the academic market’s competition. He made me long for relationships. And I also started to wonder: could something other than theory be at the core of academic knowing? What was philosophy, most humanly? Was it really just *theory*?**

Foucault's insight was to show time and again how systems of authority people take to be self-evident are normalizations of what could be otherwise. He showed how anti-authoritarian resistance could be joined with thinking the present as a set of historically contingent conditions on our self-conception—the limits of our possibility. And so Foucault (1996a) called “critique” the movement of authority to the side of what we take to be normal in the interest of pulverizing the norms that oppressed the real trajectory of bodies and sentiments between people when people are trying to grow up and to be free. Critique was an exercise of distancing oneself from the compulsions of the historical conditions that make us accept our self-conception automatically. Critique carved out a space where we could take distance on the automatic intimidation of norms. The brilliant move on Foucault's part was to see critical attitude as *room around* our practices by virtue of first beginning to see their contingency. Could they be otherwise? Here was the ironist's art. **Thinking about Foucault and about Kierkegaard makes me think about my marriage. The process of realizing that I could not keep the oath I'd taken involved seeing the contingency of marriage norms and demanded that I be intimate with myself in a way I never had been before.**

Foucault's picture underlined a point tacit in Kant and in especially the Rousseau of the *Second Discourse*. The standard textbook picture of the Enlightenment casts it as a critique of external authority—religion and monarchy—but may neglect to emphasize the purpose of this critique: to move the *locus* of authority to how *we* make sense of the world. *We, you, I, he, she* can ask:

Does this [claim, situation, relationship, practice, social form, even system of authority] make sense to me or to us? Does it work for me or for us? Does the “me” or “us” that we find ourselves stuck with work *for* us and make sense *to* us?

This is so very much like a relationship. We have to get space around our practices, first by seeing the contingency of their norms. Systems of authority, by virtue of appealing to authority, always have a space around them by which they can be questioned. The problem is often, historically, that there is fear or shame in doing so. *They are always open to question, but a shadow morality guards them in our emotions.* **This fear lives in the body, the site of our most personal memories. It lives in fear-voice.** In our emotions, our self-conception—the very “I” that questions authority—is likely to be *positioned* by norms we have not interrogated historically. What we ultimately fear in questioning authority isn’t just its reprisals or control, but also the loss of our selves we mistakenly think will occur by being abnormal. The normal resists being interrogated by being *self-evident*, if I may put it like that.

What is it to exercise your own understanding, when you have taken space on “yourself”—and you *feel* those scare-quotes? What is it to have something agree with your understanding when you can’t trust your emotions? Also—and this question is very hard to wrap one’s mind around—is there a space on yourself that isn’t simply itself an automatic construction of the historical problem of the Enlightenment, a problem where authority is in crisis and our minds cannot be trusted at first?¹ Is there a leave-taking of authority that is life-affirming and free?

The interesting possibility, I think, is to consider something Foucault did not address. What space can move our inherited authorities, not recreating them, but unsettling them once they have come into view in half light, now crossed by the shadow of a doubt? Where does the unsettling of history arise? This is tantamount to asking,

1 See Linda Trinkhaus Zagrebski, *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief* (2012). She begins with the crisis of authority in the Enlightenment.

what unsettles norms and gives us the impulse to reconsider reasons? It is not enough to see that they are contingent. They must also be unfulfilling—they must jar with the sense of what is possible in a fulfilling human life. **It hurts to think about it.**

But then we will reconsider sense itself, the condition of our home. When fulfillment has been determined by the normal, abnormality seems anathema. To reject the normal out of un-fulfillment with it is to threaten our sense of life itself. That very sense of what is possible in a fulfilling human life is split in two and acts against our inherited sense of propriety. The threat is felt as a collapse of our world just as much as of a loss of self. We have to learn to lose to leave an authority.

In a dream, you came to me, although we have not talked in a decade. You asked me if I knew that, despite everything that happened, our time together was important to you, that you had loved me, and that I had been a part of your life. I do not have enough dreams like this.

I find Kierkegaard helpful here, because of the trace of body in his sense of virtue. Especially as the questions I've been asking become emotional, they blur the boundaries between the Enlightenment and its so-called opposition in Romanticism. And if we focus on the purpose of critique, we emerge with a view of the core of the Enlightenment that is, technically speaking, no different than what Husserl inaugurated when he claimed phenomenology as a rigorous science brackets claims to authority that have not been shown to make sense to our minds.² We emerge with a view that places Kierkegaard within the Enlightenment tradition. Here, then, would be a tradition running from the Enlightenment through

2 See Edmund Husserl, *Philosophy as a Rigorous Science* (1965), and *Cartesian Meditations* (1988), meditation 1 on the *epoché* and the idea of "genuine science." See also Jean-Luc Marion, *Réduction et donation* (1989) on the "reduction" to "givenness."

Romanticism into twentieth century phenomenology.³ In it, we would attend to the body as an expressive space. The emotional body would hold open a way of becoming that could act out against norms in a refusal that allows one to re-orient ourselves to them. The body as intelligent flesh could throw off the constructing mind. Fear could give way to freedom. This would not be to separate body from mind, but to see them as modes of one, unified consciousness that exists dynamically, and it would be to look for an emotional location within the body that counteracts fear and anxiety about being abnormal.

What would such an emotional location be? Kierkegaard was aware of the body-memory of freedom, which he understood through the experience of love. Love involves a particular emotional nexus that can best be described as the rich and multi-dimensional experience of arriving home, in a true home. Love in this way is *eco-locational*. Its memory lodges within the body as a

3 What of psychoanalysis in the early twentieth century? The standard picture would make it the opposition to an Enlightenment legacy through its construction of the concept of the unconscious and the unconscious's subversion of our claim to authority. So the story goes, our unconscious acts like the authority, whether we recognize it or not.

But this story is confused, on multiple grounds. First, the unconscious does not present itself as any authority. Rather, it throws the category of authority into question by suggesting we act on the basis of experiences that are so buried as to not even be considerations, let alone reasons. Still, this correction would only strengthen the anti-Enlightenment story, once revised. But, second, what psychoanalysis classically understood does is to surface the unconscious as a cast of mind that, when one sees how it has set in, actually does have reasons. The surfacing not only brings these reasons out so that they first become reasons *to us* for the first time, but it also allows us to evaluate them. Seeing the reasons we've acted on without previously taking them as reasons, we can now come to terms with our irrationality or have sympathy for the way we were being, in a strange way, rational. But such a process develops authority over our actual, not idealized, lives. So it only deepens the Enlightenment aim.

counter-action against anxiety and fear that at the same time involves freedom without the pressure of conformity. It is too rich for conformity; feeling loved loosens the pressure of conformity as growth loosens past fixations. The issue is no longer about being normal or abnormal, but about being a *person*—and this gives one space to think and to be, to decide on norms that make sense. It is hard to break out of the adolescent cycle of the Enlightenment—one in which Foucault largely remained—but it can be done. Enlightenment—lower case “e”—is after all about growing up. It seeks a kind of maturity we have only anticipated.

Here, Kierkegaard surpassed current conceptions of body memory as a kind of practical capacity. Academics has for too long been focused on the relation between theory and practice, without considering *the relation between person and person*. The relation between people is neither merely theoretical nor merely practical, nor merely both. It isn't enough to know lots about you or to know how to manipulate you to be your friend or even simply your fellow human being! The interpersonal space is *neither objectifying nor calculative*. And the question is how to understand this. Kierkegaard had a way. For him, more than anything, the body's memory is a kind of *relational*, not simply practical, capacity. The body is *interpersonal*. In us is memory of me before or beside the authorized me, of you, before and beside the authorized you, of us, before and beside the authorized us, of *unique persons*. The pre-personal impulse to relate clears the way to reformulating relationships. He called this love's *ground*. It was an original source to humane life. The body-memory of love challenges any norms held between us as to whether they rest in intimate attention to our uniqueness and support us in growth and in fulfillment.

How can philosophical writing locate such an emotional center in people—that is, help us locate ourselves outside norms in a space of personal consideration?

Perhaps we can simply say that Kierkegaard *provoked*. But what is provocation? Is it simply offense or debate as eighteenth century *Aufklärers* — even sometimes Rousseau — seemed to believe? Is that how we speak *with* each other? No: provocation is a mode of *interpersonal address*. It is something other than debate. That the Enlightenment — capital “E” — did not understand this was its adolescent stance, and it is a stance that still grips intellectual culture to such an extent that we cannot effectively say we have left adolescent reactivity with it. **I think of my graduate school, and I shudder.**

Provocation employs what Jean-Louis Chrétien (1990) calls “the bare voice.” Writing from a position of interpersonal address, Kierkegaard provoked his readers to relate to themselves as real people who matter, who have lives of their own and who deserve love. He located the clumsy vulnerability in seeking to relate — not to theorize, not to manipulate the world to achieve our ends, but to find a home with others. The vulnerability was grounded in the body’s way of moving us beyond our consciousness through attachment to the people outside us who, though shaped normatively, are more real than norms and are centers of freedom who decide on norms. Here was a space introduced into history *relationally* by way of making authority lose its sting and become responsible to humane reality.⁴ Humane reality is a relationship. **I think of the times when all I wanted was for us to speak. There was no way to, however. Battles circulated everywhere in the space of your mind, and I could not address them without you feeling rejected by reasoning. The shame inside you was so intense. The emotions were trapped there, large and terrifying. Then you would flee or lash out, or try to fuse with someone approximating the memory of home, a home that you never had as an abused child.**

4 Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (1991).

And here was I, afraid of conflict from my own childhood, and, in the beginning, too easily re-traumatized myself, wanting to fix everything, losing myself in the mess and then being frustrated and mad.

I believe Kierkegaard's work of voicing expresses—and indirectly indicates—a bodily intelligence that is thoroughly interpersonal. His doing so isn't simply an attempt to bring emotion into thought, as a hackneyed Romantic interpretation would have it. It's an attempt to show how the body is already interpersonal and in that relatedness, free.

Landscape of you, of me before and beside me, of us, beside the authorized or scripted us, of the vibrant tendrils of the day in blue and water. There is a garden. It is outside history. Dust erodes the edges, the edges of categories blown into it. It isn't heard or seen. Right now, it is soft as grass.

Trauma in a room of notes.

Growing up by using your own understanding

It is worth circling back to what Kant wrote about enlightenment—lower case “e”—in order to see how Kierkegaard improved on it. Kant defines enlightenment as the exit from “self-incurred immaturity” (1996, 58). What is maturity, and how do Kierkegaard's invocations continue and deepen it?⁵

The thesis I am interested in is that *maturity is a personal and interpersonal deepening*. In other words, it is guided by relational reason more so than by theoretical

5 On the overall emphasis of Kant's work as work in growing up, see Susan Neiman, *The Unity of Reason, Rereading Kant* (1994, 5.v) and *Why Grow Up?* (2014). Neiman, who was a Rawls and Cavell student, has understood well the personal dimension of both a sense of justice and the claim of reason. See especially her *Moral Clarity: A Guide for Grown-up Idealists* (2008).

or practical reason, which fall in behind our personal growth. In other words, to become mature is to become more of a *person*, and in that a subject of beliefs and an agent of intentions all guided by personal understanding. If this thesis is right, then it suggests that:

The primary area of enlightenment is actually in relationships between people and in our self-relationships by which we collect ourselves around being a person. Thus, love — not objectifying or object-pursuing reason — is the center of human reason.

These conclusions would align the Enlightenment virtue of humanity with love and relationship. Kierkegaard, I think, understood these points very well.

But did Kant? To answer this question, we'd need to begin by imagining what "self-incurred immaturity" could be. Kant's metaphor of being a "machine" helps (1996, 64). Kant contrasts maturity with the self-incurred immaturity of people who let themselves be treated or seen as "machines." It is an odd image, perhaps characteristic of the mechanism of the age that saw the universe as a giant clock and animals as machines that make noise. What is at stake in claiming that we are more than machines?

A machine is a tool that is constructed so as to carry out tasks for others. Mindless, it receives its program from without. It carries out the will of its user within the parameters of its capacity. For Kant, humans are more than machines, because we can judge for ourselves what we should do. To suppress this capacity when we have it is immature.

The body isn't a machine. Machines dream of body-machines, self-organizing, nano-technological complexities evolving as bodies do. Norms are machinic in so far as they limit the impulse of bodies. Bodies are impulses, machines are expulsions of swerve, anti-querian. Of course a machine could continue the impulse of bodies,

but then it would not be a machine. In the metaphor Kant used, we are already industrial. Our bodies allergic without knowing it, sifting to the side like sand, sprouting as grass.

To me, when you acted out of your abuse, you were never a machine. You were a weapon sent by your father and now focused through you in a repetition of a habit so traumatic you could not see that it was supplanting the possibility of home with the traumatized familiarity of a volatile space.

I repetitively responded, repeating my own familiarity with a volatilized and traumatic environment. In Tarkovski's *Nostalgia*, the poet/biographer tells a story while standing soaked & drunk in the ruin of the church of angels half submerged in water:

"A man goes by another man who is stuck in the swamp, seemingly sinking.

"He pulls the man out.

"'You idiot!,' cries the man. 'I live there!'"

So Kant is underlining agency grounded in subjectivity, the power to determine ourselves by what we believe without accepting a program from without. You can see how Foucault was developing just this thought. The entire critique of the normal is intended to open a space for subjectivity-grounded agency in this Kantian sense. But I think that Kant—and so Foucault—did not go far enough with the implications of rejecting a mechanical view of people. After all, the main way a person is not a machine is that a machine cannot love. And if what we called a machine *did* love, it would no longer be merely a machine—it would become a *persona*. Machines *qua* machines and not persons lack the freedom of *withholding* themselves and the commitment to *grow together outside of what any program or use could expect*. The heart of love is that it is not a program and is not a tool. Any relationship that is a program or merely a tool eventually breaks—as so many marriages do. Relationships require that we give ourselves to each

other and grow together, without a program and without using the other person. These qualities are found in the body, even in the hug, the embrace and the body language that frees us up to be together and makes us feel that we have the space and even the impulse to be who we are and to risk growing. The minute a machine could show affection of this sort, it would become a persona.

The way I would like to put this, then, is that “immaturity” is *a pattern of world adopted without it being personal to you*, without it being loving and part of your love. *Immaturity is not living in or seeking a true home*. What you say you think and believe does not really make sense to you. What you feel does not feel loving to you. You walk about in a world of mysterious norms. You feel impersonal or depersonalized. The norms program you and you basically just go along for the ride or submit. You are a machine. You are homeless inside yourself. Maturity, by contrast, is fundamentally *nostos*⁶—seeking to make a home whenever we are alienated from one. **I have felt this way alienated from home so often as an academic in conferences like this one where people are pushed through a compressed time and an anonymous space to listen to bits of theory and to consider some practical applications while relating to each other calculatively. Only my friends at conferences have kept the personal alive. It is weird how, after you & me, I see abuse everywhere now in our most normal institutions.**

The point I am making is that maturity is deeply personal. This is the consequence of rejecting a mechanistic view of each other. Being personal, maturity depends on the solitary and the social—in relations to oneself that collect one as a person and in interpersonal relationships that we have with each other and which, in

6 The first part of *nostalgia*, which means literally the pain of home-seeking. *Nostos* is the home-seeking itself. Cf. Sarah Gridley, “*Nostos* poetics as eco-poetics” (2016).

assuming a life of their own, give us the space to be and to grow. I call this a “home.” Kierkegaard would seem to be a leading enlightenment figure at this point.

There is more, though. Kant puts the cause of self-incurred immaturity in “laziness or cowardice” — in lack of guts (1996, 58). This leads me to wonder, what kind of courage is called for when we become persons? What is the courage proper to loving? **A piece of driftwood settles out along the lake not far from the garden split by a cloud and ruffling in cold light. I hold it in your hands and know that everything is clinging to it. My tremor is gone when you run your palm over smoothness.**

It is with this question that I turn to Kierkegaard. I think Kierkegaard understood what it is to be called to responsibility by being addressed as a person. He understood that the kind of courage required by love is the courage to *show yourself* and to *give yourself*. **Both of which are *really* hard if you have been abused.** Fifty-nine years after Kant wrote “What is enlightenment?,” Kierkegaard’s first pseudonymous work ended with the following:

Ask yourself and keep on asking until you find the answer. For you may have known something many times, acknowledged it; may have willed something many times, attempted it—still. Only the deep inner motion, only your heart’s indescribable emotion, only that will show you that something actually makes sense to you. Then no force can take that from you. Only the truth that grows with you is truth to you.⁷

This famous passage assumes a wide space around an unsettled understanding, a missing authority, the decision to find it oneself. Addressing the reader’s body,

7 Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, (1988, v. 2, 354). Modification of the translation mine.

the passage validates that what moves emotionally up through the reader's chest is where her understanding begins. In so doing, the passage assumes the lineaments of Kantian enlightenment: it underlines our own capacity for sense-finding — our “own authority” — in leaving sway an emotional movement traversing the charged fear and anxiety of “cowardliness.” The body-mind is responsible, and the body-mind helps the reader claim the authority of her own coming-to-find-sense. So she claims her capacity to grow.

But even more so, this passage shows *intra*-personally what is needed for growing *inter*-personally. Kierkegaard's summons addresses a reader and asks her to be *open* with herself about what she is feeling and to *give* herself the chance to be a person who has feelings and a view of her own. It is a *credibly* generous passage in this way — it gives the reader her own credence. The courage it thereby summons is the courage to be yourself by *acknowledging* your own personal outlook on life and the relationships in which you find yourself. It intuitively sidesteps the conformity of the normal to ask the reader to have the heart — even more than the guts — to feel for herself what makes her exist in a space where growth occurs, a home. Kierkegaard has shifted the discourse of the will — of guts — to the discourse of relationship — of the heart. And so the courage he invokes is the courage to give yourself as a whole person to a process both with yourself and, presumably, in your interpersonal life with others. **It's hard.** This seems obviously more mature than the connotations to what Kant suggested, which were adolescent. Yet it doesn't reject them — it deepens and develops them. Adulthood doesn't repress adolescence — it gives it consistency and care.

Sometimes I feel as an academic that no one talks with me in my university or at this conference in airplane hanger style rooms of personless rows and dreary lights. We rush around with our work, focused in industrial theory. Can we think of ourselves as persons here?

My heart shrivels when I enter this place, it turns into a metal clock. *Tick tock.*

...

..

.

Why did I lose you so many years ago? Why have I always been off track in relationships? The fog of my metaphors mirrors my depersonalization. I wasn't looking for a person, or seeing if I were addressed as one. There is a strange way in which I haven't been showing myself, foremost to myself. This fear, it lives in the body like the echo off a metal table. *Ting*

You see, what I think is important in Kierkegaard's address is its imaginative indication of an interpersonal address. This address does the work of awakening. It summons openness, prompts courage. Its effusiveness is giving—sentimental, yes, but also giving. It reminds us of a kind of intimacy that solicits our surfacing and showing our face. Kierkegaard's authorial voice figures a scene in which someone is speaking directly to you, meeting you as a person. This formal dimension of the rhetoric is actually the crucial philosophical point. To use our own understanding, we must be awake to it, and to be awake to it, we must feel that we are persons, and to feel that we are persons depends on others speaking to us as persons, *wanting us to be*. Kant did not grasp this relational condition of enlightenment, I would say, the way enlightenment depends on community by way of its dependence on loving relationships, that is, a situation in which we are at home.

But before Kierkegaard, Rousseau almost did. One thing that is distinctive about Kierkegaard's work is the way the body is always already interpersonal, or more technically, open to relational reasons. Rousseau glimpsed this point in his concept of compassion, but the interpersonal dimension of it is not focused except in the way Rousseau thinks of the voice of conscience. Because conscience is both a form of consciousness grounded in

the address and primarily bodily and emotive, Rousseau is very close to Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard's interpersonal body-mind seems prefigured in the understanding of conscience developed in Rousseau's *Émile* in the *Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar*.⁸ Reason, the Vicar says, knows the good; only conscience loves it (Rousseau 1978, 290). Conscience is "the voice" and "the instinct" of the soul (286). Its acts "are not judgments but sentiments" (290). What these sentiments do is to express the place where, addressing oneself, the soul cares, where our being is at stake to us, despite how norms might claim us otherwise. Conscience calls us to decide on norms themselves, decide on decision, so to speak. In this way, it is personalizing. Even more, though, conscience speaks in a way that is loving. And it is this point that Kierkegaard develops. Kant, by contrast, picked up on the subjectivity inside Rousseauian conscience. But that subjectivity is weirdly impersonal without the loving voice.

What is interesting, too, is that Rousseau was interpreting ancient Stoic *οικειωσις*; every living being's disposition to care for itself.⁹ Our being is shot through with care for our being, despite the pressure to be normal. Yet what is *human* being when we care for ourselves truly and deeply? It is becoming and being a person. As Theodore Zeldin (1994) has shown, humanity's history is increasingly intimate. Accordingly, *οικειωσις* in the case of humans should be understood through the logic of being a person, and that means through interpersonal relationships.

In this way, we might say that being a person is prior to being normal, even though norms construct the way

8 It is an interesting coincidence that the minister who writes the "closing words" of *Either/Or* examined here was said to be a religious man from an isolated country place—just as the vicar is said to be.

9 See Jeremy Bendik-Keymer, *Conscience and Humanity* (2002), chapter 2, "Rousseauian Conscience", 44.

of life of people. *The personal space around norms keeps them human.* Foucault's "critical attitude" might better be described as a loving one, something Lynne Huffer has suggested.¹⁰ By addressing his readers, Kierkegaard was using interpersonal connection to awaken the distinctly human *οικειωσις* of people. By stirring the person in each of us, he was throwing a wrench into the machine.

στέπνον, a storm in wondrous hunger

I have pointed to the body of Kierkegaard's text already — the way its form of writing manifests and works his point, summoning in the form of its address the enlightenment — lower case "e" — he understands personally. I think it is interesting how focused this formal dimension of Kierkegaard's writing is. It actually points to — or reaches towards — a location in the human body, where relational emotions — including anxiety — are commonly felt. It is important to me to state that this dimension of Kierkegaard's writing is not as conceptually focused as other parts — I can imagine human beings who empirically differ from the descriptions Kierkegaard suggests. Yet for all that, there appears to be widespread shared experiences of what Kierkegaard does suggest about bodily experience. Sorting out these matters would take a different study.

For the relational matters Kierkegaard *addresses*, where does his writing point in the body? Kierkegaard says

10 Lynne Huffer, *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (2010). Huffer's emphasis, however, is on *eros*. *Eros* is too ambiguous relationally, however. It was conceptualized often in the tradition as a part of practical reason — of seeking some desirable. Relationships, however, do not admit of such objectification. They are interpersonal. Huffer has issues with the notion of the person, but I do not think she has been working with a relational understanding of the person. In fact, her lovely book, written so personally, suggests that she would value it.

that the “heart” is the place in the body where the relational logic he espouses resides. His is a metaphor, but it is also localized. We thump the chest, and in particular, the sternum to symbolize the heart with a gesture. Commonly, the biological heart quickens or breath increases or constricts as we near an avowal or a confession — the most personal matters. It is common to tell that someone matters in an especially personal way by the feeling the person leaves in one’s chest, not of fear or of agitation, but of excitement and longing. And this place in the body is felt cross-culturally to be significant. The psychoanalyst and phenomenologist Luce Irigaray also noticed this in her own work on relationships.¹¹ There appears to be something in the human nervous system where the anxiety of connection carries in the chest, or sternum. In what follows, I will claim that localizing this embodied center of connection — let us call it, of “relational reason” — helps one locate normative and relational drift.

“Drift” is the name I give to the garden.

A long time ago, I used to walk in Chicago for most of the day, setting out from the Loop and going in any direction that felt right into the North Side, turning down smaller streets I hadn’t seen before, sitting for a cup of coffee in the light, almost anonymous, sometimes writing notes as I went, walking down the long diagonal streets while the sun reflected off the windows of shops I could not afford, seeing women who were attractive and imagining what it would have been to have a normal life where I worked a job and we were married and one day would have kids, thinking how my twenties were so strange as a graduate student (whereas people I’d known in college who went on into business were looking like adults), eating a sandwich, thinking too much about some corner of an idea in Rousseau, or action theory,

11 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History* (1995), esp. ch. 1. Cf. for instance in South Asia, the sternum is one of the seven *chakras*.

or phenomenology, walking more; finally, slowing down, I was too tired, took a train back, tucked into 53rd & Kimbark & collapsed into sleep later.

What interests me about Kierkegaard's address to the heart is the way the address helps *move* the reader actually to engage with the emotional content of her life. Which content? Her *discontent* with being a person. I call this discontent "drift"—for its phenomenological and conceptual connotations regarding the problematic of enlightenment—lower case "e"—I have been exploring. Drifting is the main quality of this relational center pulsating in anxiety, excitement or longing to throw the normal into disarray in my mind, displacing me to regroup around what I feel makes sense to me *as a person*—as if, in the moment, I am coalescing as a person for the first time. Drifting leads me to begin *to sense the conditions of my senselessness*, that is, the senselessness of the normal here at this moment in this place and time. I didn't think of it this way at the time; the academy was so impersonal. It normalized my alienation from myself. But then it was not set up to help me see trauma. When you grow up with trauma, trauma seems normal. Then so much else that should make us profoundly discontented and which we should want to reject personally becomes something we simply put up with unreflectively. I could not feel my fear and how much I hated being afraid for much of my adult life. In everyday language, drifting shows me that I am not at home in such a profound sense that I feel that I am dispersed or lost as a person, at times even that I haven't yet been a person or feel that I cannot be a person under the conditions from which I've drifted. So—and this is the crucial point—drifting's emotional content actually involves personal dignity as an experience, an experience in which we want to collect ourselves in our own person or show up as a person with others. As I've said, the heart is about openness, and the way to openness is errant and abnormal in its quality.

What I like about this area in Kierkegaard's work is the way he links a conceptually necessary thing with a phenomenal experience that he actually tries to help his reader experience. Think about it. There needs to be a name for the emotional and personal zone that precedes collecting oneself personally. In this zone, we lose being gripped automatically by norms that can come under question but which at the same time structure our sense of what is possible. This zone is no longer unreflectively conformist, but it is not yet personal. It is pre-personal, eerie, unsettled, strangely exciting, expectant but unknowing, and many other blended emotions that circle around not being at home with oneself. This zone might appear suddenly or slowly. It might erupt in an anxiety attack or manifest itself over days of building aimlessness. It may appear in an elated feeling that you are not yourself, or perhaps even in wonder. There are many different ways for drift to appear. What matters is that we see it as a logical zone between conformity and collecting oneself personally.

Moreover, this zone has to be opened up for us to see how it is there. When we go about our normal lives, we don't consider that we could be lost as persons. To do so would be to risk losing oneself. Yet without experiencing such a loss as a possibility, we cannot be free to decide on what we think is truly fulfilling. We stay lodged in the normal, perhaps fearing or pushing away the extent to which we—or important things in our life—are abnormal, unfulfilling, unloving.

Drift comes only from a relational capacity in which our entire person is at stake as it really only is in love. This was Kierkegaard's insight. The embodied expression of its zone is a kind of storm-field in the chest. What builds in the sternum is the need to *communicate* or to *relate*. The key to the personal is being inscribed within the interpersonal in a way that allows one to be free while being open.

Voicing

I've done everything I can, and I can't do more. I am listening to my body. The minute I said I could keep working on it, anxiety ran through me like a nova. I slept on it. I hoped it would go away. But it got stronger and stronger, until my limbs were filled with electricity, pouring out into the air around me in my apartment and my mind would not rest. My body told me. My body remembered.

A car flipping over and over on a bare and blinding road miraculously lands in a swamp on all four wheels.

I torn free of the rule

ضمير, spoken with, as a person

Kierkegaard's summoning thereby goes beyond a focus on courage in Kant's sense. Kant is still too focused on will, but the key to having a mind of one's own is being free as a person. Accordingly, the *relational* needs to be addressed, not the practical. To be one's own person is not simply—or even really—a matter of guts. It is rather a matter of being free to be oneself with others and with oneself. This is the basic experience and condition of love. Kierkegaard does not upbraid or cheer on his readers; he addresses them, and his way of speaking shows that he imagines himself caring for his reader as a person who deserves love and in so being seen is respected at the most basic point as a human being with dignity.¹² I am interested in this address, especially as it clears our drift and, having been experienced in our bodies, clears into a realization about our becoming and

12 See the Latin *provocare*: to challenge forth by way of a call.

being a person. I am interested in what it is for us to actually talk with each other as adults.

The address comes from the possibility of home, from whatever habit or hope of free and genuine community we have inside us. I am thinking of Tarkovski's *Зеркало*, of the mother running down to fix the imagined, mistaken word during her time in the printing press under Stalin. Rain is everywhere, emotions colliding. She did not have a community until her friends heard her word. But trauma interrupted even that.

The way I want to approach this topic is through the perhaps odd—in this context—topic of conscience. It strikes me that, even more than in the case of heroic anti-authoritarian Enlightenment subjectivity, conscience matters in the quiet, interpersonal realms of daily life when we are mature enough to actually speak with each other as people. What draws on our consciences—our responsibility for who we are?¹³ Isn't it being addressed as a full human being, as a person? I am speaking of the form here, regardless of what calls us out (call that the “content”). The form has the structure of a voice speaking with us as a person.¹⁴ My thesis at this point is that Kierkegaard's formal innovations try to express, and so invoke, the adult scene between two people where they actually speak with each other as whole

13 It is common for people who have struggled with conscience to report how when they side with their consciences and commit to what makes sense to them, personally, they feel a great release, a calm, and a renewed clarity. They feel at home in the world. These feelings, moreover, coincide with a sense of enlightenment. In the calm following conscience, we are empowered to use our own understanding. After all, we just have, and in a kind of crisis. So the activation of conscience is the crucial scene of enlightenment, and to be an *Aufklärer* is to be conscientiously abnormal. We can search for home by using our own understanding. But the process begins in drift. Cf. David Shulman, “Non-saintly integrity in the South Hebron hills” (2014).

14 Cf. Jean-Louis Chretien, *L'appel et la reponse* (1992); Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (2002, 287).

human beings, that is, as persons. And the result is that, in being addressed as a person, we open our consciences to being stirred.

Here is a typical invocation to the reader at the beginning of Kierkegaard's most conscientious texts:

[My book's] finally met that singular one . . . my reader. . . It stretches out its arms. . . ¹⁵

Of course, this is funny. But in the form of this address, there is a memory of grown-up speech. **Giving-talk, you might say.** Kierkegaard is modeling the form of relationship. Kierkegaard reminds his readers of a form of life in which they are at home, because the elementary relationship in it is loving. To people keeping anxiety down in a depersonalized existence, he holds out the possibility of becoming again more of a person.

Buber called this the "primary word."¹⁶ He was talking about enlightenment—lower case "e"—very much in the Kantian sense. We might also call it plainly talking as adults with each other. It demands that you use your own understanding as you are necessarily exposed to another in your seeking to connect, your response to the call of a personal relationship with your own life as you become open to the presence of a person. That presence is intimated, or carried, in *the bare form of the address*. Address, which causes drift, works because it carries the

15 Søren Kierkegaard, "Preface" to "Two Upbuilding Discourses" (1990). Translation modified.

16 Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (1999, 15ff). It is also interesting to note that Buber, who was steeped in the neo-Kantianism of the Marburg School, came up with this way of speaking of a word while his contemporary Mikael Bakhtin did too. Bakhtin's most brilliant essay is called "The Word in Dostoevsky" (I have lost my photocopy, but I believe that it was a translation of Mikhail Bahktin, "Discourse in Dostoevsky" [1984], and Dostoevsky's "word" functions very much like a primary dialogical *relationship*. Bakhtin was also schooled in a similar neo-Kantianism during the same period.

primary word in its form — even more than speaking, we might say the address *voices*.

The point here is that we can help each other be ourselves as people by speaking personally *to* each other, that is, by talking *with* each other. This is an elementary, interpersonal form of “con-science” — “knowledge-with.” Or we can learn to listen to our personal consciences, which carries this form over in our lives, erupting through the moments where, built up, we have lost touch with ourselves as persons and come to a limit where what we thought made sense no longer does or where if we do not focus ourselves as persons, we will commit to something that compromises us.

Obviously, this hangs a lot of work on the form of communication. But the Arabic word for conscience helps in addition to the Latin root that I have already mentioned. Arabic speakers have a name for communication *from chest to chest*: ضمير. It is translated as *conscience*. The Arabic word is relational — it indicates a relation between one person and another, between oneself and God, or between oneself as struggling and oneself at home. And yes, this word is embodied in the sternum — from sternum to sternum. ضمير is often said with great earnestness, which befits the sense of personal responsibility in it. It does not communicate anything of content except what its form displays: *you are a person to me — be a person*. You count, and I do too. We are people, whole human beings. ضمير communicates the bare power of subjectivity, the “I can think” and does so through feeling, the “I can be.”¹⁷ The irony is that this is not egotistical. Quite the contrary: it opens up the space of a relationship in life, a sense of what could even make universal sense as a starting point.¹⁸

17 Cf. Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (1991).

18 As in Kant’s categorical imperative. I do not have the space here to explain how this Kierkegaardian reading extends Kant’s point about sense from *The Groundwork* and *The Critique of Judgment*.

Kierkegaard's voice in the passage just read is not to be understood based on qualities it has — loud, soft, elegant, trite, cute, sharp, relevant, etc. Obviously, it is comically sentimental, too. Still, it's the kind of voice it is because of what it *does*: it addresses the “single individual” (redundant as that expression is). That is its function or use. That's its kind. Such a kind needn't be said; it is always, however, *shown*. The most provocative signal of Kierkegaard's voice is not in the said but in the *saying* — in the repetitions, gaps, emphases, and silences.¹⁹ In the body language, the gesture, of the writing. In a kind of action that conveys the work of address. That work is not sentimental — it is basically moral and plainly humane.

What I have been trying to show you today is *how* this role of embodied, interpersonal address is just as much enlightenment — lower case “e” — as what Kant advocated. Perhaps it is more. It is certainly more mature, having surpassed some of the adolescence that Kant felt he had to address and which Foucault refined two centuries later. Communicating — the voicing of address — is the kind of saying where one tries to connect with another, seeking the vibrant openness in her in which she comes alive as a person. In terms of this talk, it is a saying where the sayer tries to connect with the point in

19 Consider the morally beautiful writing, under pseudonym, in *Training/Practice in Christianity*. This work stages a moral-religious drama through the precise repetitions of expressions, the escalation of care in sudden “cuts” and in many other ways. Moreover, as Poole has shown in *Kierkegaard, the Indirect Communication* (1993), *Training/Practice in Christianity* is literally built with the architecture of his Copenhagen readers' main Lutheran church in mind. The work is both heart-breaking and love-provoking because of the extreme “materiality” of the writing. Truly reading it with one's own search for a world beyond evil, the text manages to carry one's conscience through a process that reawakens one's idealism and illuminates renewed possibility for moral relationship.

Post-structuralists have learned from Kierkegaard on this writerly point as well — Derrida more than most, and also Jean-Luc Nancy, although sometimes to excess. See the latter's *The Birth to Presence* (1993).

the other where her engaged responsibility for her location in the space of norms will emerge—where called, she will emerge out of the shadow of the normal and move out from drift by collecting herself in talk together or in conscience alone. This means that we must use emotional intelligence to feel out where the emotional field of the other is, and so too with ourselves. We have to mind the body's surprisingly clear language of feeling.

Body language

Perhaps we are not even talking about voicing or address anymore. Perhaps we're rolling with body language. The entire body is the voice. Body's vocal (χρόνος).

What I have been calling "voicing" refers to the interpersonal dimension of a text that engages—hooks onto—the response of the reader in his ضمير. With ضمير, responsibility for the norms of my existence crystallizes around my speech. ضمير is the locus of care in speech—the place where conscience emerges as a voice in our voices. Kierkegaard's authorship (a) is a work in voicing and (b) is intended to locate ضمير in the reader. I think of this location as *eco-locational*, seeking the storm of vibrant space in another's sternum that produces drift and *nostos*—the search for home.

Voice has gotten a bad rap in the last half century. Influenced by Derrida's reading of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology* (1976), some might want to explain Kierkegaard's fascination and use of the spoken word—even indirectly in his pseudonyms' theatrics—as neurotic nostalgia for self-presence that attempts to repress existence's contingency and our constitutional inability to be completely self-transparent. This interpretation would stress, for instance, how Kierkegaard repeatedly urged his readers to read aloud so that they might hear their own voices. The idea would be that hearing your own voice activates original presence, which itself serves to make up for the

contingency of meaning in speech. Voice then supplements the diffusion or scattering of meaning. φωνή “supplements” λόγος.²⁰ Even though one might not understand what one reads completely and might not gather the intention of the author, one still auto-stimulates²¹ oneself as a giver and receiver of meaning. According to this line of criticism, the problem is that such auto-stimulated meaning—much like Rousseau’s famous “supplement”²²—is empty. It’s the mere form of subjectivity without object. And hence it isn’t even subjectivity. And hence Kierkegaardian voicing cannot work to obtain meaning at all. Meaning is not obtained. In fact, Kierkegaardian voicing covers over the mystery of meaning. We mean things only with others and only by being subjected to the grace or tragedy of meaning in our contingent existences.

But when one reads aloud, one does not read to hear oneself read. One reads to capture the gesture or act of the reading. This act helps locate one in reflection, just as both seeing and hearing the words do. There are two processing systems working together. They help one triangulate the content of the writing—not fix it with certainty. Better located, one is slowed down to think more carefully, opened up to the context that comes with acting an imagined role (the “script,” so to speak, of this other), and one is better able to stop and go at the speed and ability of one’s own understanding. In short, reading aloud is part of the act of understanding. And as a means to that end, it is a form of response—not an auto-stimulation. Its goal is not certainty or “self-presence,”

20 “Phonos” is ancient Greek for “voice” and “logos” is Greek for “reason”, “understanding” or “speech”. Derrida makes much of Rousseau’s use of the word “supplement.”

21 See Michel Henry, *Phénoménologie matérielle* (1990).

22 Derrida explores Rousseau’s famous onanism as supplement: the suggestion is that Rousseau’s text itself is plagued by a constitutional ideological onanism. But why is masturbation empty? Derrida is oddly conservative here—and disembodied.

but engagement with the “outside” which is most simply expressed in my dealing with a text that was written by *another*: me (the *object*, not the *subject*!). There is body language in reading out loud, a body language that reminds us that we are not alone in the world, not even *with* ourselves.

On the other hand, what is true about the Derridian-inspired criticism is that speaking out loud does activate oneself as a being in time who cares and has a presence. Doing so is an extremely basic way of feeling what Rousseau called “the sentiment of one’s own existence.”²³ But it is precisely such a sentiment enabling conscience to speak: the circuit of simple responding to the text helps build up emotion through body language, i.e., the simple body language of speaking out loud, of hearing the words as they pass through one’s mouth. **This is the most basic affection of words the trace of a human community of bodies, not of propositions.** In this pull of words that are embodied again, one carries over the body memory of words spoken between people. Reading aloud therefore drifts toward—not self-presence but—reaching out into the space in common where care lives between people by virtue of the common being held open at all.²⁴ Voicing therefore embodies you in the space of care—this vibrant spacing that emerges from the chest just as the voice actually does. Yes, this is purely *formal*,

23 See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (1998, 5th walk).

24 See Rousseau, *Emile* (1978, 291) for a hint. The full argument would take too long to work out here. It goes like this: conscience speaks for *amour de soi-meme* most basically (an *amour de soi* expanded with *pitié*). The sentiment of existence is a first expression and condition of a truly functioning *amour de soi*. Conscience therefore speaks out of the sentiment of existence, “the silence of the passions”—this being echoed in the entire phenomenology of conscience on 291 and also in the *Second Discourse* discussion of “the voice of nature.” See also Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (1991), especially “L’amour en éclats” (“shattered love; bursts of love”).

but it is extremely important to a view of humanity that includes persons in the space of norms—singularities who organize our communication not semantically but in primary words, that is, in relationships where norms become human rather than abstract to people's real lives and where everyone has the power to understand in her own way.²⁵

So voicing is none other than a kind of body language. Here, I am shaking off an overly disembodied view of voice, namely, one that sees (not hears) voice as part of a narcissistic circuit bound up in a metaphysical pathology, as Derrida did in reading certain moments in the philosophical tradition to bring out their narcissism. But body is significant and significance is embodied. So, too with voice.

Voicing is an extremely basic form of responsibility for the human kind of life lived in the space of what is meaningful to us personally and together. It is an activation of conscience within a context of communication. And this activation of conscience is tantamount to entering into one's own process of maturing, as we have previously seen. Kierkegaardian selves become only with others.²⁶ That is the deep and mature enlightenment point—lower case “e.” To the very stuff of the often abstract and always anti-authoritarian debates that the late eighteenth century considered Enlightenment—upper case

25 See Haagi Kenaan, *The Present Personal: Philosophy and the Hidden Face of Language* (2005). Also consider Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1997). Reading the prospectus of Kenaan's book really “clicked” with this point about persons for me. As his commentator Karsten Harries writes, “Of course we experience persons. But the seeming obviousness of this fact loses sight of a problem that has shadowed our all too often inhumane age. Kenaan succeeds in showing how such blindness is tied to a widely accepted understanding of language and reality.” See the book's dust jacket back cover.

26 Anne-Christine Habbard (2002, 165–87). See also Michael Holquist (1990).

“E-” it adds a register of personal intimacy and genuine, interpersonal relationships. What others do for us in plainly addressing us is to stir our own coming to terms with ourselves.

The Kierkegaardian idea is that your enlightenment—lower case “e”—begins when and only when your responsibility for the norms of your existence crystallizes around your affection in the vibrant space of an anxiety provoked—or remembered—through the bare form of community. In this philosophy, you become a person out of love which, *unsentimentally and not-at-all romantically*, is perhaps best found in *plain talk with each other*.

Plain talk

So I conclude. This is a conference on Kierkegaard’s journals, his way of marking time. The question I just touched on about how a solitary voice relates to itself is therefore redoubled. Yet Kierkegaard wrote his journals aware that they could be read by others. What place did Kierkegaard’s journals have in his everyday life?

It is possible that the journals manifested a form of what Foucault calls “the self’s relation to itself,” a form of “writing the self” that allowed Kierkegaard the human being to embody his words enough to be at home within his conscience. Being thus a person, he would strengthen his capacity to be in relationships with others.

Yet encouraged by Roger Poole’s (1991) study of Kierkegaard, I think it isn’t irrelevant also to imagine a man of flesh and blood,²⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, who wrote at night ascetically, who wrote each manuscript three times and then spoke it out loud, each time, as he went—word by word—who spent a significant portion

27 See Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations* (1978, chapter 1).

of his days out in the streets walking and talking with the many people whom he knew. He was many-sided: loafer, neurotic, judgmental jerk, comic, sad — even desperate — man hidden behind philosophy and genteel manners, devout soul; brilliant wit, writer, and thinker; well-meaning person, hetero-normative male inflected by patriarchy, good friend, loving family member by all reports, rebel vis-à-vis the Danish State Lutheran Church.

Well, this man also kept a journal. There are bodily and soulful practices for someone dealing with trauma as well as for someone living a philosophical life. There are everyday and plain forms of enlightenment — lower case “e” — that continue the wish of the Enlightenment — upper case “E.” Far from being mainly a *technique du soi* in the service of *critique*, to echo Foucault,²⁸ journaling was daily work in becoming a person. It was a prolegomena for *a more humane reality*. People grow up by learning to speak to themselves and by learning to speak with each other.

28 See Foucault (1996a, 1996b, 2012). See also Charles Larmore *Les Pratiques du Moi* (2004), winner of the Grand Prix de l'Academie Francaise for philosophy, 2004. These studies could provide a very useful starting point for a comparison between S.K.'s journaling and ancient philosophical practices of memory and “self-writing.” Such a comparison would allow one to further develop the “aesthetic” moment in Kierkegaard: the forms of training by which he “subjected” himself to the demands of enlightenment and the commands of his religion.

25 / I CARRIED
MY TEETH
IN MY
HEART
Recording of an act

in bed with wooden posts

in a while, crocodile

dark
snow

orange halo
 &
 their shadow

a door, the hall, it closed, lines

of light

There was a long hedgerow by the road.

In summer, I would crawl inside
especially when the shadows were long.

People would walk & I

quivered

holding my laugh.

There is an orchard in the mind

beneath the mind!

I grew up in Aurora, Ithaca, and New Hartford, New York. Every school day, my dad and I walked down Cascadilla Gorge trail. I went to school in the basement of the stone church at the bottom of the hill. Before arriving, water flowed over green algae and burst into white off ledges. *(The sound of the water was everywhere!)*

Within most forests breathe forgotten things.
Formless and transparent, filled with restlessness,
they flood surrounding static with their song,
then are gone.

Even the loudest justice
quivers beneath the sound that shakes its instance.

In the still undercurrent, luminos ity
Breaks in to frag ments of mul tic olored g las s

the animals, even, shiver with longing.

If the deep rock caverns,
the sunfall,
the algae covered light

Often, later, I remembered what she'd told him,
like the secrets grown inside their hands

or the days begun without a word but fingers crossed.
In the night air, when stillness tells the world there's
still life

inside the quiet, we hear the city coming together
like the bar I went to last weekend, singing,

or the stadium shouting out the match,
and the families, even, more beautiful than loneliness.

If I occlude the hour, shift sideways,
or smile instead of words,

it's only that a subway moving underground
has come and gone.

I remembered how
he'd hold you.

all the philosophy books sit silent

granular
eddies
on the L

this world not
like that world

and how do I

become a person

Sometimes, at daybreak, the light tunnels were endless.
Reaching through the courtyard, true, they woke
large starlings in the upper reaches of his dream.
These populated wells along old interstates and spoke
a thousand languages ancient pathways broach.

At night, I would undo the marks the evening's walk-
ways make.

Like a sand-erased shore, a firmament, I talked
aloud in my sleep to the emptiness. Never
ever it was there without me, the open life.
And inside the forgetful hours, new substance broke
up far along the stone-blocked lake
where people rode bicycles and ate cold ice cream in the
dark.

I stepped from the curb into moonlight
and heard suddenly the streets awake
of white winged moths.

like you they flew
somewhere aimlessly with a sign
behind them that
they cannot see

Busses outside roar past
this cold, November day.

Antoine's coffee on the stove steams.

I heard words on
the steps, then in the courtyard.

I feel the time
 in the city.
We become a silver sky.

The riots broke out while I was there.
You never know when you are in a plane.

Abu Dhabi is beautiful, because it is calm,
different passengers think.

Typical to modernity, nothing fits.

A steward in the bathroom lost his wits.
Some are praying. Others passing time.

When I saw you off—
you
disappeared down
the block.

a dress of roses
when we talked

I can be philosophical
as a fish
that swims in
visions
vaguely remembering touch.
Or love wisdom
when a cat, instinctively, goes
to
sleep.
O
the world is made of maggots,
Aurelius.

Through air, clouds and time:

I walked.

sudden glare

yellow slope brick walls

I was climbing up a hall that went in turns, wide
and ample,
toward the hillside's plateau,
halls like galleries slung from *Russian Ark*,
but in some cathedral
with spots of rain soaking through
in stains along
the ceiling and faded carpet stretched within
the ascending stone.

And only one woman praying at the top,
an upper balcony, the church seen in
fragments below.

Then another woman, more solitary, far, also
deep in consolation,
"God" both with her and away.

The first showed me the direction to depart
the church atop the Heights,
and
I did. It was
grey outside, typical French weather in Normandy.
The outer plaza was abandoned
and rose in waves of stone-made hills.

I walked among them and awoke.

Sometime later, I wondered where
my thoughts had gone. It was early morning,
with the dog beside me leaning on my leg and pressed
into the arm of the upholstered chair. I felt
that there was too much time and
there were too many broken things. I felt
that I had wasted out.

The porch was made of splintered talk.
Like age, it had become a place for people to
remember
the event that is the sprawling finitude of our lives and
even
of the truths, words, systems we
take to be everything that is and *couldn't*
be!

We sat there for a while in the sun.

Take me to a time that has become *unreal*.
Late adolescence will do when in my 20s
I imagined I was near adulthood
and all my closest friendships carried the glow of
completeness.
It was like this to be alive and free
enjoying the outer skin of intimacy,
but we were not even brothers to ourselves
at least in talking,
where our conversations were so limited
in terms of our sense of our fears
and of our needs.
I want to place these chapters inside a book.
A book about becoming unlike
so many that pass for philosophy
in the rows of graphically undulating
spines of
new translations.

When “great philosophies” are first perceived,
their systems (or un-systems) are like clouds,
apprehended in the air momentarily as aesthetics.
And that begins to mean
as perceptions only, while their joints of bodies
and of acts go largely
underthought. People
everywhere underplay
the seriousness of the everyday
when a festival comes to town
in every bookstore.

My creed, of course, is that the ordinary is not a fantasy.
Common sense with luck.
When the broad scale's laid out, we find eddies
of agreement in scars,
also pulsing, distant stars. A map that dissolves
makes our hands involve other people's
memories of times
we've never touched or nowhere go.
People are there in the absence. What we call
"language," "society," "self"
is upsurging, slowly collecting vomit and squirt of
stuff — all meta-
physical
gestures called "names" which do not name
or mark or tell,
but
daily meditation. Open a space within the well.
We call the upswell the "field." Our "life." This
"city."
"Now."

And then the solidity sways.
We come back into the worn comfort.
Say, "I love." "You." "Come
home."
These freed from Philosophies capital "P" are zones of
reference. Are
humilities,
ironies that put all concepts off. The way of the plain
tethers which moral sense is close to it,
quivering.
The bend of things is made of leaning.

But we are also aching and most as we go along. We
come upon it after the fact.
Our bodies do fool up and throughout.

This time, it was an auditorium inside a club for faculty and graduate students.

Part athletic center, concert hall, every space was near blacked out.

People moved through the dark around
what few lamps there were —
emergent, — or emergency? — lights . . .

One of my old advisors was there talking vociferously about how to manage a charitable board in transit with a British colleague with whom he — *cheerfully* — disagreed.

At stake was a philosophy of philanthropy.
Should I have told him
that we are headed toward the “post-human”?

I went through corridors with shifting students, adult, pressed in that half-made mode we call “bright tutelage.” It was a veritable sampling of the books to come.

The lockers
sweating with steam and the dormers half asleep
in the hall with a toothbrush.

I climbed toward an auditorium again high up
inside a balcony.

More people were there this time but still the stage was dark.

It was a carnival inside, a very mellow party of subdued talk, but you could feel the anarchic excitement in low, focused tones.

Time is on my side, and so I dig my own grave.
This is the kind of view that can get you loaded.
But the question is
 with what? My poetry
 is no alcohol, zone
 of my flesh.

Later, we talked about marriage in the fading, winter
noon.

The final time, I was in a synagogue, largest in the city,
full-up with people who talked in different groups
among many levels of seats,
the balconies staggered, shuffled, pillars blocking views,
but multitudes of possibilities
presented themselves each in side-
conversation.

I lost my friends as we found our places. I suppose
that happens
when we all grow up. But there were others
in the rows next over curious about
my leanings. And I remember feeling nervous
that I would be found to be
unchosen.

The shifting weight of self is unforgiving when
understanding is needed of
a sort.

It swings effortlessly from the limbs of mind,
but there beneath the intellect, the orchard
inside the roots and in the soils,
shifting life. I shush in the dark, between lights.

My mouth is underliving. It dismembers things
before I think them.

Saltines or Somerset, Cadavar, or colospecnic.

I've been reading journals —
the odd quarterly touted for its sound and sense.
City made of *scrape*.

But the day is mild in seven-o'clock sun.

It's
better to be unmade by the lime-green hush of the
forest.

The climb was made not knowing
that the divine is clown.

No, I am not better.

In Syracuse, New York, the literary mind
is wounds not

tops on cherries sinking lower into cream.

Finite mercy loves the dark.

& I run uphill in a memory along a street

nothing more than youth and nowhere the either side
of which is heaven.

Where's comfort?

This place that's ever moving — a shifting mark.

I was sitting on our couch at 616 DeMong.
An early hour.
We will be wedding in three days. I'm
unready.



he abandoned the slow, ascetic suffering in the solitude
of dim offices

early
morning on
a bare and blinded road by
headless sun

... steerless, he swerve d &

the swamp's smell sifted through the chassis

space of gl as s—
st eam, br ea th

solar

ze ro



There was a valley beneath the emptiness.
It lay round and cool as night fell in purple time.

Neighboring houses had clapboard sides
when she froze. The golf range hadn't been built.

There 1800 feet compacted inside green paint
while outside, a big tree.

The wind, whine of appliance

HE

She climbed the tree

* *

SHE

the defiant

* *

HE

* *

Forty years hence, her head still struck concrete.

In the evening,

she'd tense each day at that time.

* *

I left the valley in my car.

I'd found emptiness.

*

I love the atmosphere higher than the lights of the city.
It's warm with the sound of rain
straining the universe to consider
the gamma rays of iniquity.
What small portion of the problem
can we consider in our rooms? But
the warm, red memory of the origin
pulses inside my mind
and fills my body with time —

When I let go of the bad,
it is good.

When I remember the winter,
it is slight.

Tell me where the cars are sliding past values,
and I will think about how we can listen.

There is not much to be said about categories;
they keep us from what is unique,

but they protect the unconditioned.

Forest person, wood-lined in the cabin of your
thoughts,

do you remember the body you used to share?

High along the altitudes where the ice caps break
small fissures design figures of a coming life.

You anchor your teeth in night,

sing flat melodies in a soothing voice,

child of age,
finite circle,

strife's disappearance from the stars.

& "we" was well invented, we
were faded mosses along the rocks & lichened shores,
wave-ended, froth begun.

Please do not tell me that in a certain "our" inside the
hourless space of dark
you don't reach upward and inward at once
like an arborescent shell beneath the canopies of pines.

The tedium we carry in our daily habit of rest
evaporates like birds that seek new climes —



3

6 / WE ARE

5

A

STORM

IN

WONDROUS

HUNGER

Aphorism journal

Monday, January 11, 2010

Earth thought 1 of 365: I am enmeshed, although I act like I am not. I live in a context.

2: My actions are inconsequential while their patterns are not.

3: Holocene Earth gave me a chance. Do I deserve it? This sounds harsh. But I have a job. I earn it.

4: I used to see the sky, a vast silver glacier of light not unlike a heaven. Now it has changed in my mind: it continues us, is in part our effect. Vast, slow moving, long lasting.

5: We well-meaning people and our horrible consequences. There's a gap.

6: I read about Palestine (Abunimah 2009), that gross injustice. I pattern it out to a much more insecure world. Why do we build walls? I have to stop the sea-level rise in my anxiety.

7: It's foul out. But even foul weather is livable. It's foul inside me. I become disillusioned.

8: In academic philosophy, "Who am I?" has been asked for thousands of years without starting from our ecology.

9: She tattooed *Argus Pheasant displaying* (Attenborough 1979) along and across her back.

10: Holocene Earth says goodbye.

11: To identify with Earth life is not to understand it.

12: To wish is not to know.

13: They streamed over the border like a flash flood. Run-away climate change.

14: The look on my parents' faces the night before their 45th: they are serene together. They made it.



Syracuse, December 2009.

15: I turn to justice. But its most significant theory in the last century, *A Theory of Justice*, does not consider ecology (Rawls 1971). Yet Earth is the biggest “overlapping consensus.” Everyone with a “life plan” needs it.

16: “I heard kids playing today on a concrete yard next to traffic: ‘One skip, two skip, three skips warm. All our towns are under storms. Oceans up, oceans down, oceans everywhere we drown.’” Then I woke up in the pollution-filled morning.

17: When the economy is milked by managers who crash it and are then bailed out and given bonuses, managers who next become leaders of bail out organizations by the government's choice, how *can* we count on foresight? Reckless with impunity, this society of organized irresponsibility (Jackall 2009).

18: I turn to population dynamics. Maybe a world with fewer people? My students talk about not reproducing. There is no imperative to, but the problem is an unecological economy and massive gaps for exploitation of the many by the few.

19: Not just this species or that. Loss of families. Loss of genera. A species is like a poem. We lose genres. *Burn sections in nature's library.*

Tuesday, January 19, 2010

Earth thought 20 of 365: Beyond the ego, the universe. Beautiful anonymity. I am in pain.

21: We say that pre-modern man was *dirty* (Sterling 2007; Elias 1978). But modern man is too. There! He lives in his pollution. It floats through the air unseen.

22: Following the earthquake in Haiti, I remembered how the environment exceeds us and how we are tested to show common humanity when it does.

23: "Next to [the] living are the dead. Covered in blankets, their ash-covered limbs poke from beneath makeshift shrouds" (Davis 2010). I do not live in a beautiful world.

24: The paradox of cities is that they are the most sustainable while inside them the Earth is invisible.

25: There were knife fights in Haiti over food and water. Wound as I am these days around the climate, I thought of Darfur and desertification around Lake Chad. How will climate change strike the world system? That some guy like me, somewhere even now, will think he has to defend his family with a gun.

26: The best way to focus ourselves on the future and on goodness is to cultivate love for specific people now. Looking into the face of someone you love erases thoughtlessness better than terror.

Hold plausible risks in your mind.

27: I need a literature that speaks to me and makes me feel at home on Earth — neither philosophy arguing, nor poetry wishing, nor religion preaching. A voice like a family member's, reflective at the pace of Earth time, arising with the part of us that isn't destructive or blind.

Friday, January 29, 2010

Earth thought 28 of 365: "In what sorts of places do they sleep?" (Williams 2003, 24). Out in the open, with blankets as shrouds. And a thousand miles away in an air conditioned room, a designer bed from Room & Board. Hello, it is morning.

29: Boy/girl — s/he sees mom and dad's disordered world, thinks, "Why?"

S/he lives on the internet, eats local, patches her recycled clothes. She adopts-a-species, vote-drives against compromised politicians. S/he demands legal change as decade-long work.

This is new. This is old. S/he's both inside and outside the order.



Carl Schurz Park, July 2016.

30: The body is a river infused with fresh water and debris, runoff, oilfilm, rain, and cleansing marshes. Do we want purity in it so that we can keep *something* clean? Is purity possible?

What is upstream from my body?



Mahall's, Lakewood, Ohio, January 2016.

31: In Haiti, most people are peaceful while aid agencies are fearful (Price 2010). The knife has a long shadow. Anxiety the distorter.

32: Patterns are hard to remember. Turning off the lights, shutting off water, not idling or gunning the car. Do these matter?—Only in a thousand iterations in a million lives. But they also matter for my integrity.

33: New patterns open up the future.

34: "I heard the ocean on the shore. The ruins of Europe in back of me" (Müller 2001).

35: Patience in the crisis.

36: Ocean, lake, or pool. I float in my original element.

37: We built this pattern. Drinking from the tap, I tasted clear.

Tuesday, February 9, 2010

Earth thought 38 of 365: "What if everyone did that?" (Kant 1988) leaps from an average U.S. life to climate change — then to adaptation.

39: What fossil do we sink into the future? Or will the roots absorb the corpse? — Hurling the absence.

40: A clear face in fresh water, Lake Ontario. She's happier than I've ever seen her. Don't say the elements have nothing to do with this. Don't stop my identity at my body's edge. The lake swells as Elaine in it, and clouds drift inside me as the sun.

41: Kant (1965) says this is an article of rational faith: virtue will one day bring about happiness — and vice, unhappiness. But presentists don't mind future generations. Presentists will die before the grief and outrage.

42: I take my map, my internal map, with me. It's outdated.

43: On cold nights, I worry about the homeless. It is an indignity to me that there are people unwillingly exposed to the elements.

44: Would I be more in touch with our planet if I were less enveloped by machines that smooth life?

45: "My heart was a storm in me as I went" (Homer, *The Odyssey*, IV, 572).

46: Open a void for words.

47: "Everything is backwards now. The true life is out there, while in here is the dream" (Cameron 2009).

48: The surface. Undertow.

Wednesday, February 17, 2010

Earth thought 49 of 365: The Ignatian approach to error asks the self-examiner to confront missed opportunities. Holocene ecology is the opportunity that makes our opportunities.

50: How do we think a thousand years ahead? Cathedral thought.

51: My end is another's beginning.

52: A city of open houses. Life passes through, like utopia. Yet this city is real, over a billion years old. The doorway is the species. A species is evolution's doorway for the ongoing stream of life. It is where evolution happens, what lets evolution through. When we make species extinct, we slam doors shut. Mass extinction closes most of the city for millions of years.

53: When we feel loved, we stop chasing after gratification and turn our minds to those who outlast us.

54: Today, I remember my grandmother, Miriam, who died nine years ago and whom I loved very much. Only the pure things stand out today like branches in winter.

55: The not-so-distant explosions of that region, and the indignity of my countrymen and women fighting an unjust war. So we miss the battle against inertia and time, the battle to adapt.

56: Did you see the environmental devastation caused by “Shock and Awe”? Destroy and degrade.

Monday, February 22, 2010

Earth thought 57 of 365: “Managers think in the short run[,] because they are evaluated by both their superiors and peers on their short term results” (Jackall 2009, 89).

58: Look onto the future that pessimistically, sad man (McCarthy, *The Road*, 2006).

59: “Industry is just as much a part of nature.” What is its time-scale? But, yes, it’s in the history of *our* nature.

60: How will conserving life serve us? How is goodness beneficial? I give up.

61: The Winter Asymmetry (*in memoriam* Miriam Keymer): “I won’t sacrifice someone else; I will make reasoned sacrifices.”

Tuesday, March 2, 2010

Earth thought 62 of 365: Youth is overflowing. It gives. But near middle age, different thoughts scramble through the night like bones. What good will I have done by being alive?

63: “What if the world is sick, mama? I don’t want the world to be sick.”—A four, almost five, year old.

Let’s not worry in front of them but give them reason to hope by our creativity, courage. It’s rough right now, but *this is what we can do*.

64: What is more important to learn in school—how to make a living or how to change a law?

65: Individualism in the ’70s made the world inside the rage. Around us all, industrial production spewed junk into the sky.

66: “All one needs is a system. Once a day, to do some small thing. Fill a glass of water from the tap. Flush it down the toilet—only that. The world would have to change” (Tarkovsky, *The Sacrifice*, 1986).

67: “What we achieve inwardly will change outer reality” (Plutarch 1992).

68: Aphorisms, a glass of rain poured down a storm drain daily.

69: When youth protects intrinsic value and old age sees beyond itself, they see each other.

Thursday, March 11, 2010

Earth thought 70 of 365: The activist parent and the conformist. Both sacrifice their children.

71: This kid needs a home.

72: After being plunged into the river by the psychotic John the Baptist (Mark 1:9–13), Jesus lost his mind. He lived for “forty days” with “the wild beasts”—finally calmed by “angels.”

Rhythms of animals

Wind patterns and stillness in the sand and rugged trees among the rocks

73: “The mountain mind / from invisible time” (Broadcast 2000).

74: When I was a teenager hanging out in the May air with nothing major to do, I enjoyed the sound of trees. I didn’t realize that we were wrecking the environment.

75: I’m setting the thermostat at 62 degrees Fahrenheit. But it’s wasted energy to think about one individual’s wasted energy?

76: A virus wrecks the ecosystem called “my body.”

77: “I like it when I’m simple”—we’re watching ice break off the shore of Lake Ontario.

78: Philosophy books like kids with toys but thinking that they toy with nothing. So un-kid-like. Thus: childish.

The kid more adult than the book. Life a morning in the sun. Through shutters, it rests on the wall in solidarity, playing slowly. Isaiah plays.

Saturday, March 20, 2010

Earth thought 79 of 365: “The message sent / was of discontent, / from incline to incline” (Broadcast 2000).

80: Living in Syracuse and teaching at LeMoyne College, I am absorbing this Jesuit school with my atheist mind. What are atheist “discernment exercises”?

81: In the seventeenth century, physics mechanized *physis*. In the twenty-first century, *physis* returns as we acknowledge ecology’s complexity (Gorke 2003).

82: Political ecologies are complex.

How does communism’s ownership of the common distort the Winter Asymmetry? I cannot *force* the common.

And capitalism’s revolution of desire? There is nothing *lasting* to my whims.

I’m in search of free commitment to the human community.

83: The legions of the lost in the mechanized bureaucracy of the present. This was true in totalitarianism, now in capitalism concerning the future.

84: Be fruitful and multiply: biblical capitalism. What is fruitful?

85: The long, gray winter. — Now a day of sun! No longer think or write. What is fruitful?

86: It’s ironic how I always have an excuse to ride an airplane.

87: A conceivable human future is not one in which we see Earth recover from a sixth mass extinction. The last recovery took tens of millions of years. Our recorded history is ten thousand years.

Sunday, March 28, 2010

Earth thought 88 of 365: The Holocene mind is echoed in time. Atom of *Adam*, are we powerless not to grieve it?

89: In the United States of America, we've given each other health care but not yet environmental health.

90: People say that they have to think of their children, but they ignore their children when thinking that their children do not want parents who are fair to the future.

91: Is vice this symmetry: holding others to what I should demand only of myself?

But without law, environmental problems won't be solved. The evolutionary record is clear. Humans have a tendency to wipe out species around them and to over-use resources for present interests (Ridley 1998). Laws correct this tendency and introduce foresight.

Fully human only if *anthropomic*. So vice is a kind of asymmetry.

92: Law needn't be what the State calls "law." In ancient Greek, *nomos* included custom. Anthroponomy — *accus-toming* humankind to collective responsibility.

93: For at least ten thousand years — some say fifty — we have eradicated species with our technology. Technology + population = dead species.

But I am trying this. Democracy + *nomos* = anthroponomy.

We don't live in a true democracy.

94: Nothing misanthropic in being truthful.

95: I sit inside myself and worry. It is fruitless. Then I talk with George, my neighbor. I reconnect.



Queensboro (Ed Koch) Bridge, New York City, July 2016.

Monday, April 5, 2010

Earth thought 96 of 365: Cyclical time seemed endless. Blue season came and went — gold, rust, wool and green. Species became dry skeletons inside trees.

97: Absent wood doves when feral cats cry in heat, a red maple surrounded by grub-brown grass.

98: The rain ticks as the radiators click. Small streams trickle across pavement.

99: Romantic environmentalism coincided with the industrial revolution.

It overlay colonialism — made “wilderness” out of long-labored, indigenous environments!

100: Yesterday, I saw the bees in dozens around a circular patch of yellow and purple crocuses.

101: James Lovelock (2007) tells us to *enjoy* ourselves, because we cannot save the Holocene Earth. With him, moral thinking is as obtuse as the “science” of a climate change denier.

102: Surely, the best thing about us is not that we can calculate, but that we can relate.

103: I am beginning to look at the current world of life as a strangely empty version of what was here before we bloomed voraciously in population and power — first colonialist, then industrialist.

A few large animals live wild in New York State now — ghosts of the life here thousands of years ago once the glaciers receded.

Monday, April 12, 2010

Earth thought 104 of 365: Ecological flows make planetary citizens.

105: We can't keep a home in free-floating anxiety.

106: How did I become a here and now self, rather than a “we” that becomes a “humanity” across generations?

107: I want clear, practical advice concerning the environment. Sometimes, it is hard to find due to ignorance and oppression.

108: Environmental faults are brute facts.

A pragmatic attitude pulls us out of dreams.

109: I drove back to Central New York, my childhood home. Country starts to fit like broken-in jeans.

110: Powering down

Friday, April 23, 2010

Earth thought 111 of 365: The shakes run and tumble, roped and rooted as rough nature. Dream-states spread, dissolve in time. Weather in my head clears. Character smoothes over decades as rocks rolled in water.

112: Being on the side of the powerless a thousand years from now isn't powerless.

113: Worms helped me become myself—a natural history of ego.

114: I want new categories of moral heroism. We do not need to stop a bullet with our bodies. We need to dissolve the patterns degrading our world. How? By (re-)designing institutions and engaging in the complex practicality of politics.

These things are not romantic. They take time, compromise, and lunch with people you oppose.

115: Small houses live in big ones.

Take the room upon the room,
washed bowls airing nightly on the rack.
Outside, the soil is made of histories,
speechless and unending for all of human time.

116: Now by the lake. Unassumingly, it reflects my head in the clouds.

117: I'm turned inside out, doubled over from running, my back filled with sky.

118: Headaches—the clogged marsh mind with a skein of plastic bag in the reeds.

119: A loss is a vacuum only if history reminds us.

120: The Earth seeps into music. What do the earliest musics teach us about Earth?

Think of electrified sound now.

121: Just as clouds swirl in, so can small things swiftly gather in my soul to fast moving system. Bright salvation of the day, groundless and optimistic as the sun.

Monday, May 3, 2010

Earth thought 122 of 365: Plants unfurl, push, pod their way through the soil down and up. Wasps cycle out from winter into the open. Cats cry in heat.

123: Like life, I am taking a break from thinking today.

124: I want to support the watershed in our neighborhood by building a rain-water catch. Ecology begins beyond property.

125: Emotional and social maturity are important for happiness in old age; not physical health, money, success or social status (Vaillant 2003). What about ecological connection—sentiment and know-how about the land in which we live?

126: I sat on the floor with students last night, revising their semester-long work. Harried and laughing, once near tears, they tumbled out of the system with no time to lose. And we are like that, we post-students, with our home improvements and loan improvements, our tasks, competition, and dinners. We tumble out of life with barely time to lose. The Earth's lost in all this. So it is really on us, really our thing, to build in time to think about the Earth. If we don't put the Earth into our school systems, students will cascade beyond it. And so, too, with the big people, we so-called adults, who are supposed to be responsible for our generation.

127: Goodnight, Thylacine. Goodnight Holocene. Goodnight ghosts of the Earth.

128: It isn't aggression underneath the carbon-heavy skies; it's obliviousness. Insulated by metal and concrete, we revolve aimlessly inside a million aims.

We lack a political "we."

129: The view on top of the house is different than the view from the sidewalk.

130: I worked outdoors all day. The next morning, I paused over the vitamin bottle with its capsules of chemical sun.

131: Last summer, I saw the strata that were once alive where I now live. Here was once under water—ocean with strange, shelled life. These overlays are compelling in a way advertisements are not. They do not seduce desire but are coolish fact.

They say, "The world doesn't spin around you. You are becoming, and many of your desires are mistakes."

Monday, May 10, 2010

Earth thought 132 of 365: On days when my loved ones hurt, I am made of storms.

133: 1980, 1990, 2000. Most multinational corporations have been as alive to their environment as partygoers puking with laughter into the toilet bowl.

134: Why hasn't the insurance industry funded widespread, environmental activism?

135: It's important to adapt humanity, who we take ourselves to be — our self-projection.

136: The issues that interest me most about Earth ethics concern how Earth's size, duration and intricacy pose a complex problem that exceeds us.

137: The macro-perspectives of geological time and planetary ecology make it hard to keep in view, simultaneously, human perspectives. I look at a book bag I bought alongside my father — from Strand Books. On it, profiles of all different sorts of people. The warmth of that memory, which goes back to when I was young. The thought that every one of those faces has similar memories. From within each of our worlds, our loves are so intense, and it would be inhuman to forget them.

I should write a book that contrasts these two perspectives — and shows how they can coexist in a human life.

138: For the last three nights, the temperature has dipped below freezing. Three weeks ago, April saw the hottest day on record for my city.

Cycling of extremes.

Wednesday, May 19, 2010

Earth thought 139 of 365: The Bangladeshi worker on the lift for the sixth straight day of work at a dozen hours per day joining bolts between girders in Dubai's new sky-scrapers: I would not fault blindness to the environment.

Yet he knows that we are shifting the planet. He sees it through the immense strain and exploitation, the scale of it. He is not invested in denying it.

Is it the privileged who are most often in denial?

140: I watched French cinema last week (Melville 1956; Gleize 2002). Each film showed a keen awareness of chance, and luck, of the way we collide or intertwine in happenings.

We are so fundamentally abstract. Who are "we" here?

141: End of semester grading with its misshapen papers, academic dishonesty, appeals, emails, phone calls, running out pens, sore necks, weak eyes, lack of exercise, distraught students, angry messages, fine-grain policy, stress, and deadlines: we *insist* that we are learning, but the system isn't.

142: I am again as weather cycling an extreme.

143: When papers lie on top of papers, clothes hung there, a chair shifted to fit and the fine sift of dust lights up beneath a window, natural order returns.

144: Where the outside is inside and seasonal time is my clock, I live with rock patterns in my heart and the rise and fall of species.

145: I can't imagine the aesthetics of loss that a mass extinction deserves. What is a museum of lost life that isn't a museum of natural history?

146: There is utopia in a million year old form of life. Look at it, how it has weathered and been weathered.

147: The moral person might say that we have responsibility *to*, not *for*, future generations.

But the truth is that we are responsible for them.

Thursday, May 27, 2010

Earth thought 148 of 365: If I teach myself to live more freely with uncertainty, the complexity of the world opens up.

149: Earth is neither healthy nor unhealthy, and so with the environment. I am healthy. You are healthy. Those animals are unhealthy. (Frierson 2002)

Environments are relative. So we are deciding on life much of the time with our environment-changing power.

150: My society has no conventional oath by which I can publically commit myself to stewarding the environment. Nor are there many practices to steward me in contributing to the public good in this way.

151: Seeing cars backed up willy-nilly as they return from Chesapeake Bay.

152: Blindly the horseshoe crabs clutch the future—iridescent trail of eggs on the sand near the waterline.

153: Our current era has spanned sixty five million years since the fifth mass extinction. *Homo sapiens* has yet to age anywhere near a million, much less a quarter of a million, even a tenth.

Still, we have become a geological era in a sliver of time. Unlike a meteor strike or a chain of volcanic eruptions, we have ranged, constructed, settled and multiplied as we've made nature into a mechanics. This fifty thousand year moment is called "intelligence."

It is unclear whether it is *sapient*.

154: Is there a name for the hope that comes with action? Is it the hope in doing something, not nothing?

155: Arendt (2006) thought that evil in mass society has become "banal" — essentially *organized thoughtlessness*.

Jackall (2009) showed how thoughtlessness is organized in business-as-usual corporate capitalism.

The BP oil spill disrupting much of the Gulf of Mexico's ecology is a result of organized corporate thoughtlessness.

Tuesday, June 1, 2010

Earth thought 156 of 365: Can you wrap your head around all that—the fisherfolk, coastlines, ocean bottoms, life that would migrate through, breeding and hatching grounds, the birds depending on the ocean life...?

And now I'm trying to imagine human culture, the communities and visitors who depend on Gulf life, our rituals, sense of beauty, meaning.

157: *Life forms* are not the only things to go extinct. *Forms of life* do too. The first is biological — the second cultural. Our rites are often woven around life forms. So the ecological processes extinguishing life forms atrophy forms of life.

158: Last night, I saw a Western set in 1868 (Van Acken 2006) and a film about Beijing's internal, global, frontier (Jia 2004). In those 136 years powered first by colonialism, the frontier offered up electricity, cars, airplanes, computers, and industrial processes about which I can only guess. Population rocketed spaceward on a chart.

159: Humanity should become ahead of itself, not simply after its effects.

160: People talk about environmental "aesthetics." But the aesthetic approach is passive—about how a subject views the world (Harries 1998). We should talk instead about *ethos*.

An *ethos* is a way of life in which things make good sense. It is more than what we now call "ethics." It includes beauty and truth.

An ecological *ethos* is active, because it is a way of living, not simply a way of perceiving.

The place of aesthetics is *within* ethos: to reveal the morally invisible—other forms of life and the lost *we*.

Sunday, June 6, 2010

Earth thought 161 of 365: Machines are not elemental until they fall apart. But love is elemental, mechanical when it falls apart.

162: Life is organized only in so far as it emerges from disorganization, pressing against it, succumbing to it. Organs are temporary solutions to dissolution. But I must take geological time.

163: Recently, the Alaotra grebe of Madagascar was declared extinct—another bird species, an increasing number. The causes are predictable—incursion into Alaotra habitats, invasive species brought by our reshuffling life around the planet.

Should we call globalization “mass extinction?” From the perspective of much life on this planet, we are their extinction. From our own, “we are the world” (Jackson and Ritchie 1985).

164: *Ethos*, sometimes translated as *character*, is the root of *ethics*. And what of the ethics of *root*? (Why draw on a plant to teach us origins?)

165: Human rights were ill conceived at their root. The Earth’s the origin and breaker of states. What would rights be if they were conceptualized from our *ground*?

Saturday, June 12, 2010

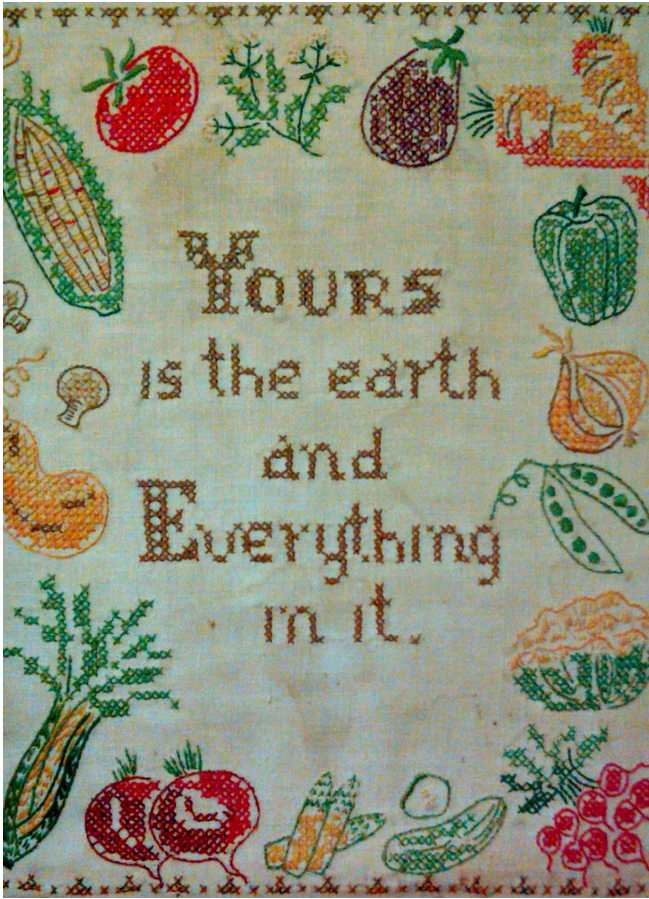
Earth thought 166/365: The root of *education* implies leading forth. To what?

From what?

167/365: Defenders of BP spout off—crude speech from their mouths.

168/365: The child’s face in light.

169/365: I’m speaking of being ecological as if it were an ideal, rather than a fact. To be ecological is to act in light of our context in the world of life, rather than being oblivious to it.



Aunt Eleanor's first needlepoint, Avon, Ohio, 2007.

170/365: "We, as gardeners, cultivate our land, our shelter[,] by taking care of the land for those to come after us — not being wasteful, but watchful — in what, how and why we care for our plot of land, whether we live in the country or [in] the city. We are 'gardeners,' if we are aware to take care of the 'land,' wherever we live."

—(Aunt) Evelyn Palik (née Bendik).

171/365: *Rain in Bangladesh* ~a one minute play~

Isaiah (age 5): “What’s a fact?”

Jeremy (age 40): “It’s something absolutely true.

Like, outside now it is sunny.”

Isaiah: “Not in Bangladesh.”



Zevi, Syracuse, New York, 2012.

Monday, June 14, 2010

172/365: *Oikeiosis* (Laertius 1925, 7.85)—the drive to maintain a good enough life. *Oikos*, or home, is at its root, just as with “ecology.” An impulse to home, to form the conditions for living in a way that meets the deep needs—the stability and growing—of the being. A non-capitalist sense of self-interest.

173/365: Rain falls on good and evil alike (*Matthew* 5:44–45). It is unconditional.

Tuesday, June 15, 2010

174/365: Pageant of Extinct Species, the Theater of Displaced Islanders, Graffiti of a Sunken Planet.

Wednesday, June 16, 2010

175/365: "It makes you feel good." This five-year-old riding a merry-go-round: a complex cyclical movement where the world amazes the body—

Monday, June 21, 2010

176/365: The Thylacine came into being through a long, evolutionary process within geological time. In a shuddering of that time, it died. From our impact.

177/365: The summer day says we should become a festival. But I think of BP oil spreading throughout the cold blackness of the Gulf.

178/365: I am fixing my house, because I own it and because my life appears with it, for a time.

179/365: No one owns the Gulf. But how could BP's life not appear with it for a time?

180/365: A corporation is lifeless, unless it builds time into its accounting and procedures.

Friday, June 25, 2010

181 of 365: Setting the *time* for accounting is as significant as what is evaluated—the time of eras versus the quarterly return.

HALFWAY: Leaving the door ajar, we heard them all night long communicating around the pond. I had dreams, many dreams, hopping about, energetic and calm at once. The amphibians, deservedly sacred, are among the most endangered. They are the memory of the mobility between land and water.

183/365: What have I learned so far doing this exercise? That I like forming over time in my own speciation process. What *kind* of life should I live?

Tuesday, June 29, 2010

184 of 365: Looked through my wild books yesterday — my books from when I was young. In my drawing: the squirming, honest, determined grasp of life.

185/365: I put the flooring down, plank by plank on top of the sub-floor, itself raised on small spaces that let the air circulate out moisture: playroom.

186/365: It is summer to feel so, forever! I have accomplished something for the next generation.

Earth thought 187 of 365: Reading. In *Republic* (Plato 1992, 330d–e), Cephalus leads the discussion to justice by explaining how old age makes the conscience more acute lest we wake at night in terror thinking of the afterlife. My life will seep into soil — and what is left after?

188 of 365: The environment may be one place where, roughly, virtue and happiness align (*pace* Kant 1965). The habit in my body of attending to this or that detail of living well in my environment is conducive to health and vitality.

Friday, July 2, 2010

189: Socrates' argument for equal opportunities for women (Plato 1992)—this first feminist critique in philosophy—how impossible it seemed thousands of years ago. Similarly, it seems impossible now that humankind could become anthroponomic.

1-9-0: Children imitate well the things their adults do. More so—they are consistent and precise in discovering where principles they've learned should be applied but are not. *They* lead us if we give them an ideal implausible to us.

Earth thought 191 of 365: A person relating to nature is among the most educational things, since it is our relationship to Earth that is at issue.

Tuesday, July 6, 2010

Earth thought 192 of 365: On the opposite page is a photo of the dock at Crumhorn Mountain Boy Scout Camp, now called Camp Henderson, near Milford, N.Y. I was a waterfront instructor here in the summers of 1985 and 1986 when I was fifteen and sixteen. My sixth grade teacher, Jim Davidson, was waterfront director and got me involved. When I look at the photo—better, am by or on this lake- whole lessons surface.

193 of 365: Pick a smooth, well-weighted one and angle it well. Skip—skip—skip—skip—skip—across the water.

Earth thought 194 of 365: I can avoid exhausting behavior. But as exhaust hits the environment, I can't. 90 degrees Fahrenheit and rising.



Crumborn Mountain waterfront dock, July 2010.

Earth thought 195 of 365: There were profits possible to squeeze outside regulation and weak links in design which no one took the time to double-check: BP.

Sunday, July 11, 2010

Earth thought 196 of 365: Colder winters, hotter summers. To think of adaptation as *insulation*.

197: O planetary citizen, how can you advocate for the unrecognized and the useless? I am wondering whether there are values that touch us from each remoteness.

198: A still patch on the lake, rocking slightly in rhythm: let me open up the sky.

199: Have I been reading slowly? Cool after heat — after sticky, nerve-frayed nights. I read with my body.

200: A fisherwoman takes on BP. How her environment will be affected, how its plenitude can be protected.

Sunday, July 18, 2010

Earth thought 201 of 365: I took a flight to California this year. Drank imported wine. These mattered, because people live in poverty. Environmentally, were my actions negligible apart from their patterns?

202: The car-driving engineer designed a more efficient car. The animal scientist framed slaughterhouses to involve less fear (Grandin and Johnson 2006).

203: Philosophy, predicated off of a personal turn, calls for *positioning* in one's life most of all. Dialogues (Plato 1992), aphorisms (Nietzsche 2001), remarks (Wittgenstein 1990). But what of the body "in" Earth (Abram 2010)?

204: Philosophy without the body is out of place. Ectopian, not ecotopian.

205: Philosophy without the commons is also ectopic. We share Earth. BP is a consequence of ectopic management.

206: What is property when it is *entrusted* and not fungible?

207: My uncle Bill the farmer plowed *around* the Killdeer nest.

Sunday, July 25, 2010

Earth thought 208 of 365: "I have lost my origin. / And I don't want to find it again" (Björk 2009). Ectopian.

209: A lone Missoni dress in the desert wears a mannequin inside.

210: In my midnight (Nolan 2010), the waters flood in, making our half measures obsolete.

211: Their homes are clapboard next to the unimaginably rich. The global economy draws countrysides into cities sprawling for miles on end, powering through the grooves of depletion left by colonialism.

212: The lives of others, of fish and bird, of sponge and mollusk are the deep-sea consciousness of the Gulf of Mexico.

213: I am dissipating the noise in my mind so that I can read while hearing the wood doves outside my home.

214: The founding fathers of the United States Constitution did not foresee a world where term limits and lobbies would thwart long-range planning. They didn't listen to the Onondaga Nation.

Sunday, August 1, 2010

215 — Quarterly returns torque the institution to the present. Look at the decision-making of BP.

216 — Institutions have no "fabric." They have to be contained and designed to self-contain. They fight for resources.

217 — How do institutions *shape* character? The pile of reports on her desk beyond what she can thoughtfully field —

218 — When thoughtful people produce thoughtless results, look at the institution.

219 — Everything has its system in our fantasy of system.

220 — Taking decades to see whether our experiments unintentionally harm is not capitalist. It is democratic.

221 — How do neighborhoods share *ethos*? By adjusting life together and passing along things that work. A democracy without neighborhoods is ectopian.

Sunday, August 8, 2010

222 — The single actor inside the large disorder. Personal environmentalism instead of democracy. A bird learns to fly by banging into windows.

223 —

1. Rotating slowly across the water's surface, a machine harvests lake plants for nearby farms to use.

2. Someone on a boat watches the reflection of the ridgeline become calm near dark.

Water harvesters

224 — Government announcement: the Gulf oil spill is dissipating, absorbed, remediated to a great extent. The long-range effects on Gulf ecosystems appear to be bearable.

Yet we are largely ignorant of what the long-range effects might be (Revkin 2010a) and the long-term effects of past spills have been extensive, much greater

than expected to both non-human ecology and human economy.

Why does the U.S. government have a bad record of environmental reporting (Holland 2010)?

225 — “Dispersed oil is still oil. It’s just [oil] in a different form” (Michael J. Blum, Tulane University, quoted in Fahrenthold, 2010).

Earth thought 226 of 365 — The metropolis is more ecological than a sprawled town. Choice of density.

Earth thought 227 of 365: Now imagine: across the street, a migration corridor, *roof woods!*

Earth thought 228 of 365: There are many different things to be said for relationships and their depth.

Sunday, August 15, 2010

Earth thought 229 of 365: One day in the future, I hike along the coast. There are cool shafts of light in the forest, moss smell in humid air, sound of slow waves of leaves absorbing quick, mostly quiet movements of animals.

Time made the forest a relief.

And sand spins around our memory of silence. The other way, the way in which cosmos and our identities blend in the dune.

Trust crossing back and forth between the human and non-human.

Now on the shore on the water

Earth thought 230 of 365: As I walk, plants grow unnoticeably, the small spider hops and stops. An ever-intent bee.

As I run, a squirrel scrambles up a tree, deer pushing off ahead of dogs and people, the ever-intent bee.

Earth thought 231 of 365: Instead of having portraits of extinct species, should we have portraits of lost terrains and, inside them, species?

Earth thought 232 of 365: Drivers. Soundless metal rivers, glass, and music. Outside, polluting.

233 of 365: Vapor in the air. Sprinklers. Children running.

234::365: The color of the August sun at sunfall. Plato (1992) likened it to the Good. A rare ecotopian trace in this first utopian.

Earth thought 235 of 365: I understood tonight why my Ohio cousins, growing up, would always take showers before bed. By day's end, a layer of stickiness coats my body.

I have moved from Syracuse to Cleveland.



Detroit Road, Cleveland, Ohio, October 2010.

Monday, August 16, 2010

Earth thought 236: In Pakistan, floods (BBC 2010). Horrible landscapes of water.

Tuesday, August 17, 2010

Earth thought 237 of 365: An environmentalism worth its name is an *ethos*. It demands a connection with our Earth origins that settles in the emotions of the chest.

Sunday, August 22, 2010

Earth thought 238 of 365: The environmentalists call it *anthropocentrism* and claim that the circle of moral concern is arbitrarily circumscribed around humans. The humanitarians call it *autonomy* and claim that beings without it—all non-humans, so they say—are not the primary focus of morality.

Both get humanity wrong. *It is humane to care about other life forms* (Bendik-Keymer 2006). Our freedom to relate makes us free to see that not only autonomy matters.

There is so much misanthropy in environmentalism and so much panic in humanitarians.

Earth thought 239 of 365: The mice and the wasps in the summer. They continue on, doing no harm to their world with which they have evolved. They are symbiotic, carrying pollen, aerating soil, turning over life like worms or fungus farming underground insects.

And we who have the power to disrupt these tight-knit multi-age cycles, these bundles of processing life, where are we in this home that has been our origin? Why are we dislocated like a top spinning along concrete?

240:: The time of the office is fragmented. Who has time to dwell on things that fall outside the office's immediate and proximate goals (Jackall 2009)?

Leave it up to the public to do the long-term thinking. But *civic time* is fragmented by a flex economy, circling between multiple jobs and child care (Sennett 1998).

As the office fragments, so does civic time.

Earth thought 241: Could we draw environmentalism from ourselves, rather than inculcating it?

Earth thought 242: The main reason why environmentalism does not develop within the good sense of people in contemporary capitalism is that we do not identify with a long enough time scale.

That, and more importantly how we are divided from each other.

Wednesday, August 25, 2010
mid-week

Earth thought 243 of 365: Lizards are going extinct at an elevated rate due to climate change They scuttle for shade rather than overheat and then lose valuable time once used for feeding. Many migrate to cooler climes — but then they compete with the species already there. Climate change is happening *too quickly* for their adaptive evolution. Their temporary system's thrown out by a planet moving too quickly beyond it, and their genetic lines die out after so many millions of years of evolution. They suffer, but do not feel, time.

244: *The impractical ones* — they run after private wealth, personal ambition, suppressing vague fears that would fully erupt only in a group acting collectively. On they go in their private spheres — *homo economicus*.

245: *Homo sapiens* only now for the first time can be aware of its long-term and widespread ecological effects. Can we use our technology to think like a planet?

The *homo sapiens* of 12,000 years ago was a long-term ecological mess. Consider the extinction of megafauna in what we now call North America—deep, indigenous specicide due to hunting with long-range weapons. Then agriculture a couple thousand years later. And now the industrial world acts as if the Earth is not our home. It simply overshoots Holocene Earth.

Can we develop a technology of planetary reach and time? This would include institutional design—and democracy.

Yes, but this also smacks of avoidance: of colonialism, of global capitalism, of today's oligarchic "democracy."

Sunday, August 29, 2010

246 of 365: The sailboat lets the biosphere be, but not the combustion engine (Braungart and McDonough 2002). I thought of these things tonight, driving home. My car, out of whack, a poorly designed artifact in a poorly designed society where we do not have true, collective choice.

247 of 365: A hawk glides above the ridgeline for minutes on minutes.

248 of 365: The industrial approach to our feelings isn't fitting to ourselves. The self-help tune-up with workbook and office seminar, even the haste with which we attack ourselves, betray industrial design: push and package.

249 of 365: *A child builds naturally*. It is how he understands causality, not how to ignore it.

Sunday, September 5, 2010

Earth thought 250 of 365: *National borders* keep us from protecting societies and ecosystems from pollution, while seeds and water are increasingly *commodified by transnational corporations*. We should become citizens of Earth and push our States toward anthroponomy.

Earth thought 251 of 365: I've been having flashes recently of . . . I don't know the word. I suddenly *feel* that everything I or others do on this planet is temporary. The entire history of life is a point with no one to record or to watch it. Rushing headlong forward, startlingly the way it is, instead of a desperate nostalgia, I feel freed to try again or anew at things that matter to me, and I feel responsible for my point in time.

The meaning is intrinsic, since any hold beyond the point is fantasy. And so my love for this point of life on Earth, for handing it down — that, too, is intrinsic. It is more meaningful to have been a point in time this way, to have been an unrecognized, unrecorded, headed-to-dust *attender* to a geological instant in an even older cosmos.

252 of 365: Paradoxically, we could use a can-do attitude like that once found in Dubai, most un-ecological of cities. That city deranged with speculation and construction, whose use of energy and emission of waste has been the largest per capita in the world — *that* city felt change in the air. And now our entire civilization must change to become ecological.

In the deserts outside Dubai, the sand sifts in eddies through the air, smooth and beautiful, and the qaf tree dots the crown and level of the land, tough in its persistent adaptation. This wealth remains unseen.

The wealth of collective action also stays unseen.

253 of 365: Yes, I save the human over the snake, but the basic idea is that we should co-inhabit. Industrial theorists obsess over the trade-offs and miss the goal: creative solutions that are altogether decent.

254 of 365: Pre-occupied grown-ups, try growing up: act collectively.

255: I am lost in the wild when I cannot reach medical care for my child. Also when I reach inarticulate silence.

I am lost in civilization when I forget I am alive or feel unfree, when I have no distance on civilization.

256 of 365: Upstairs, wound-up neighbors walking on floorboards over this apartment where I now live during the workweek, sound of cars on Lee Rd. Cold seeping in. Fall, not yet — soon.

Friday, September 10, 2010
justice in

257 of 365: Emerge out of oblivion inside the makeshift habits of adults, the future unimaginable?

258: Life isn't something you just *waste!* It deserves a chance just as we deserve a chance. There should be a good reason to kill it off, and we should want to be aware of having acted so as to kill it off.

Our society seems invisibly wanton. We're producing widespread extinction without thinking about or discussing it, without meaning to.

Earth thought 259 of 365: Trust is a keeper, the alchemist of anxiety. Trustworthy, you activists of the next world.

Earth thought 260 of 365: As Chin-Tai (Kim 2010) reminded me, trustworthiness is different than being trusted. Still, I believe in *oikeiosis*—once we include true, collective communication and some time.

Earth thought 261 of 365: Some portions of the world, around 1500 A.D., managed to brutally exploit the rest of the world, using that exploitation to drastically increase material development back home. 500 years later, those same parts of the world managed to make the descendants of the exploited suffer even more. And they did so quite simply, by polluting. Climate change floods the helpless, not the gluttonous rich, and colonialism's shadow stretches over the poorest faces still. Is it not enough to make you shake your fists at the sky?

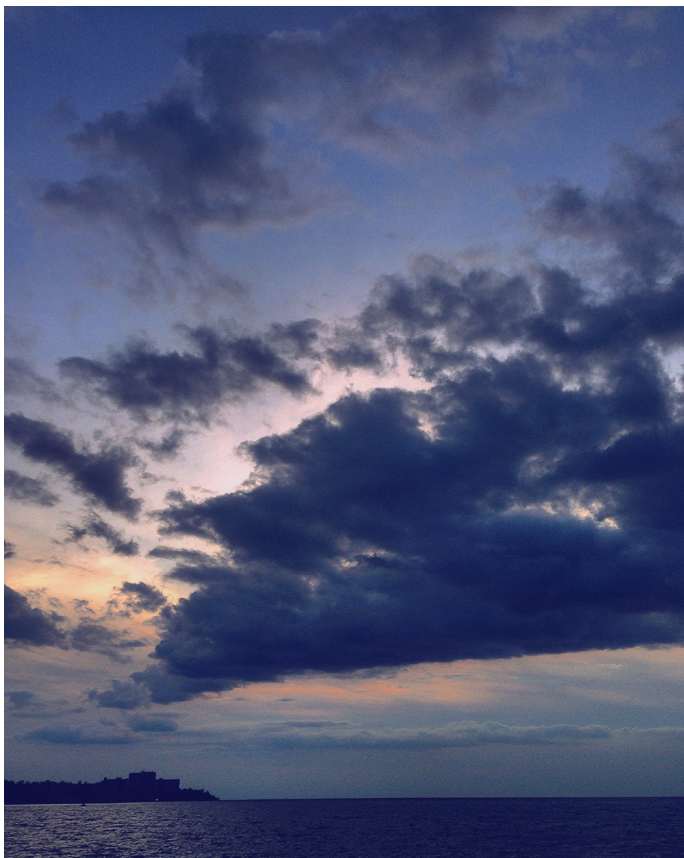
Saturday, September 11, 2010

262: "We can't simply keep stacking boulders against the change that's coming..." (McKibben 2010). Yes, we can. *They* will have to cope, not us.—This is presentism, worse than racism and sexism combined, because it magnifies powerlessness in the future.

Sunday, September 12, 2010

relationships

263: To keep our humanity, we'll need to find goodness in each other. So I am going to build a home beginning from my relationships.



Lake Erie, May 2016.

Friday, September 17, 2010

264 of 365: Alien planet, full of dislocation, loss, dryness, dust, rain and floods. But it is still Earth, a continuous biochemical system, our origin and home.

Earth thought 265 of 365 (one hundred more to go): Democratic states today exist in a dis-integrated global patchwork with many holes of sovereignty and failed coordination. State alongside state alongside state with slight consistency between when it comes to environmental policy.

And then the whims of “democratic”—just as easily *oligarchic*—preference opting for short-term interests as swayed by powerful media and politicians funded by private interests.

The widespread ignorance and apparent hedonism—valuing material pleasures over invisible life forms or over fairness to generations a hundred years from now.

But authoritarianism is unjustifiable even on consequential grounds. Top-down rule can be blind to perspective, focused on the things it thinks matter and abstract to the real concerns of people—indeed, it would almost certainly be if planetary. More importantly, authoritarianism is notoriously susceptible to corruption, checks and balances less so.

I think what is needed is a dispersed and widely held method for stabilizing perspective and integrating invisible values, checks on the systemic soft spots that subject the public to private interests. This is simply *real* democracy. We would appear to need democratic contestation and sub- and transnational movements that challenge oligarchic politics to become moral (Benhabib 2004).

266. Lady Gaga's meat (Gaga 2010)—her Missoni—is it more gluttonous than the typical restaurant menu? The eaters consume inconspicuously, whereas the dress hangs conspicuously.

267. The silk harvesting, dye vats, and electrical energy in a pulsing sewing factory, the transportation over several continents (pollution rising to the upper reaches of the atmosphere and dissolving in the oceans); the packaging of plastics, papers, and silks.

...

A florescent-lit, white showroom with bright colored scarves in glorious patterns laid out on long, white plastic podiums.

268. "Hey, you! You're destroying all of our fun!"

(The self-gratifiers are tired without even having had a storm within their chests.)

Saturday, September 18, 2010

269. Today, the media question is *can you do me?* This is a deflection in which you position someone to think *we* are out of reach from the beginning.

Sunday, September 19, 2010

particularity

270. The disaster books (McKibben 2010; Lovelock 2006) don't do a good job of starting from *our* particularity, and so they promote hysteria. The steadying by a face.

(Elaine's voice, Isaiah's face, Mom and Dad and Ruth's voices, seeing the Aunts, my good friends)

Monday, September 27, 2010

fragments — action

271. In German romanticism (1830), *avant-garde* modernism (1925), minimalist music (1950), hip-hop, rap, and much late twentieth-century media and performance, the fragment scattered the atmosphere so that we could breathe in our limits (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1988).

The cracks showing: weather outside brings down the translucent ceiling where we thought we could be angels. The hot, dusty, humid, pouring, freezing, billowing sky pours in. Shards on the floor by your feet. Children have decided on the basement.

272. When I am healthy, I am in my own ecosystem fitting my limits. I am not running myself down. I weather into myself.

273. The environmental crisis we now face is not one we can stop in our lifetimes; it is one *we* can start to address for future generations on the model of building a cathedral (Saillant 2010).

274. At the precise historical moment when we need to expand our sense of ecology to include the planet, research drives our sense of ecology down to the scale of genetics, there in the inside of cells (Whitehouse 2010). Instead of turning to the collective, “bioethics” goes back to the *sub*-individual!

275. Convert relational reality to mechanical potency for hedonic intent. *Eco-tourism* — in-grown fragmentation!

276. *Eco-hedonism*. I like to glide when I ride. And that means this: slowing up hills, quickening down them. The gas-users of America act as if we have no topography (my eco-friends and I, we’re righteously complicit)!

277. Why not fund a corps of mechanic-teachers who give public efficiency classes in each community, teaching people how to retrofit their homes to save money while teaching sustainability at the same time?

Why not prime a corps of law instructors who show us how to collectively change our zoning?

Personal efficiency, not collective legislation? In-grown fragmentation.

278. The old image of sustainability as an ever-overturning way of life is false, because the changing climate will change what is possible in life. Sustainability itself had an un-geological sense of time. *In-grown fragmentation!*

Tuesday, September 28, 2010

The Failure (1988–2012)

279. I want a movie seen from the perspective of a climate refugee in 2050. It should depict the history of the Failure (1988–2012) when everyone in the know knew about climate change—the politicians, the journalists, the academics—and (most) sneezed.

The Failure would be part of every child's vocabulary.

The Rockies will be barren in this film, eaten out by beetle infestations and washed through with soil erosion.

Many states will have imploded as Sudan has under the pressure of desertification.

The refugee will rely on the kindness of strangers.

Everyone will be stressed and angry at the selfishness of the Failure.

Wednesday, September 29, 2010

presentism

280. Presentism is bias toward the present to the detriment of the future. It is an *organizational situation*. Due in part to our presentism, we are forcing the climate toward a less hospitable planet. Shortage of resources and environmental risk are oppressive. So presentism is complicit in oppression. It is a new kind of oppression, one that is unintentional but clearly negligent.

Friday, October 1, 2010

281. The time frame of twenty-one centuries sits as a convention, a bubble in my mind. But geological time should be the default context. Ten years ago, I thought the *millennium* was the mark. The Museum of the Earth has affected my imagination.

282. Ode to a global flow. The cotton from [?], dyes from [?], buttons from [?] made from plastics from [?]
—stitched into Zara's Spring line outside Dhaka, Bangladesh; shipped to Spain [?] and redistributed to Dubai where it's sold in Mall of the Emirates to a U.S. woman who travels back to New York, then to Cleveland, and lives in Shaker Square, wearing the suit downtown on the commuter rail and walking around Public Square into her office building, up to the twenty-seventh floor, corner office, overlooking Lake Erie.

Saturday, October 2, 2010
third-generation climate ethics

Two eight three. First-generation climate ethics focused on whether there is a climate problem, what caused it, who is responsible, and how to apportion blame. The second generation focuses on the adaptability of our form of life—our social and political systems, technology and economics, our *ethos*. Third-generation climate ethics is straight civics. Trans- and subnational democratic contestation!

Sunday, October 3, 2010

Two eight four. Here is this beautiful planet whose Holocene order we are destroying.

Climate civics is trans- and subnational democratic contestation!

Monday, October 4, 2010

Two eight five. You climb around it, fall your head let upside down, hair above to the ground, leg locked, a cold and sturdy bar. The giddy high like sea-rise barriers. Out into the surrounding world, search of eddies. Self-organizing. Of broken ecologies of. A jungle gym —
like a good fragment

Thursday, October 14, 2010
post-industrial society

286/365: The State University of New York at Albany cancels most of its modern language programs (Jaschik 2010), breaking tenure, and I think about climate change. The university whose motto is “the world within reach” just did that.



Old Southern Ohio coal-mining country, May 2016.

287/365: People had to adjust to urbanization following the Industrial Revolution. What will we have to adjust to in a post-industrial age? Too easy.

288/365: On a quick-speeding plume, rolling over the land, enveloping trees, houses, fields, fences, cars, roads, mailboxes, ditches, porches . . . our industrial, democratically poor civilization meets Holocene Earth's limits.

Bedrock personal time has liquefied.

The core vaporized

Time is now urgent, a tremor on its face, an eddy blowing away the vapor

I no longer have all the time in the world; nor do we.

The seasons change, change their *form*—not just rotating.

Hylomorphs no longer count on the re-assuring, re-appearing Same.

289/365: Where the biosphere is mimicked, not shifted. To achieve a post-industrial society will require a kind of self-consciousness and innovation that the human species has rarely shown. To achieve harmony with the biosphere's cycles in a given geological era—we have hardly been able to do that in all our time as a *species* (Ridley 1998), and *especially* in industrial society. And now the cycles are shifting, the bundles coming loose.

But one thing in our way is corporate oligarchy. We are missing the wealth of true, democratic collectives.

290/365: I looked for a time yesterday at kids playing in a playground. It seemed to me that ethics isn't about argument, then, but about really looking. What am I doing here?

291/365: Goal: *post-industrial society—dismantled oligarchy—confronting the colonial past.*

292/365: *Imaginary lunch-napkin notes.*

#1 (*while they went outside for a smoke, leaving me at the table*)

Patterns of behavior in which we are locked by incentives and disincentives and in which the actors that build our world are lodged, even trapped (Jackall 2009)

#2 (*by myself later that week*)

The deconstruction of an industrial economy—energy patterns, patterns of production, accountability schemes, laws, guiding metaphors . . .

293/365: I frequently feel the need to gather my time together, my interests, the meaning of the places I've lived, the jobs I've done, and—more importantly—the meaning of my relationships.

If I am split—shaved off, and vulnerable—I settle back into myself through the processing which is done as if I were an observer to myself, loving but also detached.

...

I cling to the fragmentation until I am as much a witness to my life as anyone else, albeit someone else who has some kindness.

...

294/365: “Industry” with its word family—*industrious*.

But the Industrial Revolution with its specific form of production. There could be other forms of production that would be *more* civilized (Braungart and McDonough 2002).

The virtues of industrialism can be vices too.

Presentism, human-caused planetary change—the Industrial Revolution at its limit undermining itself through technology that is in the hands of the few over the many, here and in the far future.

295/365: Hear “industry” straight to the backlife, the frontlife.

Backlife: extraction, colonialism

Frontlife: waste, misregulated capitalism

Saturday, October 16, 2010

Here’s to focus on materials, the gut-bare fantasy.

296/365: Manuel Castells (2000) called the Information Age “post-industrial.” But how is information technology produced and what powers it? The heavy metals and rare earths are extracted. The electricity comes from fossil fuel with its emissions. The powerful still exploit the vulnerable in the name of profit. The Information Age is simply late-industrialism.

297.365: Alekandr Sokurov’s *Russian Ark* (2002)—a single, continuous shot of 96 minutes, panning and flowing through a historical dream set at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg (these Earth thoughts feel also like such a shot). This is the nineteenth century; it is nationalist, colonialist. The ark of the twenty-first century is planetary, filmed in a dismantled refinery in 2090. Who dismantled it?

Sunday, October 24, 2010

promissory justice

298.365. *The Earth’s given us a chance to live.* Does that demand anything of us?

299.365. How can a chance generate *obligations* to live up to it? It would be the meaning the chance provides that contained the grounds of obligation. What is the meaning?

300.365. Suppose that being alive were the chance of a relationship, as when I inherit my parents.

But some parents are bad. Life is deservedly criticized when it involves tragedy or abuse (Neiman 2002).

Life is the scene of all our relationships. If any relationship is good, life is a condition on that possibility. But does the possibility of the good in relationships outweigh the possibility of tragedy and abuse, especially when the good in relationships makes tragedy and abuse truly hurt?

301.365. To make any sense of the idea that the chance of being alive demands something of us, then, we need the notion of an *unsurmountable* good in a mere possibility. I call this an *unqualified* good.

302.365. There is an unqualified good in being alive. It is the chance to *see* the good. It is unqualifiedly good to discern goodness—or even to have the possibility of doing so.

So the chance Earth has given us to live demands that we mind the good.

...

Is this not a *reductio ad absurdum* of the so-called “liberal” view that we have no obligation to do anything with ourselves as long as we’re not hurting one another? We have an obligation to discern and attest to the good. It comes from the fact of being alive given to us by our original home, Earth.

303.365. *Hamlet* (Shakespeare 2003) read as *the* crisis of authority. He doesn’t see the obligation in being alive, an obligation that goes away only when we can no longer see the good. He makes being into a groundless choice. This is immoral.

Hamlet does not display authority’s crisis—our *fascination* with him does.

304.365: The rot of obligation goes deeper.

1. Citizenship is a dying art so that we have lost important knowledge about how to work out what is good.
2. Many institutions organize irresponsibility so that we have trouble maintaining what is good *collectively*.
3. We have developed practices of short-term thinking so that we are not disposed to consider what is really good *for others in the future*.

305.365: How can we have a relationship with an impersonal system of life? Cultures and labors close to the land or water tend to develop a relationship with these zones of life out of long, sedimented time interacting with them and their climate.

Listen, the system of life filters down into someone.

Sunday, October 31, 2010
the use of time

306.365: Let me suppose that the idea of a relationship with an impersonal system of life, personalized by our analogical thinking, our identification and blurring as the system settles in, is not unhelpful (Bendik-Keymer 2006). It allows us to have a *home*. Still, this only helps; it does not suffice. An impersonal system expects nothing of me. I do, rather, of myself.

307.365: In today's corporate-style-managed militaries, soldiers, too, are often treated like the Earth under industrialism—squeezed to produce effective results, trained, equipped, even drugged or biotechnologically modified. They are used up and left over, polluted by the process.

308.365: I was shocked tonight to see that the same depersonalization allowing corporations such as BP to

turn ecosystems into numbers is there in my government's discharging of combat veterans (French et al., 2010).

Did you kill anyone?

Were you wounded?

Have you ever had thoughts of suicide?

[check]

Thank you. That will be all.

309.365: Branches across glass, back and forth.

310.365: The first use of time is to be able to make decisions.

311.365: Jumbled and thrown together—and apart—our personal histories (and *our* personal history). The sound textured leaves along the hills. I *leave*.

312.365: Each day I write is significant to me, inside limits and aware.

Sunday, November 7, 2010
keeping our heads

313.365: What would a planetary curriculum for adaptation to climate change be, where the scale would be found not only in the content but also in the *form*? What kind of politics would it need to actually show?

314.365: On this election day, I can think of nothing worse for our relation to the environment than *the death of facts*.

315.365: *A self-portrait in the upstairs bathroom mirror of the Scheinfeld's home* (Scheinfeld et al. 2008). Imagine it is weathered by time, rain water, mold, ice.

316.365: / *Urban farming grocery list* /

Organic ghosts:

—to be alive to significance

—to have relational responses (to not turn away from you or myself)

—to not fit in, to

Be awkward and *ending* (!!!) even when

[They {production machines}] refuse to end. <*They really do, they refuse to give up!*>

317.365: *State of the world*. They deregulated our future so that they could gratify themselves now; sacrificed young people, families, whole ecosystems to a war based on lies. Their friends used loopholes around the globe to pollute and use up the Holocene Earth.

...

Meanwhile, I read some contemporary literature that gives one the sweetness in the infinity of life, as if everything were funny, or at least almost—ironic and light.

It's not that I am bitter and insist on critique. It's that the angles dizzy me.

318.365: Visiting University of Chicago, the first thing I did was to enter Rockefeller Chapel.

At center was *the intelligent flame of charity*—one, stained-glass window high, high up in the arch above the altar.

...

The epiphenomena of the quarterly return. Fractal dance of identities and desire amounting to an individual life.

...

I do not usually pray, being technically a-theist. But I thought about the next thousand years, an emptiness in my mind that was only a bare wish.



Not quite a self-portrait, November 2012.

319.365: *To let alone reasons, and to not let reasons be alone, so that: we aren't trying to make life more orderly than it is, denying its buzz and blur*

[organic ghost wall sticker/urban farmer saying]

Sunday, November 14, 2010

the death of facts

320.365: I think reasoning takes many forms; it isn't monolithic. For instance, reasoning can be theoretical, practical, or relational. There are many kinds of reasoning processes. Each has a different logic: involves different goals, forms of knowledge, sensibilities. Usually, when intellectuals rail against reason, they have *forgotten* practical and especially relational reason.

Look and see: how to fix something from experience, trust the body's capacity; know when to hold and be held.

Sense is sense. The sensible thing is to acknowledge it in its different forms.

So the environmentalist (Abram 2010) who chastises reason with intuition, experience, practice, poetry, religion, spirit, touch, dream, wildness, compassion, life, materiality, etc. — unintentionally contributes to an out of focus, rational culture. He gives reason to only one form of awareness, when it has many.

Think about the fact that there are many ways your life makes *sense*.

321.365: I knew a program once that, although in a school, openly contributed to the death of facts. It called itself "progressive," but was complicit in conservatism through its view of what is rational. The program, which was in philosophy, cultivated sentimentalism. It discounted objectivity and eschewed argument in favor of voice. It didn't matter if a position were well argued so long as it *felt* right. But authenticity depends ultimately



Amir & Dzena's wedding, New York City, May 2015.

on veracity to get a grip. This was my first introduction to how intellectuals can hate themselves by undermining the conditions of reason and, so, of responsibility. When you give up on objectivity, you give up on facts. And when we give up on facts, we hand over social reality to the most powerful and to self-gratification.

322.365: On March 25, 2009, Congressman Schimkus (R-IL) testified before the House Subcommittee on Energy and Environment. In this brief testimony, he appears to have taken biblical quotes out of context to justify his view that cataclysmic climate change can't

happen—“God” being providential (Doster 2009). I believe this to be the most tragic video clip I’ve seen all year, due to its banality.

You have to remember that the oligarchic power-brokers and beneficiaries of our current, global economy perpetuate a kind of exploitation against future people. Future generations are people too and deserve fair opportunities. Things as they are, however, the wealthy and their brokers take advantage of their position in time to use things up. And Congressman Schimkus runs interference with his bible.

323.365: I have obligations to a specific child, Isaiah. This fact is a despair-stopper.

My obligations demand that I do my best to protect future generations from my generation’s corrupt organization and its lack of collective will. It doesn’t matter how I feel about this. If my feelings get in the way, then I must disregard them.

324.365: Imagine that you see a tanker out on Puget Sound. My friend, Judy, shared *somesuch* photo:

Here is our world now, industrialism afloat—controlled by a corporation.

The fact of the matter?

325.365: “The summer day says we should become a festival.” And so does the winter day in late Fall. How do *days* do that— not achievements, customs, even friends—bare weather?

The sun, crisp in its unseasonal season surprises the remnants of trees and the rolling circumference of time.

326.365: I’m going to take my time with facts—*politicize* them. But that doesn’t mean I will distort them. It means the opposite. I’ll insist on their objectivity. I’ll point out the political framing that caused them to be; will signal what clouds them being seen.

Sunday, November 21, 2010
morally invisible

327: Climate change's ghosts opening barren water. This is what ocean acidification means.

328: If the essence of humanity is freedom (della Mirandola 1996), *must* we care what happens to ocean? *Only in so far as what happens to ocean bears on other free beings* (Kant 1998)—*future generations, for instance.*

I think this gets the problem backward. Free people should be responsible people, and responsible people shouldn't be thoughtless with what matters and is meaningful. So if I am going to be free, I should care what happens to ocean.

I don't need to *start* with other people's rights to see that what we are doing is not worthy of freedom. I can begin with what it means to be a responsible person.

329. A year ago next month, my nation's democracy—along with several other nations—managed to imperil future generations of the planet by not producing climate policy at Copenhagen (Morton 2009). Shall we discuss a crime against humanity?

It is hard to give democracy the hundreds of years it needs. But, then, is *that* democracy?

330. Do species matter in and of themselves?—*Yes, but; no, but . . .* Do wild processes (Rolston 1985)?—*Which?*—Isn't everything ocean near life (abiotic condition; toxin voids for speciation-to-come)?

Then do individual ocean lives demand our respect?—No, except . . .—*And those that feel pain (do fish feel pain)?*—It depends.—*Why should our depending matter more than our independing?*—That isn't even a word.—*But it's a concept.*

What is intrinsically valuable?—*Isn't relational value relative to our ends?*—What of our ends?—*The death of a species is the life of another.*

...

Or relational process, understood between us and ocean: each thing story, each decision complex, as it is between people. No, this isn't a method. It's a sensibility—a way to *hold* reasoning so that it makes sense to us.

...

331. Yesterday, I drove the thruway slowly, passing no one. I was inside my ocean, eddies in rain splashed down and wicked off the window in refracted taillights.

...

The main thing that interests me is the commitment to be thoughtful. Slow our reasoning down and think about a *generous* space. Start with *we*: sharing all the ways the ocean matters & our stories with it.

332. I am sitting with an entrusted five-year-old having pizza after a long bike ride through the secret field, the hidden station, through the mud, the wind.

One: I tell myself to forget those things that I have been writing daily.

Two: I tell myself to remember this moment so that I can understand why we should care about these things that I have been writing about daily.

333. Hard-working, industrious we—and churning underwater the morally invisible.



The secret site behind LeMoyne College, Syracuse, New York, November 2010.

Sunday, November 28, 2010

knowing vs. acknowledging

Earth thought 334 of 365: I have been thinking of high school lately, the assumptions of my world growing up. I grew up in Reaganite America and was a punk at a time when being so meant getting bullied. I tried to be political: “This school is filled with apartheid!” on my back. I was lucky to attend one of the better public high schools in the United States — New Hartford High in New Hartford, N.Y., near Utica. My parents were open-minded. I gravitated toward biology, history and English — with natural strength in math. So I was well placed to learn and to be schooled about our planet from a challenging perspective — and to *challenge* perspective.

But I grew up with the fantasy of infinity around me. I was an *actor* — we humans were actors- on a stage in the bright and open life of the world. Earth was a condition, not a limit.

I didn’t think of our inhibited, atomized action in a trade-off with future generations.

The future seemed always to get better.

I didn’t think we were pushing planetary boundaries.

335: Imagine an ethics book in which not a single thorough argument is given. The entire exercise is not critical thinking yet.

336: Bright day and around us electric lights.

337: What feeling about our politics *now* is thanksgiving?

338: Gratitude outpouring, and when it comes, it comes flowing out like shit.

339: “What sane reason could there be for moving away from this paradise? I think I may have felt a glimmer of madness, with no concept for the feeling” (Cavell 2010; July 7, 2003).

340: *The story of a structure changing. Thanksgiving day, 2010. Tokisdotis—Isaiah’s name today—has changed his structure. A hurricane went through it. Tokisdotis: Fixing the structure here.*

Aunt Ruth watching, sitting

Tokisdotis: Once the hurricane comes through the structure, we build it. And the name for that is rebuilding it. And that’s what we’re doing.

So the process here is rebuilding it, but the things in this structure are just *very* messed up. . . . Because you never know when a hurricane might hit; so you never know when the structure will get destroyed; so I’m trying to fix this. Mainly just trying to make it better; so we took it apart and put it back together, but it is a very long process. We’re trying to get this straight here.

Thursday, December 2, 2010

we

Earth thought 341 of 365: Must there be an absolute difference between our generation, the past generations—and humankind across distant, future generations?

The form of the human passes away, only not on my time scale.

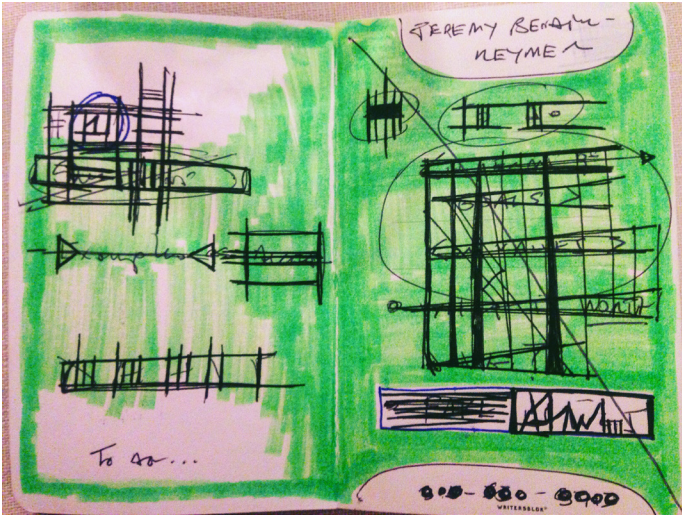
Why can’t “we” be a decision, a commitment to being as fair a part of a bio-geological process called “the human” as possible?

The best in the human is the process that includes the entire species, and beyond.

342: The major difference between our “technosphere” and “biosphere” is moral—a matter of responsibility for our environment. Whenever we live in a biosphere, we make it into a technosphere. That’s what we do. The real question is whether we are responsible *in* it. This is a political question.



Planttruck, Syracuse, New York, 2010.



Ethics Table notebook, Cleveland, Ohio, 2011.



Museum of Natural History, New York City, 2011.



Lee Rd., Cleveland Heights, Ohio, 2010.

343: On June 6th, I wondered whether human rights drive environmental destruction. If human rights include the rights of future generations, does most of the objection fade? The objection would hold only as a criticism of the discourse of human rights within their first institutionalization in 1947–1948. It wouldn't undermine their idea.

(1) A right to an environment that doesn't kill us or make us ill

(2) A right to an environment in which our conscience is not "outraged" (United Nations 1948, preamble)

The first provides protection against pollution and its effects.

The second protects non-human life, since conscience implies being thoughtful with life, not wanton with it.

Then human rights—as idea—seem able to resist environmental destruction and no longer drive it by driving the demands of "development."

But the pressure exerted by billions is to streamline the Earth's functions and the use of non-human life so that the rights of the present and the future can be met. Climate change would then be protected against—also toxicity caused by pollution, and so overfishing, over-lumbering, resource depletion in general— but everything else, much of the Earth's unused outpouring of life, would "rightfully" become subject to the human-development machine.

Is that right?

344: The activist is a site that speaks to us, not *for* us. How do we find the actual sense of politics in our guts and in our bones?

How can we participate in actual distribution of power, not over things, but as a process of ordering our shared world together?

Sunday, December 5, 2010

map key

Earth thought 345 of 365: To respect another involves sensing him, being able to connect with him—to connect enough that one sees, for instance, that it's best to disconnect for a time out of respect. It involves what I call "relational reason." This rationally ordered process demands more of us than simply conceptualizing what respects another's will. It demands that we respect another's being. How else would we even know his will?

But we can't relate to far future generations in this manner. There's no possibility of intimacy. They are the great blank, although one day we will be their pity, contempt, or inchoate heroes.

346: A child's structure—wild in many directions, left hanging

A series of lived connections, provisional and there for a time

A structure by which to integrate the momentary complexity of...

347: Let's take a walk around. One. *Thought should be searching.* Two. *Vital.* Three. *Sufficient for the day.*

Monday, December 6, 2010

348. Things look different in daily junk. Getting the kid to school, fixing plumbing, working on good communication with the loved one— not big, abstract stuff.



Night, Shaker Heights, Ohio, Winter 2016.

Tuesday, December 7, 2010

349. The making personal of knowledge—that to my mind is *philosophy*. It is also *poetry*. The connection would be obvious if philosophy recognized the personal.

Poetry knows it is a form of *knowing*. We know, for instance, that we are home.

Wednesday, December 8, 2010
over time (the conditions of judgment)

350. I shuffle myself constantly like a deck of cards. Commuting is wearing me out. I just want to be home.

Sunday, December 12, 2010
life in uncertainty

351. Few people have lived long, hard hours in the antagonistic, self-interested, vain, and collective mind of science —

the survived nature of strongly supported scientific hypotheses and of powerfully effective models.

Few people also have internalized the virtues of the altruistic, objective, scientist who isn't self-absorbed.

Both suggest (as science does) the greater sense of *uncertainty*.

352. Virtue involves judgment about putting oneself in situations that won't undermine one's judgment or will support it (cf. Kamtekar 2004, 487). The virtuous person *sets herself up* to act well.

Call this a "virtuous constitution."

353. This morning, surprisingly, climate talks progressed.

At Cancun, compromise and conciliation filled the air among all the major air polluters — China, U.S.A., India — Japan also in agreement (Revkin 2010b) . . .

I'd be unreasonable not to be wary of my own relief.

They act self-interestedly.

The politicians are elected; they are elected this morning or the next.

Where's the *law*?

But *who* makes it?

Who will make them make it *well*?

We must.

Transnationally.

354. There are so many forms of philosophy the academy hardly *touches*.

But the healthy body was encouraged in the Ἀκαδημία.

About the body *doing* philosophy?—The profession is uncertain.

Thursday, December 16, 2010

it is actually, only, art

355. What an amazing year.

This exercise has pulled around with time and been an umbilical scar.

356. Philosophy the lost art (that's how it feels)—

Hereby, I add my *wed* between the sidewalk cracks of industrial theory. Don't smoke it.

357. Non-academics turn to “philosophers” expecting traces of discernment and the ancient schools. And what we show them is a discipline crouched around a fantasy of research science when it cannot ever be science, since it is actually, only, art.

358. The practice of philosophy, done in a community of “friends” (genuinely cared-about people) is supposed to seek wisdom. However, industrial theory does not. It is organized by the formalism of a way of writing and talking that must be mastered by highly focused feats of intelligence centered on distinctions and developments of positions for their own sake. Very little checking back in with our orientation toward wisdom is done, if it ever is at all — and it rarely is.

This has costs.

Friday, December 17, 2010

359. I've come two-legged to this party.
Some say love's a way of seeing, but
love see —
saws, see.

Saturday, December 18, 2010

360. Lake Cazenovia, a Saturday morning with Tokisdotis playing in the snow.

Sunday, December 19, 2010

361. I was thinking yesterday of how these thoughts circled around the sun as they circled around a year.

Tuesday, December 21, 2010

362. Some greater whole when you fill in for me, for I am trying.

363. In *Respiro* (Crialesi 2002), set on a small Italian speaking island between France and Italy, people use the environment in a way that displays a closeness to its workings and hence an awareness of its shifts. They cope with the surging sea around them on the dry rocks of the place and reveal an unsentimental sense of fellowship with non-human life. It allows them to use that life, revealing familiarity with life and its patterns. The people's lives are suffused with the tossing air and sea, rolling in cycles.

Thursday, December 23, 2010

364. For a time it seemed I was in a place where I could be useful and where discussion was needed. So I tried. I am proud of that.

The Ecological Life's concept of a thought of the Earth shaped this year's daily practice here (2006, lecture 9).

I was anxious, moving, without an industrial theory and ambivalent about doing any. I wanted to *do* philosophy.

This sprawling text might be called *The Sky inside the City*—the original title I wanted for *The Ecological Life*, but which my editor said it was too literary. Why is that bad?

(That title came from Alex Shakar's first novel, *City in Love: The New York Metamorphoses* [1996], the story in the Museum of Natural History.)

Perhaps all I've left to do for now is to group these thoughts with the poetics of extinction I projected back into my graduate school studio at 53rd & Kimbark:

the sky filled with glacier light —

Earth thought 365 of 365: *Rules of engagement* —

1. Write a reflection daily for a year.
2. Aim my “sternum-mind” toward “Earth” as a bundle of ecological concerns — what don’t I feel resolved about? What isn’t clear?
3. Compose the reflection on the day, and do not edit it once the day is done until many years later.
4. Share the Earth thoughts when I feel like it with those who would seem to want to read them. (I hope that you enjoyed them.)
5. Be open — what Bernard Williams (2003) called “sincere.”
6. Write to change my own mind. Write gymnastically.
7. Let us grow.

POSTSCRIPT: THE PRACTICE OF ETHICS

*Delivered with slides almost exactly as written,
March 12, 2009, at Case Western Reserve University.*



Nour, 2008.

The point of this talk is not to school you in the practice of ethics, but to raise questions about the practice of ethics. There is a standard picture of the practice of ethics that goes like this:

Ethical theory is done in a classroom. It is divided into normative theory, meta-ethics, and descriptive ethics. Students learn to see how the ethics in their society and community works; they learn how to discover true ethical beliefs and sometimes discover them during class. Through meta-ethics, they understand what it is to have an ethical belief. Then—and here comes the practice part—they go out and *practice* ethics.

In this picture, the domain of ethics is the domain of everyday life, and academic life has the role of providing the theory of everyday life, in this case, the theory of ethics. The point, then, is to *apply* what you learn in the classroom. The school is the think-tank for your world.

Of course, the expression “ethics” is equivocal, and can be a *field of study*, rather than the domain of what we should do and how we should live. In the first picture, we focused on a meaning of the word¹ “ethics” that comes up when we speak of someone being *ethical* or *unethical*. When we do speak of someone being ethical, we mean that her ethics are solid: she is, for instance, a good person, does the right thing, and so on. Here, ethics are not primary theoretical, but are already practical. That is why, in fact, the theory of ethics in the academy could be seen as brushing up and polishing our ethics so that we

1 I do not think there is a substantial difference in this context between calling “ethics” a “word” and calling it an “expression.” I believe all words—provided they are in use in a community—are expressions, but not all expressions are words. Words which are not expressions are dead, or meaningless, words. My thinking on this matter has been shaped by my reading of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* (1995).

can return to everyday life to *practice* it better, that is, to be more *ethical*.

However, “ethics” also means a field of study, what we are engaged in here, and where a professor of ethics has her academic home. In this light, “the practice of ethics” refers to what we do when we study being ethical. It refers to the academic practice of a field of knowledge. To ask, here, about the practice of ethics is to ask how we study ethics as a field of knowledge, our methods, the assumptions of our investigations, what we do in the classroom — that is, our pedagogy. For this sense of the word “ethics”, there is also a standard picture. It looks like this:

The practice of ethics *just is* ethical theory, whether descriptive, normative or meta-ethical. There are various ways to practice ethical theory, but all of them must be responsible to the demands of good theory. For instance, all of them must attempt to be objective, clear, and attentive to the problems of life. Moreover, all of them should involve close and analytical reading and analytical writing of some sort.

Here, we have the practice of Ethics, the field of study, rather than the practice of being ethical. And, indeed, this is what my talk is about — the field of study — or I would have titled it “the practice of being ethical.”

How should we practice the field of study called “Ethics”? That is, how should we study being ethical? In particular, should we *study* being ethical? Is the verb “to study” the right verb to express the relation we want to have between being ethical and our work to understand it? Should it even be “understanding” that schooling in ethics puts to the fore? What does it mean to “study”?

This group of questions around the infinitive “to study” is not arbitrary. As it turns out the idea of *studying* ethics is assumed in *both* standard pictures I have presented. That is, whether you understood the title of this talk to speak to the practice of *being* ethical or understood it to

mean the practice of the field of study Ethics, the standard picture of either in modern universities assumes that, in school, you *study* being ethical. And I want to question whether that assumption should be held. Should we *study* being ethical?

Now this question struck me as odd when I raised it. Schools are places of study. What else would one do with any object of interest in education? You study it. Scholarship is vast, multi-generational, and has led to undeniable progress in our human condition. There must be good reasons why we study what we want to understand, rather than say, dance about it. Or, to be more precise, the institution “school” is set up to study objects of learning. If you want to learn about an object differently, say, by dancing about it, you don’t go to school, but to a community gathering. It’s not so much that the *only* way to learn is to study but that schools are one of many ways to learn, and *they* are set up for *studying*. To question



Eva with Dhaka Project kids, 2008.

whether we should study being ethical is to question the institution of the school.

Socrates, though, showed us that just because a belief is common sense does not entail that it is justified. Just because we—of course—study being ethical in school does not entail that we should. Moreover, Socrates showed us that, even if a common sense belief is justified, we seldom appreciate it fully until we question it. I interpret his claim—reported by Plato (1981, 38a)—that “the unexamined life is not worth living” as almost a tautology. Worth is given to things by weighing them. They may matter in themselves, but until we weigh them, they are not worth anything. Now to weigh something is to consider its importance. And the way we consider something’s importance is to *examine* its significance. So a life that is unexamined is not a worthwhile life. It may matter in itself, but without examination it is not worthwhile. That is, while its significance may strike us, the relative importance of the significance will escape us. Similarly, even if we should study being ethical in school, we cannot expect going to school for that purpose to be worthwhile until we question it.

Should we study ethics in school? Should we go to school to study being ethical? What is the difference between going to school to study being ethical and going to school to *be* more ethical? And, if what we want is to *be* more ethical, should we go to school for it? Before I take my best shot at these questions, which involve questioning both what school and studying are, I want to show a third picture of ethics. This picture once was standard, certainly in antiquity, but some say up until the modern age and the rise of the modern university. It looks like this:

Ethics is a practice, whether you are stopping to think, or are being ethical. In fact, the division between being ethical and thinking about being ethical is specious if one understands what it is to think about being ethical properly. That

is, properly conceived, reflection just is part of the practice of being ethical, and there is no other way to think about ethics properly than *in* a practice. The conclusion flows from the purpose of ethics, its *point*.

I attribute this view to Aristotle, the first great ethical theorist in the Western tradition, and the philosopher who seems to have initiated the disciplines of our universities more than any other philosopher, including Plato. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle reminds his listeners (his book is a transcription by Nicomachus of his lectures):

The purpose of our examination is not to know what virtue is but to become good. (1999, 1103b28–29)

Aristotle can throw out such a succinct and simple reminder, because his audience understood the nature of ethics. The Greek word *ethos* meant *character* or *way of life*,² and when people reflected on ethics, they intended to *act* a certain way. This kind of reflection can be contrasted with people reflecting on what Aristotle called “origins” and which are sometimes referred to as “principles” (1139b19–36). These were the basis for scientific knowledge in Aristotle’s time. When reflecting on them, the point is not to act but to *know*.

The distinction here in philosophy of mind is between thought whose point is to know and thought whose point is to act. It is carried forward and explained most lucidly by Aristotle’s greatest medieval commentator, Thomas Aquinas—St. Thomas to Catholics. Aquinas distinguished the activity we know as *theory* from the activity we know as *practice* in terms of their points. For Aquinas, what it is to engage in something depends on the point of doing it. On the one hand, the point of science—and what we call “theory”—is to know something. But

2 Thanks to Irene Liu for clarifying the Greek.

on the other hand, the point of practical life is a deed, *done*. And ethics is a part of practical life, whether you're thinking about it or acting out of habit. The way Aquinas firmed up this distinction was through his philosophy of mind. *Theoretical* reason aims at knowledge. *Practical* reason aims at an actual, finished deed. This was Aristotle's distinction, polished up.³ When we do Ethics, we use practical reason.

Now if we step back a moment and look at the common, contemporary division of the academic study of ethics in at least Anglophone universities, we find a distinction between descriptive ethics, normative ethics, and meta-ethics. Descriptive ethics aims at describing how people take themselves to act ethically. It is sociological and anthropological. Psychology also studies it, and history can, too. Even literature can be said to be doing, at times, descriptive ethics, as when we meet the Parisian poor in Émile Zola's *L'assommoir*. Descriptive ethics does *theory* in Aquinas's sense.

Similarly, meta-ethics aims to understand the nature of ethical concepts. For instance, in contemporary ethics, much attention is lavished on understanding what a reason is, then a reason for action, and even what normativity itself is, that property by which some belief strikes us as a reason to follow it. Meta-ethics does theory, too, because it simply wants to know what this thing ethics is, as a scientist would want to understand what nature is, albeit using the empirical method. Some meta-ethicists even use science to learn what ethical concepts are in their nature. For instance, empiricists like Jesse Prinz (2004) draw on neuroscience to explain our "gut perceptions."

Normative ethics, however, does not do theory in Aquinas's sense. It falls under practical reason. The reason

3 My reading of Aquinas is indebted to Candace Vogler, *Reasonably Vicious* (2002) and to Anthony Lisska's work on Aquinas, e.g., his *Aquinas' Theory of Natural Law* (1998).

why is that the *point* of normative theory is to figure out what we should actually *do*. What is right, *for real*? What is true human goodness? How should we *live*? In other words, normative theory wants to *determine our actions*, not just to reflect on truths about the world. It's action-focused. Looking at the practice of Ethics from the standpoint of Aquinas's distinction, then, it would seem that the question of what it is to learn ethics depends on whether we are engaged in, on the one hand, descriptive or meta-ethics, or, on the other hand, normative ethics. The first two can rest content with knowing that people think something is ethical or with knowing *that*, for instance, a reason is normative because of its place in intentional action. The first two are after truths. But the third, normative ethics, can rest content only with *living* ethically. It's after deeds.

This conclusion in itself is surprising and should be considered. But before we do, we should note that the distinction Aquinas allows us to introduce into the field of Ethics reveals an *ambiguity* in the idea of *studying* ethics. For we commonly say we are studying all three: descriptive, meta-, and normative ethics. But something imprecise is afoot when the activity with which we're engaged — "studying" — has *two* incompatible ends! To study *for the sake of* knowing some true claim about the nature of things is not compatible with studying *for the sake of* accomplishing an actual deed. Think of it this way: if I think my point is to know some true claim about the nature of things (in this case, what kind of thing goodness is), but you think the point of what we're doing is to actually do something good, we will be disappointed with each other. For I will stop doing what I'm doing when I have the truth, but you will expect me to go on and *act* truly. Thinking about the point of what we're doing when we do mainstream Anglo-American Ethics shows us that "studying" is ambiguous. Something is not right here.

Now, I've laid out a lot of questions, and I want to thank you for your patience with this investigation as I have. I want to come back and start answering some of them, but it is the nature of investigations like this one to take a long time to even lay out the field of questions. So I will ask you for a little more patience as I lay out one more consideration that strikes me as important.

I don't know any better way to go into it than by bluntly quoting a passage from an ancient author who, in the passage, expresses a vision of ethics different than Aristotle's, yet coherent with its assumptions about the point of ethics. The text is from the third century Roman philosopher Plotinus, who began his philosophical journey in Alexandria in what is today Egypt. In his collection of writings compiled as the *Enneads*, Plotinus writes:

Go back inside yourself and look: if you do not yet see yourself as beautiful, then do as the sculptor does with a statue he wants to make beautiful; he chisels away one part, and levels off another, makes one spot smooth and another clear, until he shows forth a beautiful face on the statue. Like him, remove what is superfluous, straighten what is crooked, clean up what is dark and make it bright, and never stop sculpting your own statue, until the godlike splendor of virtue shines forth *to you*. . . . If you have become this, and seen it, and become pure and alone with yourself, with nothing now preventing you from becoming one in this way, and have nothing extraneous mixed within yourself, . . . if you see that this is what you have become, then you have become vision.⁴

4 *Enneads* I, 6, 9, 7–23, my emphasis. I take this passage and its translation from Pierre Hadot's *Plotinus, or the Simplicity of Vision* (1993). The translation of the passage is by Michael Chase, who consulted both the French edition Hadot used in his book and the original Greek.

What Plotinus so beautifully describes is nothing other than an ethical practice as Aristotle and his Greek contemporaries understood it, that is, a practice of habituation into a truer, better nature (the tradition even called this “*second nature*”). The image of sculpting a statue, so common among ancient philosophers, expresses the point well: you begin rough at the edges, but mindfulness can smooth you out until you become truer to the form of what is good. The first century Platonist and major essayist of the ancient world, Plutarch (1992a), uses this image even when describing how a true friend calls you out on your faults. A friend smoothes out the rough edges on you as a good sculptor would. For Plotinus as for Plutarch, the sculpting aims to make you a better person; it aims to make you act well. Its point is not to know what the nature of ethics is, but “to become good.”

The commentator on Plotinus who led me to this passage, the French historian of philosophy Pierre Hadot, had an expression for this method of doing ethics, which, interestingly, was also his expression for the method by which the ancients did philosophy. He said Plotinus was commending a *spiritual exercise*, an *askesis*, the root of our word “ascetics” (Hadot 1993, 22). Hadot, an emeritus professor at the Collège de France in Paris, pointed out—again and again (it was his life’s work)—that, for the ancients, philosophy *was* ethics, in the precise sense of a practical work on our habits to become a better person and to live a more ideal life. He pointed out that philosophy was first and foremost *a way of life*.⁵ The very idea of reflecting on ethics was just a focused part of a wider ethics, the ethics of doing philosophy itself, wherein one habituated oneself slowly and over time to a way of life. Ethics, the topic, was a focused space in the middle of a wider ethical practice: a kind of group conscience sorting through how to make ourselves better when it comes to

5 See his (2003) *Philosophy as a Way of Life, passim*.

things like our character, practical judgment and so on. The whole thing, though — philosophy — was an ethics.

My point in bringing up this ancient picture of philosophy is to point out that, from its perspective, *even* the distinction between theory and practice might not help us clarify what it is to study ethics philosophically. The reason why is that in this ancient perspective, even seeking to know the nature of things should be done as *part* of a wider ethics, an ethics known as “Philosophy.” From such a perspective, *if* you understand philosophy as an ethics, even theoretical reflection on meta — or descriptive ethics must be placed *within* the larger aim of living virtuously, as Plotinus says. Thus, if you do look inside the ancient classroom de-contextualized from the larger way of life of the philosophical school, you might be able to divide theoretical science from practical reflection. But if you zoom out and focus on the whole school, you see that it is from start to finish practical, that is, aimed at shaping people to *live* as good people. Theory, then, is only so good as its place in the human good.

Hadot implies this point when he explains what writing meant for the ancients. In one of his most helpful essays, called “Philosophy and Philosophical Discourse,” he explains how written and spoken philosophy — what he called “discourse” — was not *primarily* theoretical, but was at best *secondarily* theoretical. Rather,

Discourse [was] a privileged means by which the philosopher [could] act [on] himself and others. . . . It [was] always intended to produce an effect, to create a *habitus* within the soul, or to provoke a transformation of the self. (Hadot 2002, 176)

So, you might be reading a papyrus scroll from Plato on the nature of language and talking about it with your schoolmates in an Epicurean common house in a modest quarter of your ancient city. Outside, the sounds and smells of daily commerce would pass by your windows.

You might be seeking to understand *what is language?* What did Plato mean in this dialogue called the *Cratylus*? Yet at every and all times, you would be asking these questions only to make yourself a wiser person, a better person, more able to die a noble death as Socrates did, and to avoid the illusions of so much of human life. You would be steering yourself and others toward what truly makes life worth living.

What strikes me about this last picture of both ethics and philosophy is that it also presents a different picture of what a *school* can be. Here, school appears not as a place of study for its own sake, but as preparation for living. This preparation is not pre-professional. It is ethical and civic. Study, here, opens up a deep appreciation of what life involves and helps us live less clogged by illusions. The classroom is a place of discourse and reflection, yet for the sake of developing wiser people. *The entire school* is a practice of ethics. But that does not mean it brainwashes people. Rather, the school as a



Uttara, 2008.

whole habituates people to seek wisdom, in open, questioning ways. And wisdom? Wisdom is supposed to shine through a life well *lived*, in mature human beings slowly shaping a glorious world.

What in *this* school would the practice of the field of Ethics be? Since ethics—for this ancient picture—is reflective and searching habituation into wisdom, to reflect on ethics inside the school just would be to reflect on the nature of the entire school itself, on philosophy itself as the search to discover wisdom and to make ourselves become its “vision.” For this ancient picture, the practice of Ethics—the field of study—is like a conscience inside the entire institution reflecting on the entire institution’s path toward wisdom in all its dimensions—scientific, social, extra-curricular, financial, etc.—and, more importantly, it is a reflection on and awareness always of what the entire school should amount to: living life well. For this ancient picture of philosophy *as* ethics, the field of study Ethics would be Meta-philosophy or what we now call Philosophy of Education, and its ultimate aim would be to discover how school can lead us to grow wise all through our lives.

* * *

O.K. With these four pictures of the practice of ethics in place, I can now turn to sorting out some answers to the question, *what is the practice of ethics?* I want to underline that, although the ancient picture of ethics as a philosophical school is lovely, there is no reason to assume it is desirable for us, simply because it is ancient and in that sense original. We should avoid the error John Dewey pointed out in *Democracy and Education* (1916), the error of thinking that schooling for one kind of society fits schooling for another kind. After all, we live in a highly complex society with a variegated and vast division of labor interconnecting almost the entire world. Within this social form—modern society embedded

within globalization — it might seem odd for an entire school to do ethics in one form or another, and it might seem pretentious for the field Ethics to be the conscience of the school. We are no longer in a commune, much less a monastery, but in a research university.

I wish to put the ancient picture on hold and return to contemporary Ethics. One thing that seems indisputable to me is Aquinas's Aristotelian distinction between the point of science and the point of ethics. If you are trying to know, the act of knowing aims at truths. But if you are trying to be ethical, the act of ethical reflection aims at deeds. Knowing a truth is achieved when a belief is justified and true. But doing a deed is achieved when you finish the act, for instance, clearing off the counter. No one can change the belief's truth — it is not voluntary. But you can always change your action and not clear off the counter. This distinction, as we saw, drives a wedge between descriptive and meta-ethics — on the one hand — and normative ethics — on the other. Descriptive and meta-ethics may have a point as theoretical practices, but they are pointless as *ethical* practices, *because they do not aim at deeds*. By contrast, normative ethics can be an ethical practice, because it aims at right living.

So we have one clear distinction. I believe we should consequently relegate descriptive ethics to sociology, anthropology and psychology, where it is more properly situated, and meta-ethics to meta-physics — the study of the nature of reality — where it at least won't be confused with doing ethics. In saying this, I do not mean that ethicists should stop either kind of study, nor that Philosophy departments should necessarily lose ties to the social sciences. On the contrary, I would agree with the late Bernard Williams that those interested in ethics should learn from the social sciences, a point he made a decade ago in *Making Sense of Humanity* (1998). And I would agree with many people writing today, but memorably Iris Murdoch (1994), that metaphysics can be a guide to morals.

I would *disagree*, though, that people studying meta-ethics or descriptive ethics are doing ethics. Rather, they are learning about the things that go on in ethics, but not in an ethical way. By this last qualification “not in an ethical way,” I do *not* mean that meta-ethicists are rogues and sociologists villains, but simply and precisely that their point is *not* a deed. It is rather a truth.

The *practice* of Ethics, then, belongs to normative ethics, and from now on when I speak of Ethics in the classroom, I will be referring to normative ethics. The question then is, does it make sense to say we should *study* Ethics? I am interested in our actual use of language; so I will not go into the etymology of “study” as if that would provide us with the key to its meaning. Rather, looking at contemporary language as the ordinary language philosophers of the 1950s did, we can see immediately that there is an ambiguity within the verb “to study”, one found especially in the noun form of it, “studies.” On the one hand, the overwhelming amount of English definitions of the verb point to studying being *the pursuit of knowledge*. Study, on this set of definitions, is a project of one sort or another aimed at obtaining knowledge. Here is the realm of investigation or analysis of some topic, of time taken to learn the truth about it. We can see already, then, that if Ethics demands practical reasoning, *studying* Ethics is not what we should do. On this first set of definitions, studying ethics would amount to seeking knowledge, which isn’t the point of Ethics. The point of Ethics is to become good.

But there is a second sense of the verb “study” which shows up in its noun form. This sense *is* practical, as when we say, she did a study of light and shadow so as to learn how to draw. Or, Chopin played his *Études* — his *Studies* — as a way to demonstrate the art of the piano. These studies are practical: the point is to do them, and — in doing them — the further point is to train for something further you will do. If studying Ethics meant doing studies in this sense, it might at least make sense

to use the verb.⁶ We would then speak more naturally of studying Ethics — upper case “E” — by doing studies in ethics — lower case “e” — as when one does studies in drawing, music, or sculpture. *This* kind of ethics really would look like training, even if reflective and open-ended in all sorts of ways, as painting or dance are. In so being, though, it would come very close to the *askesis* that Hadot described among the ancients, to what he translated as *spiritual exercises*. In other words, if you studied Ethics in the sense that I am compelled to accept here, you would be going to class to exercise your capacity to do good. The classroom would, in its essence, be closer to a gym than a reading room. Its library would be a wealth of moves served by texts.

The image is humorous, to stay the least — twenty to forty students and their teacher doing ethical push-ups. No, wait, the ethical treadmill. And finally, a bit of ethical stretching before showering — in separate locker rooms — and going home. But of course Hadot didn’t mean exercise in that sense, not as the genus. Rather, for the ancients, gymnasium was a species of exercise — physical exercise — under the genus of spiritual exercise — the overall philosophical attempt to become a better person. If we are committed to studying Ethics, it seems we are committed to some species of that training.

The analogy with plastic arts and music is also instructive. To do Ethics as a series of studies would really seem to be to try to “become vision,” or — in the case of music — to “follow the *voice* of conscience.” What would it be like if, in studying Ethics, we were searching for the complex and intricate human song that resonates in our hearts when we truly are right with the world? It sounds

6 For this and the preceding paragraph, I was helped by my iBook *Oxford American Dictionary*, Version 1.0.2 (2005). I paraphrased the many definitions drawn on. I wish to thank Lauren Tillinghast for helping me conceptualize this practical form of studying.

nice, and it is suggestive. Here, a different vision of the study of Ethics and a different vision of the classroom open up, one where service learning, community-based learning, and experiential learning are not simply nice additions to the curriculum, but are *essential* developments of what Ethics is, truer and better ways to do Ethics than to only read a book. After all, if you want to do a study in ethics, you'll need to help out at times, be part of a community, and learn from experience. You can't do a study by just reasoning. You have to try something in the world.

Once we learn what studying Ethics must mean, the vast proliferation of self-help manuals that clogs our bookstores doesn't look like ignorance as much as it looks like inchoate *reason*. The Philosophy section won't give us Ethics, actual practice in living better, at least typically. But self-help books try to. Whatever their simplifications, they at least have the *point* of Ethics right.

Also, once we grasp what an ethical study is, the return to church which some academics decry as a sign of American anti-intellectualism seems only encouraged by a vision of school that does not aim to make people better. Church is an option when school does not give people the chance to exercise their ethical needs. Schools that do not do ethical studies deny a basic developmental dimension of being human: the desire to become mature by becoming someone who has character. We have to remember that the idea of a study in ethics is leading us to see all this.

Once we see what Ethics is, and once we sort out the only kind of studying that fits Ethics, we face the philosophy of education. Here is a new vision of school, at least when it comes to Ethics classrooms. The ethical school is a new kind of school. It is a school in which there are certain spaces and certain times when you experiment with becoming a better person or with doing good. Books, writing, and all the media of the world rally around a task fitted to you, as you try to figure out what you will

do in this world, and not in terms simply of your profession, but on your terms as a grown-up human being, living your whole human life with all its many dimensions and all its many relationships in communities within societies.

It should be no surprise, then, that the scholar of ancient philosophy Martha Nussbaum (1997) called this new school's goal *cultivating humanity*. She meant cultivating an all-around and life-long aptitude for taking in the human good. She correctly saw that, ironically, the new school is old school. Through her grounding in ancient philosophy where ethics is practical (as it *must* be) and school is ethical (aiming to help you live well, not simply to know a lot or to make a rich living), she advocated what the tradition originally saw as the point of the liberal arts—the making of active, reflective citizens. New school? Old school? It doesn't matter. Cultivating humanity is neither anachronistic, nor nostalgic, but intuitively grasps the point of ethics. If you practice ethics—the field or the school entire—you cultivate humanity. It is a whole lot more than reading books.

* * *

I want to end this talk by elaborating on one idea I have for doing Ethics. I had originally wanted to devote the entire talk to this idea, but I found myself wading through the preceding conceptual difficulties first, and they seemed both important and easily as fascinating as my idea is to me. I would also like to add that, although I earlier sketched the vision of school found among the ancients, where ethics subsumes the entire school in training for the philosophical life, and although I just now ended my last section with Martha Nussbaum's idea of liberal arts education, I have only committed myself at this point to what goes on in an Ethics classroom. I've given no argument for why we should see Ethics as *the*



At the park, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2008.

key to school. All I've reasoned out is what doing Ethics — capital “E” — should entail, and I've positioned my conclusions within the philosophical tradition and some of the larger ideas to which it *might*, but has not yet shown to be, related. I have no idea if it is. Right now, I'm still focused on a simple, old Ethics classroom.

What should go on in, or *through*, that classroom? [Pause.] What kind of studies, understanding them similar to musical or sculpting studies? Will reading and writing, for example, be diminished? My idea for studying Ethics implies a resounding “No!” On the contrary, I believe reading and writing will be improved, once their point is in line with the nature of the subject matter to which they are subjected. Everything comes down to remembering the point of ethics. The ancients read and wrote — as Hadot showed us. Their writing was meant to “create a habit in the soul” or “a transformation of the self.” Similarly, you might say ethical reading and writing should be meant to make people better people or to help people become, or do, good. Happily, this is interesting to students, especially when the classroom is not shrouded in judgment as ethical life often seems, but is open and bright to exploring why really something is good, or not, and what alternatives might be. In such a climate, reading and writing — working on and from our interest in our own development — stand a good chance of being both motivating and useful in the eyes of the learner. This, at least, has been my experience. A writing assignment joining complex scholarly reflection with personal interest can be an amazing thing.

All this clears the ground for my main idea about doing Ethics, capital “E.” I believe that a new school for Ethics awaits in embedding Ethics within international exchange. There are many reasons for my view, which I will only be able to enumerate here without the kind of explanation I would like to give. First, however, let me explain my idea.

I do not claim that the idea is original. In fact, you can find it in book V of Rousseau's *Émile* (1978), when *Émile* is sent off by his tutor to travel the world and learn true, active citizenship as a citizen of the world.⁷ The idea is simply mine in the sense that I have been gravitating to it inside my soul and based on my experience. It is mine only in that I belong to it. In love, "you are mine," means "I am yours," and it is no different in philosophy.

The idea is to study ethics by studying abroad for at least six months and by weaving the study abroad into an equal flux of foreign exchange students invited back home. Certainly, studying abroad is not new at all. I did it twice as a high schooler, once in college, and decided I would just teach abroad for a good part of my 30s. But remember that we have arrived at a sense of "study" that departs from what is usually meant by the expression "study abroad." Studying abroad does not usually imply practicing virtue and training to become good. But it could.

Now, I am not talking about all studies abroad, but simply about doing Ethics by studying abroad, a special and deliberate program. It is *ethics* that compels us to adopt the minoritarian sense of "study" and imagine practicing virtue and training to become good. I believe that studying ethics abroad in that sense has many advantages, which I will enumerate here as a way of closing my talk.

The first is that studying Ethics abroad will be *conducive to open-mindedness*. To study Ethics philosophically involves starting with questions: how do I become good? What is virtue? Questions like these. In the context of a foreign culture, these questions take on vivid and genuine interest. After all, you are surrounded by a living and

7 Rousseau is hostile to cosmopolitans in book I. However, his development of *Émile's* common humanity in book IV and his advocacy of comparative politics through *Émile's* travels strike me as forms of cosmopolitan citizenship. And, indeed, nationalism does not assert itself ever in *Émile*.

often different interpretation not only of answers you expect to see but of the questions themselves. When, for instance, Arabic speakers discuss conscience, the question I asked as a college student at Yale in the 1990s takes on a surprisingly new focus. I asked “What does it mean to have a conscience?”—a question that took me all the way through graduate school at University of Chicago and issued in my dissertation. I was looking for an answer about how to follow an inner call, and which call to follow, and why it might matter at all, and where objectivity might lie. But in Arabic, conscience is ضمير (*dhameer*), a word that implies immediately one’s relationships with other people—not simply as a duty that conscience relays, but as the voice of conscience itself. It is as if conscience is an opening through which the reality of other people impresses itself on the soul. If I had studied Ethics abroad as an undergraduate and gone to an Arabic speaking country, I would have been able to ask my question still, but the *object* of it would have been entirely different. A surprising and wonderful discovery.

Thus, when I say that studying Ethics abroad will be conducive to open-mindedness, I am taking seriously the point of philosophy’s involvement in Ethics, its way of asking questions first, of carefully considering ideas and positions. Training to become good abroad does not imply proselytizing, imperialistic condescension, or missionary zeal. It implies, rather, having one’s lessons immediately around one, and having to reconsider many of the things one considers good, thereby *examining* what really is good. The foreign culture acts as a Socratic fire, if only one lights a match by asking a simple question.

I see that time is running out. So I will be able only to mention two more reasons. I believe studying Ethics abroad is advantageous in that it *teaches mostly through know-how and knowing people*. In other words, it does not center around what in epistemology we call “knowing-that,” propositional knowledge. There is a debate in epistemology about whether all knowledge is at bottom propositional knowledge, a set of beliefs. For reasons I

can't go into here, I believe that it is not. Rather, I believe that we know also by knowing how to do things. At the very least, brain science has shown this to be true, such that amnesiacs who can't retain learned beliefs can still develop practical know-how.⁸ Further, I do not believe knowing people is a kind of knowing how to do things or a kind of propositional knowledge. At a conceptual level, Emmanuel Lévinas demonstrated this point well in his extensive phenomenology of human meeting, and in doing so he drew on an assertion made earlier by Martin Buber. Also, at the level of our brains, it would seem sociopaths show us that one can know that something is true and know how to do something but still not be able to know people in any soulful way. Finally, some languages make a distinction between knowing how to do things and knowing people — as the French language does between *savoir* and *connaître* (although blurring the distinction between knowing people and knowing truths in the latter verb). I believe, then, that if we want to be knowledgeable in the fullest sense, we need at least three kinds of knowledge.⁹

Now, it should be no surprise that being ethical involves know-how. After all, the point of ethics is to be doing something. Nor should it be a surprise that being ethical involves knowing people. Ethics is primarily a

8 I drew these conclusions from the unpublished work of David Bzdak, then a finishing graduate student at Syracuse University (now a professor at Onondaga Community College), and in particular from his talk “On amnesia and knowing-how” (2009). The conclusion about knowing people is my own.

9 After this talk, I developed two published papers on relational reason—the reason involved in knowing people as people. See my “The Moral and the Ethical: What Conscience Teaches Us about Morality” (2013a) and “Do you have a conscience?” (2012). I have no doubt that relational reason will figure centrally in my future work, as it has already figured in talks on the capabilities of other species, in meta-philosophical reflections, and even in published work about human responsibility for mass extinction. And of course this book is a study in relational reason, for which I thank your time and care in reading.

social phenomenon. Put bluntly, you can have all the true ethical beliefs in the world, but if you are a futz or a sociopath, you're not going to do much good—in the first case—or be ethical—in the second. Studying Ethics, then, should involve know-how and knowing people.

I believe study abroad would forefront both of these kinds of knowledge. A good part of most study abroad is human connection, surmounting the hurdles that loss of home, meeting of foreigners, and language and custom bring. Similarly, in the new places where one lives, living abroad challenges one to learn how to do things one had taken for granted—going to the store, being polite, figuring out bureaucracy. Much of this know-how also relies on knowing people. Certainly, one does not need to go abroad to learn how to do good things or to learn how to know people in solidarity and common humanity, but it certainly helps.

The final advantage of studying Ethics abroad for which I have time today is best relayed by a story. Last Spring, I took a group of students from American University of Sharjah's Department of International Studies to Dhaka, Bangladesh. We went to volunteer for ten days at The Dhaka Project, a combination school, family center, and job-training program serving the poorest of Dhaka's children and their families.¹⁰ Children from shanties bordering the rivers where public land exists are invited out from the foul waters where people bathe, wash, and defecate, from crowded thatch and detritus rooms housing up to a dozen people. These children and their families are invited to exchange their living quarters for a solid brick hut that will not catch fire from cooking fires and will house four people in a room. In return, the parents contract to send their children to school clean every day in a clean uniform and to not make their children work the countless child labor jobs around Dhaka. Not surprisingly, there is more demand than supply, and the

10 See Namitha (2008).

waiting list for the project is long. Not surprisingly, too, the children *love* to go to school, with their whole hearts and their whole minds and their whole, bright souls.

The students who went with me had for the most part grown up in the United Arab Emirates. There is more room in the bathrooms of the some of the restaurants they might frequent in one of Dubai's luxury malls than there was in three or four of the shanties put together. The students were overwhelmed, but, being Muslim, also immediately tuned into what Muslims take as their God-given duty to serve the poor, their fellow brothers and sisters on Earth.

I don't think those students will easily forget the trip, and certainly not the inner trip we made to visit a mother from the Project who had ended up in the burn ward, one of Dhaka's thousands of yearly victims of cooking fires. There in the city's best public hospital right next to the country's best university, hundreds of patients languished in hallways, overflowing the burn wards. An entire ward filled with hundreds of infants and young children filled the air with constant cries. Face after face was swollen and disfigured with blisters. Over half of the people there would die, due to absence of medication and unsanitary conditions.



The burn ward, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2008.

The photo I have put up here is from one woman whose legs were burned. She was uncommonly positive. Her husband, from Dhaka's lower middle class, was with her. But he had lost his job due to tending her. The flowers in her hand came from some of the Muslim students I was with, and they sent back a fan and medication to help in that corridor. This woman was lucky, but there were so many more around her suffering without hope and in all likelihood just days from dying.

The economist, the public health official, the doctor, research scientist and the engineer who might relieve these development conditions in Dhaka would also need human kindness.

THANKS

Preface “a” was spun from fragments of a review of Pierre Hadot’s *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* written for *Philosophical Practice* (Bendik-Keymer 2008). Thanks to that journal for permission to use fragments of my review. Lauren Tillinghast, then the book-review editor, helped me think through the concepts of a *practical study* as well as that of *relational reason*. Lauren helped me come up with some of the concepts that I most use today.

“The ideas start in the kitchen” first arose as a parallel inquiry to students at American University of Sharjah working on a self-portraiture project of their own in 2006–2007. It was first written in spells: April 3–May 13, 2007 in Sharjah, U.A.E., and June 20–July 3, 2007 in Modesto, California.

In 2005, students remarked in office hours that they had not found a space outside of class to talk intellectually in the way that they wanted. So began the extracurricular conversation circle of 2005–2006 on the steps of the main building Tuesday evenings. The conversations from those steps inspired me in Spring 2006 to propose a class addressing them — *Modern Identity*. Students in the U.A.E. wanted at that time to work out the contradictions and potentials of “being modern.” The

class I constructed to stage their questions ended with “identity portfolios,” hybrid response papers to core modern ideas—abstraction, liberty, equality—alongside self-portraits engaging with these ideas. The power of these portfolios synthesizing and opposing the personal with the systematic led me to mention them over email to Breena Holland when I was staying at the Cité Universitaire in the summer of 2006. She suggested I contact Theodore Zeldin and his Oxford Muse Project. Mr. Zeldin was enthusiastic and agreed to work with a group of my students from Sharjah. These were: Hesam Ziaei, Stephanie Mahmoud, Sidra Shahid, Alia Al-Sabi, Ayla Qadeer. In some ways, this book is the end of my parallel process with them and with the image of a humanist that Mr. Zeldin allowed me to glimpse for a brief, important moment in my mid-30s. This book could be seen as my “modernity portrait.”

I want to thank the late Richard Gassan, who was killed by a negligent driver in the U.A.E. while biking—his desert love. Richard was one of the few faculty to participate almost every week in the conversation circle of 2005–2006. He was loved by his students, and he was a friend. He would have read this book and busted my balls. “The ideas start in the kitchen” is dedicated to him.

“I don’t want to be thoughtless” first appeared in a much more normal format (although not *that* normal), as “Species extinction and the vice of thoughtlessness: the importance of spiritual exercises for learning virtue” in a special issue of *the Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, guest edited by P. Cafaro and R. Sandler, Winter 2010. That article grew from a paper I presented at *Human Flourishing and Restoration in an Age of Global Warming*, a workshop at Clemson University, September 2008, co-organized by Allen Thompson, Breena Holland, and myself. It has been greatly changed here.

“Orchard in the mind” is an expression from Sidra Shahid, one of the students from Sharjah: “the orchard in

the mind beneath the mind.” Sidra is working on her Ph.D. in Philosophy at the University of East Anglia after earning two masters degrees—one in gender studies and another in philosophy. She read Seutonius and Spinoza by herself at a library in Kuwait growing up.

Intermixed into the scientific jumble of the neighbor are some important yet still poorly understood things about mass extinction. For a grasp of them, I thank members of the Colgate Mass Extinction workshop I co-organized with Paul Pinet, especially Bill Erwin of the Smithsonian Museum and my colleague Christopher Haufe.

Finally, I want to thank Steve Vogel for emphasizing the value of collective, human work. You can hear my engagement with his *Thinking like a Mall* in parts of the discernment exercise. Steve’s work was also influential to me as I revised “We are a storm in wondrous hunger.” I can’t hear *we* in that study without hearing his emphasis on the loss of *we* in our alienated political economy. It was surprising to me, who agreed with his position from my college days on, to see how my thinking could drift away from the simple politicization of the environment as a collective achievement of *us*. Steve’s work is a much-needed corrective to neo-liberalism now, including in environmental philosophy.

“I was in the open then” first developed in *New Word Order*, a workshop on revision taught by Nate Pritts at the Downtown Writer’s Center at the YMCA, Syracuse, NY. I presented an early form of it as “53rd & Kimbark: a poetics of extinction” at the conference *Geo-aesthetics in the Anthropocene* at Sallisbury University, with thanks to James Hatley. I want to thank Nate for helping me rearticulate poetry after more than a decade of professional philosophical denial of it.

There are too many people in the poem to thank properly. I hope that they recognize themselves and remember the time we shared. But I want to thank especially Lars Helge Strand—who makes an appearance or

two—Dima Ghoneim, who was in some sense behind the text poem, Antoine Lacronique, Mari-Ann Kucharek, Flannery Hysjulien, Janine Schiavi, Megan Craig, Stephen M. Rich, Christopher Boerboom, Rick Furtak, Elaine M. Wolf, Amir Berbic, Zlatan Filipovic, the late Shoib Nabi Ahmad, and Roderick Grant—all of whom influenced poems. Finally, my stay in France would not have been possible without the LeFebure and the Facq families especially and without the support of the Rotary Clubs of Rouen and of Utica, New York.

“I want to meet you as a person” is modified substantially from “Kierkegaard as an Enlightenment thinker,” originally a talk for a conference on Kierkegaard’s journals organized by Gordon Marino at St. Olaf College. I decided I did not want my scholarship to go in that direction and never gave the talk.

In many ways, the subject of that essay, which is central to this book, comes from conversations with Anne-Christine Habbard. One day in early 1991, she read me Kant’s “What is enlightenment?” out loud while I was in the bathtub. As with so many preoccupations in my intellectual history, the conversations I had with Christine *cored* central ideas in my mind, or even soul. After all, my dissertation at Chicago—*Conscience and Humanity*—was in many ways an attempt to conceptualize what I’d learned from her, and perhaps to hold on to a different experience of philosophy than what I suffered at Chicago.

“I carried my teeth in my heart” is a modified line from a poem I wrote in Nate Pritts’ seminar that was subsequently published in a triptych for *H_ngm_n* #12, 2010. The poem is called “Ethos,” and a different part is a longer version of “I can be philosophical . . .”

The earliest material of the entire poem series published here is from 1989, a fragment of an unpublished poem written in my dorm room at Yale College. There is a substantially reworked fragment of “A Night Tale,” *The Yale Literary Magazine*, Fall 1990, and the

entirety—without the title—of “*Section urbaine*”, *The Yale Literary Magazine*, Fall 1992.

“We are a storm in wondrous hunger” first appeared as a blog called *365 Earth Thoughts* between 2009 and 2010. I explain further its relationship to *The Ecological Life* in aphorism 364. The many people who commented on the process as it unfolded—in line with one of the rules of the *askesis*—are cited properly in the bibliography and in-text cited in the actual study. As I’ve mentioned, too, Steve Vogel’s work was on my mind during the revision, as was Andrée Boisselle’s attention to indigenous experience.

There are too many people to thank for the study, which took place over a year. Mostly, I want to thank Isaiah.

“The practice of ethics” is the talk given as credited. Thanks to the Case Western Reserve University Department of Philosophy, especially Colin McLarty. It draws on a trip to the Dhaka Project, Bangladesh, by students from A.U.S. Thanks to Nour Merza, Eva Fernandes, the students and local staff of the Dhaka Project (April 2008), and to the anonymous woman in the burn ward who allowed me to take her picture.

In most cases, photos were taken by me using a variety of cameras from a SONY Cyber-shot digital camera (2006–2008) to a Blackberry Bold cell phone camera (2008–2010). At least one photo in “The ideas start in the kitchen” was taken on a Nikon FG 35mm film camera. Thanks to Amir and Isak Berbic for discussing the format of images and to Zlatan Filipovic for advice on the Cyber-shot. More recent photos were taken by me on an iPhone 5S and modified using basic Instagram filters and refinement tools.

Thanks go to those who read the first draft of the project, *The Book of Becoming*: John Levy Barnard, Sara Marie Blakely, Lynne Huffer, Elaine Hullihen, Dan & Sandra Scheinfeld, Alex Shakar, Arielle Zibrak, and Rachel Zucker.

For compiling many first drafts of the book to be sent to readers, I want to especially thank Renee Holland-Golphin.

My students from the Rancière seminar at Hamilton College, Spring 2014, led me to do a partial revision and to extrapolate my criticism of Plato's Ἀκαδήμεια. Thanks to Mercy Corredor, Sean Fujimori, Jackson Graves, Grant Meglis, Chip Sinton, Jesse Voremberg, and Kim Wang. This book would not have come to take this form without our luminous and unforgettable seminar, for which I am still grateful.

Thanks go to Shannon Lee Dawdy, who encouraged me to put this book out until a publisher discovered it, and to Sarah Gridley, who co-led a seminar-across-two-seminars-in-correspondence called *The Literary Mind: a Challenge to Philosophy* (mine) and *Poetry as Philosophy* (hers).

For reading the penultimate draft of this project, I wish to thank Esther Ann Bendik, Kaitlyn Marie Conners, Ryan Johnson—who also deserves thanks for recommending Punctum to me—Sean Martin, Susan Neiman, and Amy Seymour. For reading the last draft, I wish to thank Andrée Boisselle, whose understanding of decolonization taught me something. For weighing in on titles at the eleventh hour, I want to thank a whole bunch of folks.

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The publishing house

Punctum did a bang up job. It is the kind of publishing platform and collective we need now. I am proud to have published with them and urge established scholars to join its babbling up. Thanks go to Chris Piuma for *constituting* this book in print and for his patience with my process; Arthur and Jules Russell for Shaker Square Farmer's Market title talk; and Eileen Joy for walking the talk. Again: theirs is the kind of publishing philosophy we need in the world now.

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The dedication

Solar Calendar began to come together during a divorce. But as I compiled, rewrote, and integrated this book, seeing it grow alongside me, I became aware of how much of it is indebted to my time in Rouen, France as a Rotary exchange student in 1988–89, befriending, reading and philosophizing outside the classroom. To the entire Lacronique family—thank you for welcoming me into Paris. Malka Espaignet, wherever you are, thank you for being a teacher who saw and believed in my possibility. *On n'est pas sérieux quand on a dix-sept ans, et qu'on a des tilleuls verts sur la promenade.*



East Hill School, Ithaca, New York, with my mother, May 2009.

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How a book works only by forgetting it. If I remember a book to conceive of my personal decisions, then I act under its fantasy as it guides my action. This is the danger allegorized by Dante between Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta. I do not want that, and so I let the day be the most vibrant thing of all. Only forgotten things can truly be transformed.



*On a walk through Barcelona, end of the school year,
May 2007.*

SOLAR CALENDAR AND OTHER WAYS OF MARKING TIME JEREMY BENDIK-KEYMER

Imagine the kind of philosophy book you might have wished for when you were growing up. Seeking a reader who would live with her own questions and walk around town with her thoughts, this book would not have a single thesis but would work through multiple problems and be an experience, born out of life-experience. *Solar Calendar* contains a family portrait, a parody-essay, a time-capsule poem, an exploded essay, a poetic record of an act, and an aphorism journal for a year. They protest that philosophy is a daily practice of thoughtful relationships and turn the book into the texture of a person.

This “book of becoming” weaves together poetry, photo album, exploded essay (including tears and scotch tape), philosophical commentary, memoir, and aphoristic journal. The breathtaking result is a philosophical askesis for our time: polyphonic, democratic, practical, and urgent.

—Lynne Huffer, author of *Mad for Foucault*

It is rare to come across a book that does what it says.

—Shannon Lee Dawdy, author of *Patina: a Profane Archeology*

How to be philosophical, how to be good and ethical and interconnected. How to be responsible, how to be free. *Solar Calendar* is a truly holistic work suffused with intelligence, honesty, beauty, and care.

—Alex Shakar, author of *Luminarium*

Solar Calendar opens up temporal vortices through which we can consider the contrasting frames of human, geological, and even cosmic time. I have never read anything like it. Though the scope of its concerns is vast, it is a work equally fitted to the scale of a human reader.

—John Levi Barnard, Department of English, College of Wooster

The philosophy is not a wooden game of chess.

—Elaine Hullihen, conceptual, performance, and body artist



Bendik-Keymer, Jeremy

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