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SANTA CRUZ

OF WONDER AND WAKING

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

PHILOSOPHY

by

BRIAN KEITH AXEL

DECEMBER 2012

The Dissertation of BRIAN K AXEL
is approved:

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ABSTRACT

BRIAN KEITH AXEL

OF WONDER AND WAKING

In this dissertation, I have merely wished to explore four basic possibilities: First, that beings, or individual subjects, possess wakefulness and wonder in their very nature. Second, that wakefulness is available to, and already present for, each being in every moment. Third, that every being is always already awake. And fourth, that every individual being *as* a subject lives in forgetfulness of its true nature – a forgetfulness which it is compelled energetically to sustain. This latter is a critical element in the composition of what I have called the illusion of personal identity. Thus, although it is nothing special, some philosophers – like Kant – believe the moment of wakefulness is something of an achievement that requires proper cultivation. Others, like Kierkegaard and Heidegger – as well as myself – feel otherwise, i.e., that the cessation of forgetfulness is quite mundane. Such an everyday access to the absurd, Kierkegaard calls: *the sublime in the pedestrian*. There are, however, significant differences – as well as critical sites of emergence and intersection – within and between the texts of these philosophers. Each of the chapters of this dissertation attends to these in precise ways.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

...shall we go, you and I, while we can?

I have always loved the manner in which Alan Watts plays at translating the opening words of the *Tao Te Ching*. He delights in the telegrammatic quality of the original Chinese: “*Tao can tao not eternal Tao*” – something of which is preserved in his, not unfunny, translation: “The way that can be way-ed is not the eternal way.” This is in contrast to the common translation – for instance, “the way that can be spoken of is not the eternal way” or “the way that can be experienced is not true.” Is it not possible to combine the sensibility of each of these, and thus, in a manner that sustains its paradoxical nature, render the *Tao Te Ching*’s first line...*the way that can be way-ed is not the way...?* It is in this spirit, that is, in the spirit of the dissertation as a whole, that I strive to acknowledge those who accompanied me in a journeying that, unimaginable in the midst, seems now to have begun in ellipsis and ended in a question-mark. The question-mark returns one to the beginning and the beginning arises from within the nameless. Afterward, that is, in the meantime, I sit with wonder and gratitude that I hereby make a meager attempt to express.

If it were not for a chance meeting with Paul Roth, I would not have entered the philosophy Ph.D. program – I shall never forget the serendipity of that day, nor the uncanniness of suddenly finding myself where, unbeknownst to me, I had always wanted to be. I am grateful to him for presenting to me the possibility of studying at

UC-Santa Cruz. I am especially grateful to David Hoy for taking me on as a student, and for giving me the opportunity to work through most of the materials that formed the basis for this dissertation. I am equally thankful to Ric Otte for his ongoing encouragement and enthusiasm for my project, and for his engagement with the writing of each chapter – without him I would not have completed this text. And I thank Rasmus Winther, who, near the journey’s end, proved to be an indispensable interlocutor. Other scholars and teachers, during my time in Santa Cruz, and in the years prior to my arrival, also provided me with inspiration to pursue this path, particularly: Arjun Appadurai, John Caputo, Bernard S. Cohn, Chunglian Ai Huang, Paul Livingston, Elizabeth Povinelli, and Hayden White.

Over the past 14 years I have been pursuing, developing, and learning about the inquiry that forms the basis for this dissertation as a teacher in classrooms from the University of Chicago, to Emory University, Harvard University, Swarthmore College, Duke University, and Stanford University. I am grateful and honored to have had the opportunity to have encountered so many students – too many to mention by name – who have given me the gift of their questioning and have challenged me to show up as one who listens. As I have discussed in the dissertation, many of the philosophical comedy routines that comprise the chapters-to-come were initially discovered and worked out with these students in these diverse classrooms.

Monet Roshaan Sexauer, William Russell Morrow (III or IV), Leaflin Lore Winecoff, and Denys Kovalchuk literally saw me through each step of this journey. Our friendship is such that I only hesitate to append my name to this text as its author

– for each word, each paragraph, and each private joke seems to have arisen through the laughter, tears, conversation, and silence that we have shared and relished together for more than ten years. Other question-mark loving friends have joined me along the way, at various times and for varying durations – and likewise I find them, with my entire family who have loved and supported me through my life, inseparable from the text: Bali, Kelsey Barrett, Anastasia Bespalova, Brad Burge, Jeffri Lynn Carington, Fuji, Frogwood, Sarah Greene, Jimmy Hardwick, Audrey Kittock, Erika Layman, Seabrook Leaf, Elizabeth Livingston, Paul Livingston, Marcella Lotusfairy, Natalie Loveless, Greg Manning, Valerie Mojeiko, Kristen Nation, New Zealand, Karen Noble, Benjamin Roome, Curtis Russet, Carlo Santiago, Josh Sonstroem, Tania T., Trout, Tiff, and Elizabeth Vines. Alas! – four friends died during months leading to the completion of this dissertation. The sorrow of their missing, and the gratitude for their lives, remains inscribed in this text: Claire Wedding, George Macauley, Gretchen Miller, and Mark Esformes.

Of course by now I needn't tell you that I conceive of the writing of this text as an embodiment of the music of my everyday life. Quite literally there is a soundtrack to this dissertation. To the following musicians, I am infinitely grateful for generating the rituals that were daily repeated in the hopes that the Muse would visit and, thereby, allow the text to write itself, as it only can: the Grateful Dead, Mouse on Mars, Frank Zappa, John Hartford, Jimi Hendrix, John Fahey, Motorhead, Bert Jansch, Ornette Coleman, Marc Leclair, The Only Ones, Shakti, David Bowie, Eric Dolphy, and Mix Master Morris.

Finally, and ultimately, I express infinite gratitude to my mother, Mary Mandis, whose life is a constant source of inspiration for me – inspiration to have faith in the impossible, to pursue what I love, and to find laughter and joy in it all. Over at least 11 years, she has read everything that I have written as an anthropologist, historian, and philosopher – and this text is no exception. In fact, she is the reader that I envisioned when the text was being written, and it is to her that this philosophical epistle is addressed. With love and gratitude, I dedicate *Of Wonder and Waking* to her.

Chapter 1

Introduction

...is all this only the shadow in him of something quite other?

Excursus:¹ I Am Not What I Think I Am

For many years – and indeed since I was a child – I have been curious about the question of personal identity. By personal identity, I mean this: on the one hand, the sensation of oneself as a separate singular ego enclosed in an isolated bag of skin; and, on the other, the belief that one lives within a world of likewise composed others, both of which (i.e., the world and others) one is decidedly *not*. If personal identity could speak, it would say: *I am me; I am not you; and I am not the world*. My curiosity concerning this matter arises from the simple fact that I have never felt uniformly compelled by such a sensation and belief. Rather, I have always felt things as quite otherwise.

What I am admitting here, at the outset, is that this dissertation represents quite a personal journey for me. That is not to say that what I have written in the past

¹ I use “excursus” here, precisely, in the double sense provided by its definition as both “a digression” and a “detailed discussion.” Anticipating the point developed at the end of the excursus, it is indeed a detour on the way to a philosophy of wonder and wakefulness – a movement toward the beginning of the dissertation that may appear in the visage of a movement away. In this sense, it signifies the beginning of an inquiry while also indicating its end (i.e., traditionally, an “excursus” is also, often, used as an “appendix” to a text). The Latin etymology is most apt: a “running forth” which is “to run” (*currere*) “out” (*ex*).

– as an anthropologist or historian – has had no connection to my life. Far from it. Nevertheless, the texts of my past were quite different. For instance, although I like to refer to my first book as “my torture book,” *The Nation’s Tortured Body* does not explicitly tell the tale of suffering that I lived while writing it (funnily enough, a friendly critic once complained that, for an ethnography, the text didn’t have enough of the author’s story in it!). And in *From the Margins* (my second book), I do not address the question of my own sense of marginalization from the norms of anthropology and history. In this dissertation, however, what I call the fundamental experiences of wonder and wakefulness are – and have been, long before my encounter with philosophy – most profoundly significant to my life.

There are two simple points that I wish to relate about the experiences of wonder and wakefulness before I proceed any further. The first is that this *disposition for the otherwise* has led me to consider the possibility that the sensation of personal identity is an illusion. For, indeed, as I will discuss at length, wakefulness is characterized not merely by the dissolution of the sense that the individual human subject *is indeed* a subject; more precisely, it reveals that the individual human subject is *not* an individual human subject. Concurrently, wonder is the domain of affect that arises in the wake of wakefulness; it indicates an attunement to, or a disposition for, the otherwise.

Which is *not* to imply that the sense of personal identity is wrong, or that the world of individual subjects living among and relating to others within a complex

constellation of objects is not – in the common use of the term – real.² Rather, the word “illusion” – with its Latin etymology, “in” + “ludere” – conveys just the opposite. It suggests one way of considering the very nature of reality (or a certain domain of beings) as *semblance at play*. That is to say: the taking of this play of semblance *as* all there is – what Jacques Lacan called *meconnaissance* – may very well be part and parcel of everyday reality.³

Personal identity is an illusion – this is not a novel insight. Indeed for me it does not signify any insight at all. Is there not a long history of western philosophical texts that has said as much? These texts may use slightly different terms – for instance, dream (Heraclitus), form of appearance (Kant), fiction (Hume/Nietzsche), or masquerade (Heidegger/Foucault) – but the basic point seems the same (regardless of what each text does with the point).

² That is, I am not using the term “real” in the philosophical or psychoanalytic (Lacanian) sense. According to an old-fashioned philosophical tradition (which reaches its apex in Kant), the world is divided into two realms, the sensible or natural world and the supersensible or *real* world; consequently, the human subject appears divided or split in that it is conceived to have some relation to, perhaps even to embody, both domains. Thus, according to this older moment of European Thought: 1) theory or theoretical knowledge signifies mere description; it is descriptive *cum* propositional knowledge of the only world which can be known, the “sensible” or “natural” world which is not the world as it is, not the “real” world (because the real is unknowable), but a world of appearance; 2) practice or practical knowledge pertains to the domain of the ethical; it is knowledge of how one ought to act, and it originates within, or is defined by the dictates of, the world of the *real*, from that domain which is unknowable.

³ It is interesting to note that Lacan introduces the term *meconnaissance* in the context of a complaint about a certain philosophical trajectory (particularly that of Sartre and his strange reading of Heidegger): “But unfortunately that philosophy grasps negativity only within the limits of a self-sufficiency of consciousness, which, as one of its premises, links to the *meconnaissance* that constitutes the ego, the illusion of autonomy to which it entrusts itself” (1977: 6).

Needless to say, and despite this venerable philosophical history, the proposal of the illusory nature of the “I” often makes people feel uncomfortable (to say the least). In contrast, however, it is precisely because of an interest in attending to the I’s play of semblance (that is, because of my fundamental experiences of being, in a sense, me-and-not-me), that I have been inspired to study philosophy – even if this means, at times, that I am gripped with a sense of discomfort and even peril, a kind of homesickness in becoming enigmatic to myself. Thus – and this is my second point – I have come to maintain a very old fashioned belief that philosophy begins with wonder and wakefulness.

Conversely, because of such experiences – and well before I began work on a philosophy Ph.D. – I seem to have developed a kind of *sifting humour*, to use Hume’s felicitous phrase (1993: 20). That is, I have felt inspired to look closely at my sense of self, and to speak with others and ask questions about their senses of self. In so doing, I have found that merely pursuing an inquiry into the taken-for-granted qualities of personal identity (without even mentioning the old idea of the illusory quality of the ‘I’) can inspire a certain kind of resistance, or, more precisely, refusal. Let me try to characterize this kind of refusal more carefully – for it corresponds with a third point I wish to make, which is slightly more difficult to state.

I first stumbled, somewhat awkwardly, into the territory of this refusal within the context of disciplinary philosophy during my first year in college, where I was convinced that, in order to become a good surgeon one day, I needed to study Ancient Greek (a peculiar vision of a future me whose provenance still remains obscure). I

became somewhat of a chauvinist for Homeric and Attic Greek, but I was baffled by what was presented to me as Greek philosophy. I recall having to lead a class on Aristotle's *Metaphysics, Book IV*, and particularly on the "Law of Identity" and the "Law of Non-contradiction." The propositions conveyed by these laws were (literally) abhorrent to me (this has since changed and, indeed, I have discovered a great love of logic). For instance, it was clear that I was simultaneously both me and not-me. At the time, I had neither the capacity to convey my visceral reaction to Aristotle nor the lexicon to articulate the seemingly contradictory situation of my supposed-self. And, likewise, I did not know that such things as "abhorrence" and "repugnance" could pass as legitimate refutations within certain domains of disciplinary philosophy. So, for my presentation, I merely wrote **ARISTOTLE = PEASOUP** on the chalk board, and left it at that. My professor – Chris Shields, now a famous Oxford classicist – was wonderfully indulgent of my ex-centricity. He smiled and sat back to watch the show. The other students in the class – some of them my friends – found me as repugnant as I found Aristotle. And some of them also thought I was insane. How could someone deny something so obvious? Since I was from New Jersey, all I could say was: No it's not! Many of my peers felt compelled to try to correct me, or to help me (and to this day, on occasion, they still enjoy recalling the incident). It seemed that, for them, I came to represent a questioning of the unquestionable, or perhaps a speaking of that which comes without saying because it goes without saying.

Many years later, in 1998, when I became a new professor of Anthropology and History at Emory University, I began a practice of asking my students to conduct a “free-write” on the question: “Who are you, and how do you know?” Since then, in each course that I have taught, regardless of the topic, I have devoted the first class of the term to this free-write. I have done this equally with undergraduates and graduate students, at Emory, Harvard, Swarthmore, Duke, Stanford, or UC-Santa Cruz.

Looking back, the conversations that emerged from this exercise appear strikingly similar. Over the past fourteen years, I have noticed that, almost without fail, in the first instance, my students have tended to regard the question with varying degrees of confoundment – was I really asking this question? why was I asking this question? was it not ridiculous? was not the answer obvious? Is it not common sense that I, for example, *am* [Name of Student]? Repeatedly, I have heard the response: I know this because I am here; I have a body; it is my body; I feel my self as myself; and this is me doing stuff, like writing or speaking. Some people would respond by reflecting on the role of, and relation to, others (i.e., they felt convinced *that they are* and they know *who they are* because of certain gifts of recognition from their world): my parents gave me this name; or, I have a birth certificate or a license with my name on it; or, everyone else around me regards me as me. Still others, the clever ones, would say: I think therefore I am. In a specific way, however, most of the responses to the question, ultimately, seemed to converge on one point: not only is it the case that *I am*, and that *I think*, but *I am what I think I am*.

Looking back, I note a powerful sense of *ofcourseness* surrounding these conversations with my students – which resonates with what I noticed with my college peers in the Aristotle class.⁴ *Of course I am what I think I am! How could it be otherwise?* Most poignant, perhaps, is the accompanying affect – many students, with whom I have spoken, express the fear that “if I wasn’t who I thought I was then I would be crazy.”⁵ Thus an attachment to a belief configured by fear seems to sediment into something veiled while in plain view. That is, despite the proliferation of a kind of script of stock phrases providing a putative answer, here, nevertheless, is a certain question that seems to be avoided or passed over repeatedly. In short, what I have noticed in these conversations with my students is that, whether by habit or (what may amount to the same thing) by prohibition, the question of “who am I and how do I know” remains energetically unexamined as if it had the quality of a taboo. I mean this in the strict sense of the term: to provide a putative answer to the question allows one to keep one’s distance from the question and, thereby, avoiding its

⁴ As Stuart Hall (1984: 8) comments in a different context, and using a different analytical lexicon: “That ‘of course’ is the most ideological moment, because that’s the moment at which you’re least aware that you are using a particular ideological framework.” As I indicate below, it may very well be that the moment of “least” awareness is precisely the moment of possibility.

⁵ Needless to say, many people have forgotten the subjunctive, and I have long since abandoned correcting my students. However, it may be worth speculating that between the “If I was *not*...” and the “If I were *not*...” arises some insight into the fear of not-being, and the manner in which an utterance in the hypothetical (as a fear-based discursive mode) serves to distance oneself from (i.e., veil) the very question of being. One of the comedic pedagogical routines that I have often explored is organized around prohibiting hypothetical utterances in the classroom. I have found this useful in generating awareness, for myself, of the manner in which – through such utterances – one evacuates oneself from one’s utterances and thereby provides an obstacle to the inquiry into “who am I.” Conversely, when invited to not rely upon the hypothetical, students often find themselves speechless, not knowing how to speak otherwise.

perilous neighborhood, to not only *not* answer the question but safely *not* ask it.

Ofcourseness, then, arises as a mode of refusal of the question of “Who am I and how do I know.”

I have explored many ways of engaging with this mode of refusal in the classroom. At different times, inspired by my own obsessions or inclinations, and certainly effected by the vicissitudes of my own life experiences, I have performed various pedagogical tricks that would facilitate (or so I believed at those moments) a questioning. In general, my main concern has always been to learn to listen to my students, to respect their experiences, and to provide them with a safe and occasionally comical context where they might pursue their own inquiry – and I have certainly learned to be attentive to the possibility of fear arising in the inquiry.

In my more flamboyant days, I used to assail students with my Jacques Lacan impersonation. I would declare suddenly (not without a sense of humor): If you are not coming here to put into question everything you believe, I don’t see why you’re here! Why not just join up with some sort of bureaucracy or other (Lacan 1991: 7)? That certainly had some kind of effect – sometimes entertaining students, although occasionally alienating those who were really attached to not examining the question, or who felt a lot of fear around it (or who were showing up to class just because they had to fulfill a GE requirement).

In more recent days – days when I was quite enamored of Kant and the “Introduction” to his *Prolegomena* – I might say something like: Why don’t we pause a moment and, regarding all that has been done as though undone, reconsider our

investment in common sense (1950: 3)? Certainly the conviction that “I am,” or that “I am what I think I am” (i.e., an ego encapsulated in a bag of skin) appears to be supported by common sense – particularly if *common sense* signifies that which is sensed most commonly (i.e., *I sense that I am and think that I am and so, apparently, does everyone else*). In this context, however, it hardly matters to declare: Since when has common sense been the basis for understanding, knowledge, or truth! – for, indeed, that is precisely what common sense always has been. Thus, despite his warning against “appealing to it as an oracle,” Kant, too, reluctantly, and with a certain Prussian humour, admits: “To appeal to common sense...is one of the subtile discoveries of modern times, by means of which the most superficial ranter can safely enter the lists with the most thorough thinking and hold his own” (1950: 7).

Still during other pedagogical moments, I have asked students simply: Well, what is thought? And why do you believe that it is you that actually thinks? Now – this is a fine question. Why? Because not only is it the case that most people never attend to such an inquiry, but also – unlike the question of “who am I” – they are not provided with a large script of stock phrases which allows them to pass over the question with the ease of ofcourseness.⁶ When the question is pursued beyond the

⁶ My use of the concept “script of stock phrases” – in addition to conjuring the figure of Socrates (see below) – may also be understood to intersect with the notion of a normative (metapragmatic) discourse constituting the sovereign subject as a regulatory ideal. In saying the later, I am using a different analytical lexicon (which I have deployed in the past, but dispense with in the present context). Nevertheless, a point: It is helpful to reiterate that this regulatory ideal is not “a figment of fantasy” (although it is) or not “real” (although it is). Rather, a normative discourse may be understood to generate the basic “descriptive” features of such a subject through processes of referential projection and objectification: that is, they read surface-segmentable patterns off of the normatively conceived structure of

common sense reference to the supposed “internal monologue” or “those words going on inside my head,” many people admit that they are not exactly sure what thought is (even though, in another moment, they claim to know what it is provided they are not asked what it is). I realized this most powerfully when, a few years ago, I taught a course at UCSC called “Thought at the Limit: Beauty, Terror, and Death.” The aim of the course was not to explore the borderland of putative thought and the unthinkable, or to arrive at a place of cessation of thought (i.e., it did not presume that we are thinking beings). Rather, the course pursued an idea inspired by Heidegger: “What is most thought-provoking is that we are still not thinking” (1993: 370). The intent of the course was to strive toward possible thought, or “the thinking that is to come.” In Heidegger’s words, such a thinking is an “experience” that is a “shattering,” and an “affirmation” that, as “acknowledgement,” conducts “ek-sistence into the realm of the upsurge of healing” (1993: 246, 260).⁷ I still, quite often, bump into students from that class – they refer to it by its subtitle “Beauty, Terror, and Death” and make no mention of “Thought.”

communication (i.e., the utterance of “I”), and thus constitute (project and objectify) communicative practice and its context – i.e., an objective world of the “really real” – by analogy to semiotic categories of reference and predication (like instrumentality and extension) (Silverstein 1979: 202, 1998: 128). All of which to say, with the concept of “script of stock phrases,” I am raising the question: Do I speak, or is it I that am spoken? It is interesting to note that, in the context of this inquiry, when the script of stock phrases runs out, what may arise is silence – and, thence, the possibility of the question.

⁷ There is an important relation here, which we explored in the class, between the words that Heidegger uses to describe “thinking-to-come” and those that Kant uses in his discussion of the moment of the “sublime” – indeed I read both as attempts to describe the fundamental experience of wakefulness.

I have to admit that what I am here referring to as pedagogical tricks never originated in the context of “prep-time” for a class. Rather, I discovered them just as my students discovered them, as they were uttered spontaneously. Very often – and to this day – I would forget them as I left the classroom. Indeed, I have found that, if I were to attempt to plan to perform one of these “tricks” before entering a classroom, I could not remember what the particular trick was. And ultimately I have noticed that once a trick has sedimented into a memorable, iterable form, I no longer have the ability, or interest, to perform it. Such is the case with the last two I wish to mention. Both of these – like the others – have emerged in moments of sincere bafflement. Within a conversation about “who are you and how do you know,” I have found myself on many occasions, over several years, saying: “Wow – so you all are really convinced that you exist? I certainly am clear that I do not!” Or, and this really seems to me the same thing, I have said: “My goodness! You think that you are what you think you are? Well, friends, I can assure you that I am not what I think I am.”

I do not exist. I am not what I think I am. Of all the utterances that emerge within an inquiry into “who are you and how do you know,” I think these are most interesting – and most important for me. They bear forth the reason why I have pursued this practice with my students for all these years. I have not – it must be clear – repeatedly conducted these classroom inquiries because I wanted students to provide an answer, or learn to give an answer. Nor has it been to convince students that they do not exist, or that they are not what they think they are. Indeed, I could never tell students such a thing as: “You don’t exist.” Likewise, I would never tell

them to abandon common sense. My concern has never been to convince students of anything. Rather, I have been compelled by curiosity and care to listen – a sifting humour – that has somehow arisen with a certain disposition for the otherwise. For some reason, I have had faith that something otherwise might open for them.

Conversely, every time I have conducted this inquiry, I have not just led it, I have taken part in it. I have done the free-writes with my students without fail. And, as I have indicated, on occasion I myself have spoken up. The inquiry has been my own.

One last note on these pedagogical tricks. To speak *I do not exist* or *I am not what I think I am* in a classroom is not, for me, to speak seriously – that would be too steeped in the *meconnaissance* of the self. It is, rather, to speak sincerely and playfully, that is, with an attunement to play. That is to say: to speak such things is to sincerely perform philosophical entertainment from a momentary awareness of the *play* of semblance, in the mode of the humorist not unlike Kierkegaard or the mode of farce akin to Foucault (again, not that I try to be Kierkegaard or Foucault – it is just my manner). This I always admit to my students: I am an entertainer. For, I have found, when I am “just being me” in this manner, many students seem to be entertained and they, at the very least, continue to show up for class; they want to find out “what Axel will say next.” At the most, by showing up, something – certainly not me – inspires them to begin their own inquiry for themselves. The intensity of a refusal of what I consider to be philosophy transforms. They may become a witness to their own refusal. And, rather than reiterate stock phrases that

facilitate a disavowal of questioning, they may begin to see the question itself. And I myself, too, may begin again.

Let me now reiterate, in slightly different terms, the two basic points I have made concerning my curiosity about personal identity – and then relate them to the third point, which comes from this tale of ofcourseness and refusal. I have noted that, in my view, the fundamental experiences of wonder and wakefulness constitute the beginning of philosophy. The intimation that personal identity is an illusion; the compulsion to ask questions about that which seems unquestionable (the ‘I’) – these, with wonder, arise in the wake of, and signify an orientation toward, wakefulness. Philosophy, concurrently, for me, concerns itself with its own site of emergence. That is, wakefulness becomes the task of philosophy. From this vantage, the refusal conveyed by the ofcourseness of “I am what I think I am” reappears as not-refusal, i.e., as a critical ally to the sifting humour that I associate with philosophy – for, despite operating in tandem with common sense, refusal, when it arises, identifies precisely the path to take toward a possible questioning.

The challenge here, however, is this – and this is my third point: the refusal that I have described as my peers’ and my students’ is, in all actuality, also my very own. Refusal, thus, as a path toward a possible questioning, as a path toward the emergence of philosophy, needs to be specified further.

To put this simply: wakefulness and wonder are not experiences that I may merely enact. I cannot, of my own accord, wake up; and, more significantly, no matter how much I desire to do so, I do not wish to wake up. The subject that seeks

its own dissolution is involved in a definitively ambivalent situation – the desire is met with equal amounts of repulsion. And for that matter, the subject that undergoes its own dissolution is not around to experience anything (i.e., there is no subject). From this vantage, is not the path of inquiry that I am compelled to follow – is not the question of the I – itself a detour? A detour: by which, while I ready myself, I myself avoid what I seek? And while I steer clear of a confrontation with the face of philosophy, does not philosophy itself withdraw? Is it any wonder that Novalis declares homesickness the very determination of philosophy! “Driven in our homesickness...our very being is restlessness” (Heidegger 1995: 5).

Finally, to conclude this excursus, I wish to say what most certainly is already clear. I chose to write this dissertation on wonder and wakefulness *not* because I read a philosophical text, found an interesting topic, and wished to learn more about it or to understand it. And I certainly was not driven by the injunction *know thyself* (I find it infinitely funny that people miss the joke and think that the Greek trickster-oracle actually meant you were supposed know yourself!). Rather, I stumbled upon philosophical texts – first Kant’s, then Heidegger’s, then Kierkegaard’s – and found a resonance with my own experience. I do not read these texts to understand something – I read them because I find in them companions in this personal, often solitudinal, journey. The purpose of this dissertation, then, is not to say anything new. In fact, it concerns itself with quite a well-worn path. If anything, it may track, in a somewhat ex-centric fashion, a few detours taken on the way to philosophy.

Is all this only the shadow in him of something quite other? This phrase of Heidegger's from my epigraph conveys a critical aspect of the experience of philosophy for me. For, indeed, as Heidegger's text amply demonstrates, the shadow is also a clearing: indication of light. From this vantage, the very fact that I experience, on occasion, myself as myself – as an isolated center of feeling and action living inside and bounded by a physical body – becomes, itself, the indication that I am not. I can, on occasion, say that *I am what I think I am* precisely because *I am not what I think I am*.

Our Business is to Wake Up

Huxley's words, I believe, are most helpful in summarizing what I have said, and indicating the direction of this dissertation: "The world is an illusion, but an illusion which we must take seriously, because it is real as far as it goes, and in those aspects of reality which we are capable of comprehending. *Our business is to wake up*. (Huxley 1968: 288). Let me now begin to explore, elaborate, and reiterate this sense of the business of philosophy in a slightly different way.

Wakefulness comprises the task of philosophy. Philosophy concerns itself with its site of emergence. It is born out of the moment of wakefulness and has wakefulness as its aim.⁸ That is, pursuing an inquiry into the possibility of wonder

⁸ This is a critical quality of wakefulness that I wish to emphasize. Wakefulness may very well signify both the beginning (*arche*) and end (*telos*) of philosophy. Perhaps it is for this reason that temporality features so prevalently in discussions (as I indicate below, and discuss in each chapter). However, there is another feature that may correspond to this signification (which I mention in the excursus, and reiterate now in a different way): Does not wakefulness

and wakefulness is, in a way, one manner of pursuing an inquiry into the possibility of philosophy – as that which conveys, facilitates a passage to, or cultivates an attunement for wakefulness. However: In the moment of wakefulness, what is revealed is that the individual subject is no individual subject. Within such a moment, there may be wakefulness, and there may be wonder, but not one that wakes or wonders. Thus, none of the normal qualities or features that are regularly (though not unquestionably) attributed the individual human subject apply to wakefulness: for instance, experience, knowledge, imagination, cognition. In other words, wakefulness is inexperiencable, unknowable, unimaginable, and unthinkable. Concurrently, wakefulness and wonder cannot be said to *take place*. In this sense, the moment of wakefulness appears to be what, in Attic Greek, is called *atopon* (“that which has no place”), *to may on* (“the nothing,” “that which is not”), or *to kaynon* (“the empty”). For this reason, some philosophers – like Huxley and Walter Benjamin – see wakefulness as a residing within the eternal, the *nunc stans*, or the eternally present moment.⁹ Others, like Kant, refer to the *cancellation of time*. And still others, like Kierkegaard and Heidegger, describe the moment as that out of which temporality as such arises. Be that as it may, the question of wakefulness is strongly associated with questions of temporality.

then establish a deeply ambivalent relation to the constitution of the philosopher as a subject which is, conversely, compelled to approach and withdraw from its own condition of possibility (i.e., which is its condition of impossibility)?

⁹ As Huxley says: “Thought is determined by life, and life is determined by the passing of time. But the dominion of time is not absolute, for ‘time must have a stop’...in the individual mind, which must learn the regular cultivation of a mood of timelessness, of a sense of eternity” (1968: 190-191).

From what I have said, it will be gathered that the words wakefulness and wonder are names for that which cannot be named. They are the nameless. Heidegger says: “But if man is to find his way once again into the nearness of Being he must first learn to exist in the nameless” (1993: 223). *Learning to exist in the nameless*. I take this to be a restatement of the task of philosophy. It is for this reason – or, more specifically, it is precisely from the vantage of Reason – that wakefulness signifies not just the paradoxical and the absurd, but the impossible. This dissertation, then, pursues an inquiry into the possibility of the impossible.

Although the words I use here to describe wakefulness, wonder, and philosophy may appear quite modern, what I am saying is actually quite old-fashioned. I elaborate this below, and in subsequent chapters. Presently, however, I wish to make a few more programmatic statements. First, I am of the view that – and in saying this I really do risk sounding old-fashioned – beings, or individual subjects, possess wakefulness and wonder in their very nature. Second, wakefulness is available to, and already present for, each being in every moment. Third, to say it even more bluntly: every being is always already awake. Fourth, and finally, every individual being *as* a subject lives in forgetfulness of its true nature – a forgetfulness which it is compelled energetically to sustain. This latter is a critical element in the composition of what I have called the illusion of personal identity. Thus, although it is nothing special, some philosophers – like Kant – believe the moment of wakefulness is something of an achievement that requires proper cultivation. Others, like Kierkegaard and Heidegger – as well as myself – feel otherwise, i.e., that the

cessation of forgetfulness is quite mundane. Such an everyday access to the absurd, Kierkegaard calls: *the sublime in the pedestrian*. There are, however, significant differences – as well as critical sites of emergence and intersection – within and between the texts of these philosophers. Each of the chapters of this dissertation attends to these in precise ways.

Stock Phrases

It may be helpful at this point to speak to the question of language and common sense. To use Socrates' felicitous phrase, this is a concern with the proliferation of "stock phrases used against all who philosophize" (122). Let me consider a few examples.

Alan Watts once told a story that seems quite apt: "I remember a very wise man who used to give lectures like this, and when he came in he used to be silent. He would look at the audience, gaze at everyone there for a particularly long time, and everybody would begin feeling vaguely embarrassed. When he had gazed at them for a long time he would say, 'WAKE UP, you're all asleep! And if you don't wake up, I won't give any lecture.'" It may seem evident that Watts, in this story, is addressing, precisely, the question of wakefulness with which this dissertation is concerned. Nevertheless, I can envision quite easily a scenario in which audience members (both Watts' and the supposed "wise man's") respond: "What do you mean 'WAKE UP'? I am awake, can't you see?" Or: "You are just playing with words. You don't really

mean ‘WAKE UP’.” Conversely, I can picture a different kind of response, one in which the listeners, in the surprise of the moment, discover some inspiration to reflect for themselves on their sense of being.

I can envision these reactions because, on occasion, they have been my own. At other times, most recently, as I have pursued the questioning with which this dissertation is concerned, I have encountered them myself. I do not – or at least not any longer – exhort people to wake up or tell them they are asleep (I have done so in the classroom of past years, as one of my pedagogical tricks). However, I do speak about my interest in wakefulness, or waking up, quite often. The response of most people is something like: “Oh, I thought you must be talking about what happens when the alarm goes off in the morning and I struggle to get out of bed.” Accordingly they are often somewhat perplexed when I suggest otherwise. Occasionally, however, I have noticed that out of the perplexity arises a joint inquiry on the path to philosophy.

To put this quite plainly, and to begin to address the question of language: although it may be a pedestrian experience, wakefulness, for instance, is not a word or concept based analogically on some original meaning or use in a supposed normal life experience, such as getting out of bed in the morning. To say so is to rely upon an impoverished understanding of language (according to which language is supposed to refer to, and predicate about, “what is happening” prior to and outside of itself). Language, simply, is not such a thing as common sense portrays – and each of the

philosophical texts that I explore in this dissertation is quite clear on this.¹⁰ Kant, for instance, some two-hundred years before Judith Butler, outlined precisely how particular kinds of “concepts” (those pertaining to practical reason – i.e., the ethical) within particular kinds of utterances (i.e., those of the “voice of reason”), “themselves produce the reality of that to which they refer” (1997: 57). (It is not for nothing that J.L. Austin was the White’s Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford, or that he claimed, in his *How To Do Things With Words*: “Here too Kant was among the pioneers.”)

It may be helpful, then, to distinguish particular utterances wherein the concepts of wakefulness arise in terms of their domain of discourse. For instance, take the claim that “wakefulness” *must* signify (i.e., have an original reference to) that which happens after the alarm goes off in the morning. This utterance, in my view, supports and proliferates a discursive formation that is organized around, and perhaps, in some way, constitutive of, personal identity, i.e., the world of subjects, others, and objects. In terms that I have introduced in the Excursus, such an utterance comprises a banal instance of refusal.

Outside of the bedroom and the lecture hall, the exhortation to “wake up” is quite common in political and cultural rhetoric. For instance, on September 21, 2010, anticipating the US midterm elections, President Obama uttered an impassioned

¹⁰ I have devoted a large proportion of my prior research and publications to the analysis of language and the philosophy of language. Although I remain infinitely fascinated with questions of language, it is not my intention, for the purposes of this dissertation, to reiterate my prior work. There is just too much to say. Perhaps when I transpose this text into a proper book-form I shall include discussions on the topic.

appeal to disgruntled Democrats: "When I hear Democrats griping and groaning and saying 'the healthcare plan didn't have a public option' ... or, 'yes, you ended the war in Iraq, but you haven't completely finished the Afghan war yet', I say, 'folks, *wake up!*.'" Obama timed this speech to coincide with the release, on the same day, of the album *Wake Up!* by John Legend and The Roots. The message of this coordinated effort was clear: citizens need to become more aware of how they are being hoodwinked by insidious (i.e., Republican) forces. According to the requirements of modern political-democratic practice, the being that is required to wake up out of delusion is an individual, human being understood to be a neo-liberal citizen subject. In these terms, waking up would foster the creation of a better democratic community composed of stronger, unhoodwinkable, democratic, individual subjects – good citizens of the modern nation-state.

What is striking in Obama's appeal is the manner in which it performs a kind of rebuke, one which is quite infantilizing. And, in doing so, it separates the speaker from those addressed (i.e., apparently Obama himself does not need to wake up). Thus, the exhortation demonstrates, in a banal fashion, a kind of distrust of its puerile audience (i.e., they need to be monitored and taken care of). At the same time, the utterance is saturated with stock phrases, to the extent that, when the declaration *Wake Up!* arrives, it is of no surprise. It is no surprise because it has arrived already – for, indeed, how many individuals have not come into being as subjects through the

castigation of the Father?¹¹ Obama's speech, then, gives the opportunity to its audience to cease listening, for it has all been heard before. His *Wake Up!* is rather a lullaby. In short, at least in my view, this common political exhortation comprises and proliferates a somnambulizing disavowal of wakefulness and the task of philosophy. It is, in this sense, a normative discursive formation; it constitutes, and supports, a domain of discourse whereby the 'I' arises as an individual subject in relation to a world of others and objects. To put this in other terms, such a discourse, as common sense, exhibits no sensibility for the impossible and the absurd.

In contrast, Martin Luther King Jr.'s Oberlin College Convocation Address of 1965 – *Remaining Awake Through A Great Revolution* – demonstrates a powerful faith in the possibility of the impossible. King's main concern is not merely to rid the country of racial injustice – although it is that. Moreover, his interest is much broader and global – it concerns “mankind” and “the geographical togetherness of our world.” His demand is no less than this: “We must get rid of violence, hatred, and war.” King is clear about what is required to fulfill this: “We shall not have the courage, the insight, to deal with such matters unless we are prepared to undergo a mental and spiritual change.” In other words, the accomplishment of such a feat follows from a fundamental experience which, for King, arises with the dissolution of an investment in the illusion of a world of alienated subjects and objects – a world which, as King says, referring to Martin Buber, “substitutes an I-it relationship for the I-thou

¹¹ I say this in the sense developed by Freud, Lacan, and Althusser; which does not require that the emergent subject be addressed by a “real” father. Indeed, “the Father’s no” is everywhere.

relationship.” From this vantage, King offers a powerful and succinct analysis of racial injustice: “And what is segregation but an existential expression of man's tragic estrangement – his awful segregation, his terrible sinfulness?”

Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech exemplifies a powerful engagement with what Heidegger calls “philosophical wakefulness” (14). Remaining awake, however, signifies for King the possibility of transposing – in a way that is akin to Kant – the fundamental experience of a radical spiritual awakening into the everyday world. Based in such an experience, it is possible, according to King, to discern that “all mankind is tied together; all life is interrelated, and we are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.” Remaining awake, in short, signifies for King the ability to sustain a vision of “the interrelated structure of reality.” It thus invokes a domain of discourse that, while firmly oriented toward a political project of possibility, arises from, to use Kierkegaard's words, a “faith in the impossible by virtue of the absurd” (1983).

The way King positions himself in relation to his audience is crucial. He addresses them not just as one *of* them, but *with* them mutually as one. He does not separate himself from his audience. What he is exhorting them to do, he exhorts himself to do. As he says: “For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be.” *For some strange reason*: this abandonment of normal reason – indeed of knowledge as such – is critical. Knowledge ceases to be the basis of practice. For, despite all the evidence that the mass of populations that he addresses, and lives amongst, are themselves the source of violence, hatred, and war;

King expresses infinite faith in their capacity to proliferate universal peace. Thus, in this context, what is significant is that, rather than berating them for being asleep, King says *we must remain awake*. King has some sensibility that we are already awake.

Remain awake. This latter is one example of how Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech resists all temptation to proliferate, or rely upon, stock phrases. Instead, King's utterance is saturated with novel concepts – developed, with care and precision, in close conversation with the texts of Buber, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Tillich. *Remain awake. We must get rid of violence, hatred, and war. Inescapable network of mutuality*. These concepts, arising within this domain of discourse, *must* have a quality of the outrageous – an offense to common sense. *Remain awake. We must get rid of violence, hatred, and war. Inescapable network of mutuality*. These concepts – precisely because they appeal to the impossible and the absurd – demand attention. They comprise no lullaby. Rather, for the fortunate ones who happen to be in the presence of this speaker, what is opened up is the possibility of reflection and transformation. The opening of a novel path: a questioning of one's compulsory attachment to habits of thought and knowledge, at the very least, and, at most, an inquiry into oneself – not as an individual subject, but as something otherwise.

In this dissertation, I can only begin to follow Martin Luther King Jr.'s inspiration. Perhaps at the most superficial level is the imperative to resist the utterance of stock phrases. There are two key points regarding such an intent. The first concerns the fact wakefulness and wonder are, quite simply, incomprehensible

(from the perspective of both common sense and the dictates of reason). My interest, in this dissertation, is not to transpose the incomprehensible into a domain of comprehensibility, but, as Kierkegaard says, to make incomprehensibility more salient (1983: 112). King accomplishes this, precisely, by developing philosophical concepts that have the task of opening access to a non-conceptual domain – and this is my second point. For me, the task of philosophy is not to generate concepts that, like math problems, contain their own solution. As Kierkegaard is so powerful at reminding, there is a “security” and a “glorious...relief” that accompanies holding onto, and residing within, a world of such concepts – for it “translates” one into an individual subject that is “understood by everyone” and “understandable to himself” (1983: 76). In contrast, the philosophy I wish to pursue creates concepts that function as vehicles along the way to philosophy, vehicles which convey, transport, or facilitate access to the fundamental experience wakefulness. The difficulty of this is not just that such concepts have no reference (i.e., they do not operate according to common sense dictates of reference and predication). It is that the creation of such concepts calls for the giving up of that which can be conceptualized. I believe that Deleuze and Guattari are working with a very similar idea: “It [the concept] makes us aware of new variations and unknown resonances, it carries out unforeseen cuttings-out, it brings forth an Event that surveys [*survole*] us” (1994: 28).¹²

¹² In the chapters that follow, I explore how, in various and disparate ways, the texts of Kant, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger pursue this task.

A Life Worth Living

Socrates, too, exemplifies an infinite faith in the possibility of wakefulness – at the very least, in his commitment to himself conceived of as a commitment to the *hoi polloi* – and his example may serve to elaborate further what I have called the task of philosophy.¹³ I see this most powerfully in a passage from the *Apology* where Socrates reasserts his commitment to the citizens of Athens even as they prepare to sentence him to death.

For, even if it seems ridiculous to say so, I've literally been attached to the city, as if to a large thoroughbred horse that was somewhat sluggish because of its size and needed to be awakened by some sort of gadfly. It's as just such a gadfly, it seems to me, that the god has attached me to the city – one that awakens...If you obey Anytus, you might easily kill me. Then you might spend the rest of your lives asleep (129).

One that awakens. This, as Socrates' self-description, may serve, at least in my view, to define the iconic philosopher, which, no doubt, Socrates is.¹⁴ Or at least

¹³ I use the common expression here – “the *hoi polloi*” – out of convenience. *Hoi polloi* translates as “the many.” So “the *hoi polloi*” literally means *the the many*.

¹⁴ I hasten to say that, in mentioning such names and philosophical trajectories (e.g., “Socrates”), at stake is decidedly not a project of fitting them and their ideas together in the manner of a jigsaw puzzle. Such a project would be awkward, or even dubious, for many reasons, not least of which is the fact that what these different figures have written – or the terms they have supposedly introduced – cannot fit together; indeed, often their modes of inquiry may be shown to be incommensurable. Likewise, I do not conceive of this philosophical project in instrumental terms – thus I do not aim to deploy the concepts of other philosophers instrumentally as *tools*. If elements of their lexicons appear in this text, it is to generate precise concepts (in the fashion indicated by Heidegger [*Facticity*: 12-13, 28], i.e., so that a preliminary access to the inquiry at hand may be worked out. In such a process, are elements of a philosophical lexicon transformed, redeployed? That is: Is there a proprietary relation between a philosophical category and its author/origin *cum* textual-provenance? There is another matter, however, perhaps more important, which concerns the relationship that this text has to philosophical figures of the past: what is a “figure?” What can a relationship of a present inquiry be to a *past* figure? Ought an inquiry in the present to strive to reproduce or represent the correct or true interpretation or reading of the past figure? What is a project that strays into the history of philosophy? I admit my own manner agrees with Deleuze, in that I “conceive of the history of philosophy as a kind of buggery or, what comes to the same thing, immaculate conception.” Deleuze goes on to articulate

it identifies the desire of the philosopher, as a lover...of what? It is so often said that philosophy is the love of wisdom, however this is too facile a translation, which seems to me to appeal to quickly to etymology and neglect the old texts that may be seen to tell tales of something otherwise. Certainly, in response to Chaerephon's question – whether anyone was wiser than Socrates? – the oracle said “no one is wiser.” Nevertheless, this response was no answer; rather it was the beginning of a path of questioning, which led Socrates to a realization: “He among you is the wisest who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is worth nothing at all” (Baird and Kaufmann 2008: 87). In other words, the answer to the trickster-oracle's riddle was most certainly not: therefore, go out and love wisdom!

Let me explain. The oracle does not provide Socrates with an answer, but with a paradox: He is wisest who gives up wisdom. Socrates does not dispense with the paradox – he lives with it. He resides within paradox. There is nothing pleasant about this. Socrates lives a life of “unease,” “fear,” and “anxiety.” This he calls the examined life.

Socrates is compelled to attempt to lead others along the path of the examined life – for, as he says: “The unexamined life isn't worth living” (136). This examination, however, is not oriented toward arriving at knowledge but, rather, toward leading the many into the domain of paradox and to a dawning awareness of

the basis for what I would call a *queer philosophy* (which may not be inappropriate in the discussion of Socrates): “I imagined myself getting onto the back of an author, and giving him a child, which would be his and which would at the same time be a monster. It is very important that it should be his child, because the author actually had to say everything that I made him say. But it also had to be a monster because it was necessary to go through all kinds of decenterings, slips, break-ins, secret emissions, which I really enjoyed” (Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*: 8).

nonknowing.¹⁵ Is he successful? At the very least, on occasion, he leads them to a place of “perplexity” (as in the *Meno*)¹⁶ and, more often, to “indignation.”

Nevertheless, the Socratic text is saturated with the utterance of paradoxes:

*I know that I am not wise.
I, having no knowledge, do not think that I have knowledge.
I know that I possess no knowledge.
I am not a teacher and I have nothing to persuade you of.
I spend my whole life teaching and persuading you (to give
your greatest care to the improvement of your souls).
I do not think I am something when I am really nothing.*

What then is Socrates, the philosopher, a lover of? There are at least two possibilities that seem, to me, to intersect orthogonally. The first is, quite simply this: he is a lover of Love. This answer is provided in his “speech in praise of Love” in the *Symposium*. There the figure of Socrates receives a teaching on the “true nature of Love” and the “goal of Loving” from Diotima. This teaching leads him through ascending stages of Love. After the true lover has “learned to see the beautiful in due order and succession,” starting from the love of an individual body and many bodies, and ascending through the love of institutions, laws, and the sciences to all souls: “all of a sudden he will catch sight of something wonderfully beautiful in nature” (318).

¹⁵ And why is this the case? Deleuze’s words are quite helpful here: “Paradox is initially that which destroys good sense as the only direction, but it is also that which destroys common sense as the assignation of fixed identities” (1990: 3).

¹⁶ Meno, accusing Socrates of putting him in state of perplexity, declares: “You seem to have that effect on me, for both my mind and my tongue are numb, and I have no answer to give you.” Socrates’ reply: “I myself do not have the answer when I perplex others, but I am more perplexed than anyone when I cause perplexity in others. So now I do not know what virtue is; perhaps you knew before you contacted me, but now you are certainly like one who does not know” (211-212).

This thing is “absolute,” “pure,” and “unmixed.” “It always *is* and neither comes to be nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes.” It is *atopos* in this sense: “It is not anywhere...or in anything, but itself by itself with itself, it is always one” (318). However, this, itself is not it. For, as Diotima says: “When someone rises by these stages...and begins to see this beauty, he has *almost* grasped his goal.” *Almost*. The goal, remains unfathomable and nameless, and merely, as Socrates reports, “the mystery of Love.” However, what is clear is that the experience of arriving at this goal is that of wonder (*thaumazein*) – which, as Socrates says in the *Theaetetus*, is the beginning of philosophy.

As to the second possibility, Socrates provides a clue in the *Apology*, where he says: “For, to fear death, my friends, is only to think ourselves wise without really being wise, for it is to think we know what we do not know” (Church 1956: 35). Here is a radical equation: Fear of death = To think oneself wise and to think one has knowledge. Socrates, as he says repeatedly, has no fear of death. Why is that? It is not because he does not think himself wise and does not think he has knowledge – for indeed it is more precisely the case that *he does and does not*. In other words, his non-fear of death arises from residing within the paradox. However, it is not merely the case that Socrates does not fear death. Rather, as he says in the *Phaedo*:

Those who rightly engage philosophy study only dying and death. And it would be surely strange for a man all through his life to desire only death, and then, when death comes to him, to be vexed at it, when it has been his study and his desire for so long (112).

[The soul that] has loved wisdom rightly...has truly practiced how to die. Is not this the practice of death? (126)

The philosopher, in short, who has loved wisdom rightly by letting go of wisdom, who has led the examined life, who has loved Love, is the one who studies only death, who pursues the practice of death, and embodies a desire of death. The philosopher is the lover of death.

Here, then, is another way of saying that philosophy, at least in my view, is driven by a commitment to the possibility of the impossible. Is it not the fear of death that which lies behind what I call the refusal of wakefulness? Indeed, is not wakefulness indexical of a specific kind of death, so long as it signifies the dissolution of the subject as such (i.e., that the individual subject is not the individual subject)? Be that as it may, philosophy, in this sense, definitively does not embody the pursuit of knowledge. Rather, it pursues (as Foucault says – in his most misunderstood, because “parodic and farcical,” utterance) the “sacrifice of the subject of knowledge,” and even “the destruction of the subject who seeks knowledge” (1977: 162, 164).¹⁷ Why “parodic and farcical?” Because, as Foucault certainly knew, the subject of knowledge *is* not. Or, as I have already noted, and will elaborate in later chapters, wakefulness may very well be always already the case.¹⁸

Needless to say, as the figures of Martin Luther King Jr. and Socrates most poignantly demonstrate, the pursuit of the task of philosophy may embody a risk of

¹⁷ In this sense, philosophy for me is also always genealogy (i.e., as elaborated by Foucault in “Nietzsche Genealogy History”).

¹⁸ As I completed writing this section, a friend (who knew nothing of my writing) sent the following words to me written by Kahlil Gibran:

Alas, Wakefulness has Destroyed Me,
But I Am a Lover and the Truth of Love is Awakening.
Behold My Life, as I have Lived so shall I Die.

tremendous proportions. In this sense, although it is a practice of love, and although it demonstrates an infinite commitment to human life, philosophy – as exemplified by Martin Luther King, Jr. and Socrates – does not seem to support the requirements of the modern nation-state and neo-liberal citizenship (e.g., as historically configured around the proliferation of war and the preservation of the illusion of sovereign subjects). And, despite its orientation toward the universal cessation of suffering (including all prejudice, violence, hatred, and war), or perhaps precisely for that reason,¹⁹ philosophy may constitute a radically transgressive act.²⁰ What Socrates called “the true philosopher” (115) – the one that awakens, the one that embodies the love of Love – may come, as it were, to represent not just incomprehensibility (i.e., through its nonknowing, its letting go of concepts); it may come to present the very face of death to the nation-state and the figure of the good citizen. Nevertheless, from another vantage, even the most superficial aspect of philosophical practice – its striving to ask a question – may bear forth an honoring and loving of one self that is an honoring and loving of the many. Or, as Socrates is said to have said on his deathbed: “Take *care* of your own selves, and you will serve me and mine and yourselves in all that you do” (148).

¹⁹ If there is any doubt about this, I refer the reader to the *New York Times* article of May 29, 2012 entitled “Secret ‘Kill List’ Proves a Test of Obama’s Principles and Will.” This horrific situation – according to which “the president of the United States believes he has the power to order people killed – in total secrecy, without any due process, without transparency or oversight of any kind” – demonstrates how far from Martin Luther King Jr. Obama stands. Much of my prior work in anthropology and history has been devoted to histories of violence and war. Needless to say, this current situation reiterates a familiar pattern which I observe in my studies of torture and human rights abuses around the world.

²⁰ The *Apology*, in my reading, offers a most precise analysis of “prejudice” and its function within democratic life.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I take the lessons of Socrates quite literally: to strive to reside within the paradox, to reside within the domain of nonknowing. As I shall discuss, while Kant ultimately turns away from this lesson, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger pursue it relentlessly. And I am also of the opinion that this does constitute a risk (personal and political), but that it, for me, is an act of love that arises mutually with an attempt to face the finitude of life. That is to say, for me, quite sincerely, it is a way of care.

Chapter 2

The Trouble with the Subject

...we suffer from man, beyond doubt.

Introduction: To Return to the Subject

What I wish to do in this chapter is to develop a kind of questioning that is quite otherwise. My questioning is not a questioning of this or that proposition; rather, in seeking a questioning *of* the subject, I conduct this inquiry in the spirit of a *self*-examination, as it is represented in the figure of Socrates – that is, as an examination of the “I.” Needless to say, this pursuit may appear quite ambivalent precisely because it is a caring-for-self that is not invested in fortifying the subject – i.e., it does not orient itself toward the construction of a fortress of knowledge protecting and supporting the illusion of the subject as individual being. It is oriented toward exploring the possibility that the individual human subject is no individual human subject. That is to say: it is concerned with the possibility of the impossible.

In my understanding, *the subject* has the peculiar quality of being an indispensable concept that must be dispensed with on the way to philosophy, a vehicle that facilitates access to the fundamental experience of wakefulness. The trick, of course, is that the subject is not so easily dispensed with. Here, then, is one way to describe the trouble with the subject: the “I,” as subject, cannot help but hold

on to that which it seeks to let go. Turning toward this trouble may provide one possibility for beginning anew a questioning of the subject, and thus facilitate passage on the way to philosophy. For how may one dispense with something without having clarity about what it is one grasps?

Let me, then, return to the subject. It is possible that, in the last chapter, by moving quickly to introduce my concerns as a whole, I may have passed over some of the nuances that make the concept of the subject distinctive. That, however, is the danger of an introduction, I suppose. In its desire to draw the reader in, it may say both too much and too little, and thus risk concealing as much as it may reveal. One of my favorite of Kant's terms specifies the nature of this risk. *Propaedeutic*: a preliminary operation that, in clearing the way for what lay ahead, redeploys or makes use anew of the "doctrines" or "principles" that came before.²¹ I find that the concept of the subject I am trying to develop has just such a sense of prior availability, a quality of given-ahead-of-time, which, as a result of conjuring its common significations, may be slightly misleading.

It may be helpful, then, to take a step back, pause, and consider the common significations of the concept of the subject at a slower pace. What I suggested in the preceding chapter is that the subject, or personal identity, is commonly understood to be comprised of a special sensation and belief. What I am calling – using non-technical language – a sensation and belief, in all actuality, may not be quite as

²¹ For Kant's discussion of the terms "introduction" and "propaedeutic," see the "First Introduction to the Critique of Judgment" (which was not originally published because Kant thought it too long) (1987: 431-432).

separable as the two words imply. Indeed, there is reason to understand the two to be mutually related.²² Be that as it may: the basic point, put in quite simplistic terms, is that most of us have the sensation of being an “I” that is an isolated center of feeling and action living inside a bag of skin; concurrently, we live according to the belief that the “I myself” confronts a world of, on the one hand, similarly composed beings or others and, on the other, differently composed things or objects, both of which the “I” is not. Everyday figures of speech reflect this: “I love you.” “I make quinoa.”

As a result of – or perhaps coinciding with – this sensation and belief, we have a particular attitude to ourselves and to the world “outside” us. There are four points regarding this attitude. First, and most fundamentally, the subject considers itself to be a particular kind of being: one that is a distinct, isolable, autonomous, and sovereign entity. That is to say, we consider ourselves to have actual being, to have life that persists independently. This is what is commonly meant by *to exist*, which, from the Latin *ex + sistere* signifies that which stands away from or outside of, and, therefore, may form a relation to others and objects in a world. Thus, from the vantage of the figure of a sovereign subject, to be is to exist, and to exist is to relate.

The second point is that the subject, as a being that exists, relates to its world with a particular kind of activity – an action that is a doing. Several important aspects

²² In the preceding chapter, when speaking of this constellation of sensation and belief, I deploy the terms “subject” and “personal identity” as if they were vaguely synonymous. I should say that it is at the intersection of what I am calling sensation and belief that the concepts of “subject” and “personal identity” may be seen to be mutually constitutive – a process mediated by the discursive element “I” understood to be an indexical icon. I suggest this in a paragraph below. However, my intent in this dissertation is not to provide an analysis of language and subject formation. I have written on these topics elsewhere.

of the illusion of the subject concern this point. For instance, the subject is the subject “of” an action in the same way that it is a subject “of” a sentence. In fact, in this sense, speaking is one of the subject’s basic actions. The subject, conceived in this way, is a speaking being. However, whether speaking or cooking quinoa, a critically significant aspect of the illusion of the subject is this: that not only is the “I” distinct and isolable from its world, but it is also distinct and isolable from what it does. This means that the way an “I” relates to its doing is different from the way the “I” relates to a “you.” The doing is “mine” to the extent that “I” tend to conceive of myself not just as a doer and agent, but as an originator, creator, and causer. This very common experience has a very interesting formulation: *I am not my deed, but the deed is mine.* Thus, in the same way that one may say “I speak words” and “the words are mine,” one may also say “I cook quinoa” and “the quinoa is mine.” Finally, whether we relate to a deed or to an other, we do our relating as an agent that is specifically temporalized. That is, as a *being* that *exists* as *doer*, the subject appears as that which comes *before* its own deed and as that which persists *after*, while the doing comprises a *present* through which the doer is said to pass.

It may be helpful to note that these elements of existing, relating, and doing in time correspond to a common experience of language – the basics of which most of us learn in grammar school. At a fundamental level, the subject, as a grammatical element, signifies the “I” that arises within an instance of discourse. However, more important is the specific way that the “I” signifies not just “person-speaking” but “first-person-singular.” The “first” of the “first-person-singular” has a way of

conveying the magnitude of priority and authority that is commonly accorded to the “I” of personal identity as a mode of being that appears to exist prior to and outside of discourse. Thus, the common linguistic understanding of the subject seems to corroborate the common experience that “I” am the origin of my speaking, that “I” speak words, and that my words are my words. In turn, this genitive relation of the “I” to language may be related – complexly, needless to say – to the experience of one’s actions as one’s own and one’s body as one’s own. Thus, this is the third point: in common experience, “I” itself takes on the quality of what linguists call an indexical icon to the extent that we understand “I” not only as tethered to, but also as *embodying* and *standing in for*, both the sensation and belief that define personal identity.

Here is the fourth point: In addition to speaking words and cooking quinoa, there are two actions that have specific importance for clarifying the common experience of the subject: thinking and knowing. The fable that I told about my students in the previous chapter conveys this element quite well. In exploring the question *who are you and how do you know?* my students would often reply: “Of course I am what I think I am! How could it be otherwise?” In other words, the life of the subject entails a very special relationship between (what are commonly considered) thinking and knowing. Not only is it the case that thinking and knowing are believed to be specific actions that “I” do and that, conversely, are “mine.” More significantly, although the “I” may think and know things other than the “I myself,” the very act of thinking itself comes to be equated with a certain knowing of the “I.”

More precisely, the very act of thought is commensurable with a knowledge of oneself – *as being, as existing* – that is beyond doubt. My-(Any)-Thinking = My-Self-Knowing. In short, thinking and knowing comprise a form of self-relation through which the “I” is assured of itself as existing, as acting, and as relating to the world in a temporality that is linear and progressive.

Needless to say, these elements of the life of the subject – which circulate within or as common sense – also form the basis for a predominant trajectory within a history of philosophy that may have its roots in Aristotle, but which emerges, more particularly, within the legacy of metaphysics that follows the path cleared by Descartes. Accordingly, this tradition of metaphysical thinking organizes itself around the configuration of the subject conceived of as a being-doing-thinking-knowing. In other words, this tradition takes the Greek trickster-oracle’s injunction – *Know Thyself* – literally. However, it passes over the “*Thyself*” part rather quickly (“Of course I know myself!”), and transposes the injunction into a simple “*Know!*” Consequently, metaphysics, from Descartes onward, orients itself toward “problems” of epistemology. Descartes (1998: 18-19) portrays the birth of philosophy in these terms with clarity and concision:

I noticed that, while I wanted thus to think that everything was false, it necessarily had to be the case that I, who was thinking this, was something. And noticing that this truth – *I think, therefore I am* – was so firm and so assured that all the most extravagant suppositions of the skeptics were incapable of shaking it, I judged that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking...From the very fact that I thought of doubting the truth of other things, it followed very evidently and very certainly that I existed...From this I knew that I was a substance.

The way that common sense and metaphysics intersect like this is quite revealing, at a basic level, precisely in what it conceals. That is: the very easy manner – i.e., the *ofcourseness* – by which it passes over the question of the subject conceals, without any ado, the extent to which the subject is a requirement. Is it any wonder that Descartes so quickly excludes any consideration of the possibility of the cessation of thought? As he says (1998: 19): “Had I simply stopped thinking...I would have had no reason to believe that I had existed.” The “I” needs its thinking/knowing precisely as a reason to believe that it exists.²³ In other words, within both metaphysics and common sense (which cannot now be so easily separated), the subject is not just a certainty but an apodictic certainty: it is a necessary assumption or postulate for the possibility of all else. In this sense, the world of experience and possibility organized around the subject, indeed, stands or falls with the subject.

This, then, is another way to describe the trouble with the subject. It comprises a kind of quilting point for the mutual support of both common sense and serious metaphysics. To put this in other words: Metaphysics comes to the rescue of common experience, and common sense becomes an alibi for metaphysical reason. Needless to say, this makes it quite difficult to pursue an inquiry into the subject.

And, thus, it is not surprising that, an inquiry into the subject that begins from within

²³ I mention only in passing that the supposed “empiricist tradition” represented by Locke remains quite clearly tethered to this metaphysical common sense. Locke’s displacement of the Cartesian formulation – i.e., the subject as thinking-being – with his prioritization of sensation – i.e., the subject as sensing-being – ultimately reinstates the basic metaphysical requirement of the “I” living in a world divided. In the next chapter, I discuss how this dividing entails a distinguishing of two worlds, sensible and supersensible.

the world of common sense or metaphysics ends up turning well away from its intended aim. The subject, in a sense, deflects the questioning from itself, i.e., from that which is required for any further questioning. This, in one sense, is what I mean when I say that to pursue an inquiry into the subject is more often than not a detour on the way to philosophy.

In this chapter, after developing this theme of the detour through a self-examination, I proceed to an examination of the self through a close reading of Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*. The latter, I propose, provides one means for reconceiving of subject in a manner that shall facilitate the discussion of wakefulness in the next chapter, and, perhaps, provide passage on the way to philosophy.

In My Own Way

Let me elaborate my proposal that to ask the question of the subject is, often enough, precisely *not* to put the subject into question. One way to do this is to present a fable from my own experience – from a time when I conceived of questioning not as self-examination but as a kind boxing match within a ring of knowing.

When I began my career as an anthropologist and a historian, I felt that I was always pursuing the question of the subject. In fact, I took a peculiarly authoritarian stance on the matter. I declared that the question of the subject was the only question there was. For instance, in my first book on torture and the lives of Sikhs, I said: “This designates what I take to be the appropriate unit of analysis for historical

anthropology – in other words, the subject and subject formation rather than the individual” (Axel 2001: 33). I was quite enamored of Marx (1976: 92) at the time – of course I still am, who isn’t? – and so I described “the individual as a phantasm of bourgeois society imbued with *putative* agency, intentionality, consciousness, and freedom” (33-34).²⁴

One of my first concerns was to avoid the follies of essentialism and constructivism (the debate was alive and well when I was at the University of Chicago). The essentialists, or so it was said, believed that the individual was indeed an agent with intentionality, consciousness, and freedom. The constructivists, in contrast, maintained that all these things were socially constructed. I declared that all constructivists were really crypto-essentialists. In my view, their analyses ultimately salvaged the individual as the naturalized doer that, as one among many, gathered in a group, created the social, and did the constructing (I still feel this way, but it isn’t as big a deal). Conversely, and funnily enough, I do not think there really were any avowed essentialists around. Essentialism was just a term I used to dismiss scholars who did not adopt *the appropriate* unit of analysis within their studies (i.e., the subject and subject formation).

Thus I turned toward the question of the subject. In my rendering, however, the question of the subject really was always a question of subjectification. As I said:

²⁴ I was always keeping in focus this critical element of the *putative*. Perhaps I thought that, by doing this, I could stay on track with organizing an inquiry around a questioning of the subject, rather than the individual. Indeed, in retrospect, I am surprised that I did not put “putative” in the book’s index. Everything seemed to be putative! Even *diaspora* – which I insisted on putting in quotes in the book’s title: *The Nation’s Tortured Body: Violence, Representation, and the Formation of a Sikh “Diaspora.”*

“What is important to clarify immediately is that I am not concerned with a singular Sikh subject. Indeed, there has been a proliferation of Sikh subjects since the nineteenth century. In this book, I am concerned with four kinds of Sikh subjects or, more precisely, four sites of Sikh subjectification” (34-35). I related the four kinds of Sikh subjects to four types of procedures of knowledge production. These two aspects, subjectification and knowledge production, were, in my view, so intertwined that I called them “indissoluble.” I thus paired each site of subjectification with a site of knowledge production: the colonial, the nation-state, the diasporic, and “the Sikh subject constituted by Sikh studies.”

There is one discussion in this book, *The Nation’s Tortured Body*, which strikes me as most revealing. This concerned subjectification and knowledge production within the Indian nation-state. In one chapter, I introduced the phrase “the questioning subject” to talk about the manner in which the “juridico-political procedures” of knowledge production constituted Sikhs as a threat to the (“putative”) sovereignty and integrity of the Indian people. The phrase “the questioning subject” is a play on a sentence that I pulled out of the Official Secret Act of India. This Act – in the usual cumbersome jargon of constitutional law – basically says this: anyone who circulates inaccurate knowledge in any form, “by words either spoken or written, or by signs, or visible representation or otherwise, that is likely to affect the sovereignty and integrity of India, or that tantamounts to *questioning* the territorial integrity of India, shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both.” The Indian Government, according

to this Act, reserved for itself the authority to produce and circulate all knowledge of India (and also to evaluate representations of India as “accurate” or “inaccurate”). Sikhs were in trouble because they demanded a territorial reorganization of India and circulated inaccurate maps of India’s frontiers that portrayed a separate Sikh state between India and Pakistan.

I claimed that, from within this assemblage of subjectification and knowledge production, the Sikh subject emerged as the questioning subject. There was, however, a hook. To the extent that the Indian Government prohibited the production and circulation of any map of the frontiers of India, no citizen – including government employees, Sikhs, and everyone else – was permitted to ever have any accurate knowledge of the territorial integrity of India. Every citizen, despite embodying the sovereignty of democratic India, was prohibited from knowing itself. I made quite a big deal of this: “Caught between an inability to know and an inability to represent their own sovereignty or integrity, the people of India, it would seem, now appear to take on the qualities that define the alterity of the questioning subject. Unable to know what the sovereign subject must know, are the people of India not bound to question the integrity of India” (118-119)?

In short, what I did in this chapter was collapse all subjects – Sikh and otherwise – into one subject. In fact, time and again I did the same thing within each chapter. In the end, I portrayed *every* subject as the questioning subject.

As *The Nation’s Tortured Body* was about to arrive in bookstores, I was preparing my second book for publication – *From the Margins: Historical*

Anthropology and Its Futures. In this book, and several articles, I turned my attention almost exclusively to the question of the subject of knowledge. In this, I was concerned with how subjects of knowledge, like anthropologists or historians, produced objects of knowledge – objects which, themselves, through this procedure, came into being as subjects. I attacked scholars who – driven by what I considered to be an underexamined disciplinary desire of epistemology – were compelled into an untenable reliance upon commonsense notions of peoplehood. I was quite disturbed by the way they presumed that their objects of study were really real things that existed prior to and outside of discourse.

By this time, however, I had begun to learn that I needed to be nicer when I attacked people, and so I provided “generous readings” of my seeming enemies, and I used a kind of *mea culpa* rhetoric of compassion and complicity. For instance, in one article I said: “I seem to be compelled to speak of diaspora *as such*, as if *it* were a *thing* – and, conversely, just in the speaking, I cannot resist putting diaspora in the position of being, for example, a subject or an object. ‘Diaspora’, then, can barely help but appear given as already present. It is almost as if my own language were to simultaneously supply me with, while prohibiting me from examining, my own desire – a desire that, moreover, I am not always aware is mine (e.g., a desire to *find* subjects, to *isolate* or *position* objects).”

What I was doing, *in my own way*, was drawing attention to the way disciplines like anthropology and history defined themselves in terms of the ofcourseness of their epistemological project. “Of course our job is to know things

and disseminate knowledge! How could it be otherwise!” Thus, I redescribed the questioning subject in a tricky way. Not only were, for instance, anthropologists or historians, not able to know what they were supposed to know (i.e., they could not know a pre-given object that existed prior to and outside of discourse); in my view, they did not even know that they were supposed to know what they were supposed to know (i.e., they failed to know their own epistemological desire)! These, of course, were things that I knew.

In another sense, however, I was getting *in my own way*. Or rather, a certain concealed belief about the “I” was. More precisely, despite my attempts to oppose it, I was nevertheless operating under the influence of the ofcourseness that was defining projects in the humanities and social sciences – i.e., my position was being constituted by that which I intended to attack. I may have redefined the subject as the questioning subject; and I may have redefined knowledge as a procedure by which a subject produced its object as an object of knowledge. However, *that* anthropologists, for instance, *are* subjects that relate to objects which, although also subjects, are subjects of difference, and thus others – this is something I did not put into question in my texts. Likewise, in these texts, I did not question the disciplinary commonsense that conceived the relation of subjects to objects or others in terms of epistemology (i.e., by whether or how a subject could claim to know its object).

To put this in other words, whereas I claimed to be asking the question of the subject, all that I ever put into question was knowledge. In all my striving to (as I would often say) “rethink” the subject, the subject, itself, was precisely *not* put in

question. Indeed, while seeming to ask the question of the subject, did I not sneak the “phantasm of the individual” through the back door? This individual may have been re clothed in the garb of a subject that did not know what it was supposed to know, but it still was a being that, as a questioner, was a doer and an actor. Thus, for instance, at the end of my first book, I was able to say: “The social practices of particular subjects, as localized processes, are what make possible the generation of abstract forms – abstract forms that have become very ‘real’” (230). This does not seem very far from the social constructivist position that I attacked so vehemently. Needless to say, in hindsight I find it hilarious, and quite appropriate, that I placed not just *the subject* but *the questioning subject* at the very basis of my inquiry as the most secure and, quite literally, the most unquestioned foundation.

In doing this, I unwittingly stood myself squarely within the enduring legacy of Cartesian metaphysics, according to which philosophy begins and ends with the question of knowledge while presuming, necessarily, the existence of the subject that desires knowledge.

Strangers to Ourselves

At this point I want to bring Nietzsche into the conversation. His texts speak directly to the intensity of my attachment to the epistemological project and my inability to draw the subject into question. Nietzsche, I believe, provides one way of turning these detours into a possible questioning of the subject. Let me explain.

The beginning of Nietzsche's inquiry is critical. It starts with an "experience" of learning how to ask questions that is quite distinct from the one that configures the worlds of common sense and metaphysics. As he says in *On the Genealogy of Morals*: "Whoever sticks with it and *learns* how to ask questions here will experience what I experienced – a tremendous new prospect opens up for him, a new possibility comes over him like a vertigo, every kind of mistrust, suspicion, fear leaps up, his belief in morality, in all morality falters" (1989: 20). In my rendering, this "experience" to which Nietzsche refers, this philosophical "vertigo," and its concomitant loosening of the binds of belief in morality, corresponds to Socrates' manner of living in "perplexity," his residing in the place of nonknowing.

One must remain quite alert when reading this text (as with all of Nietzsche's texts). Nietzsche's language is playful, poet, and relentlessly parodic. It is always important to keep in mind that Nietzsche is not *serious*. His seeming caustic tenor is really only seeming – a way of engaging with the seriousness of metaphysics that resists any temptation of playing according to the rules of metaphysics. Seriousness is, for him, a "prejudice" of the "serious beast" which he counters with the "laughter and gaiety" of his own "gay science" (1989: 196).

Nietzsche's laughter pervades his exposition of the vertigo of his gay science. Not least significant is the way he makes fun of the manner in which metaphysics champions the principles of non-contradiction and identity. In contrast, the experience of the vertigo, and the impossible path of philosophy that arises in its wake, signifies, for Nietzsche, the meeting of that which cannot be met. The vertigo is an offence to

reason, a domain of impossibility. Having stood within the vertigo – within offence, within paradox – Nietzsche is henceforward compelled to draw into question all that has remained unquestioned, including not only morality, but the subject-epistemology combine. In his words: “The value of these values themselves must *first* be called in question” (1989: 20). In other words, it is not just the notions of “good and bad” or “good and evil” that must be questioned; for Nietzsche, that which is valued “as given, as factual, as beyond all question” – i.e., “man in general” (1989: 20) – needs to be brought under the sign of a question mark. And from this questioning, moreover, the questioner is not excluded: “This question mark [is] so black, so huge that it casts a shadow over the man who puts it down” (*Twilight of the Idols*).

In this sense, *On the Genealogy of Morals* is exemplary. With the very first sentence, Nietzsche (1989: 15) immediately turns away from the Cartesian metaphysical project: “We are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge – and with good reason. We have never sought ourselves – how could it happen that we should ever *find* ourselves?” With this turning away from metaphysics, there is no turning back. Nietzsche has no intention of ushering us onto the proper path of knowledge. This is because “we men of knowledge,” who are always seeking something, who are so invested in ourselves as seekers and knowers, can never seek ourselves. Nietzsche says: man is “absent-minded” and “divinely preoccupied and immersed in himself.” That is, we are so distracted by, and invested in, the image of ourselves *as* subjects, that we are incapable of understanding that our seeking of ourselves is like looking for our own eyes. In other words, not only can we not seek

ourselves; moreover, it is in our very nature to *not* know ourselves: “We are necessarily strangers to ourselves, we do not comprehend ourselves, we *have* to misunderstand ourselves, for us the law ‘Each is furthest from himself’ applies to all eternity – we are not ‘men of knowledge’ with respect to ourselves” (1989: 15).

The philosophical path that Nietzsche pursues, in other words, does not set out from knowledge, and it does not take knowledge as its goal. Beginning with vertigo, it proceeds to a questioning of that which is normally unquestionable through riddles of non-knowing: *We are men of knowledge and yet remain unknown to ourselves...I am furthest from myself.*

Dispensing with the Cartesian point of departure, Nietzsche, thus, is able to question the subject in a way that is unprecedented. His first insight is to reveal what the ofcoursesness of what he calls “popular morality” (i.e., metaphysics) commonly conceals: “Man” is configured within a complex double-bind situation. While we are ever driven to ask “Who are we really” (1989: 15), we are simultaneously prohibited, by our own nature, from knowing ourselves. To convey this Catch-22, Nietzsche evokes Mandeville’s 1714 publication *The Fable of the Bees* – which, itself, is a commentary on morality elaborated through ingenious paradoxes. Nietzsche, parodying Mandeville, likens “Man” to bees, and knowledge to beehives: “We are constantly making for [the beehives of our knowledge], being by nature winged creatures and honey-gatherers of the spirit; there is one thing alone that we really care about from the heart – ‘bringing something home’” (1989: 15). The double-bind of

the subject, in other words, is that, within its very heart, the subject is compelled by an impossible desire.

From this vantage, what I introduced earlier as an epistemological “problem” (i.e., a problem of national or disciplinary knowledge that ought to be fixed), now reappears as an unresolvable tension within the nature of the subject. More precisely, according to common sense and metaphysics, the subject *is* a subject-supposed-to-know, and it is supposed to know, minimally that it *is*. And yet, as Nietzsche says, it is in the subject’s very nature not to know. Driven by a desire – “to bring something home” – which is impossible to fulfill, is the subject, then, in a sense, always to remain homeless? Is there not something quite unhomey (*Unheimlich*) in our desire for the homely (*Heimlich*)? Be that as it may: The subject, within Nietzsche’s portrayal, appears to be an uncanny configuration – and the subject’s very life makes the subject strange to itself.

Our Need to Believe

Nietzsche thus redescribes the experience of the individual human subject, as living within the vicissitudes of a seeking for that which is ever concealed, between desire and prohibition, home and homelessness. But, precisely, what, according to Nietzsche *is* the subject? I have used the term *illusion* to convey the complex play of semblance by which we commonly understand the subject to be a separate singular ego enclosed in a bag of skin that confronts a world of others and objects that it is not. Nietzsche uses many terms to refer to the subject: for instance, “that little

changeling,” the “failed soul,” “that ill-constituted thing,” “fiction,” and “sublime self-deception” (1989: 44, 45, 46) – all of which, we ought ever to keep in mind, are utterances saturated with a tone of “cheerful prankishness” (Nietzsche’s name for his mode of questioning the subject which he introduces in *Twilight of the Idols*).

For Nietzsche, the subject also comprises a vast, seemingly indispensable, system of belief. In his description, we are attached to this kind of belief in the same way that we are necessarily strangers to ourselves – for, indeed, this form of belief is fundamentally a misunderstanding. As he says:

Man *needs* to believe in a neutral independent “subject,” prompted by an instinct for self-preservation and self-affirmation in which every lie is sanctified. The subject (or, to use a more popular expression, the *soul*) has perhaps been believed in hitherto more firmly than anything else on earth because it makes possible to the majority of mortals...the sublime self-deception that interprets weakness as freedom, and their being thus-and-thus as a *merit*.

This passage indicates how globally pervasive is the illusion of the subject. However, it needs some unpacking – not just to grasp its significance for a questioning of the subject, but to appreciate its humor. There are two points that I wish to highlight. The first is that Nietzsche’s phrases – at least the way I read them – are to be understood in terms of a dense forest of citations. For instance, when he says “instinct for self-preservation and self-affirmation” and “sublime self-deception” – these refer directly to Edmund Burke’s 1757 publication *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*. Burke’s text is an important predecessor to Paul Ree’s and the other “English psychologists” whom Nietzsche enjoys making fun of. The significance of his text, however, is that, while oriented toward the development of a moral theory of the subject as a neutral, independent, acting being of reason, it

succeeds most powerfully in portraying moments when that being loses those qualities – and, indeed, when what happens is a Cartesian nightmare of the cessation of thought. These moments are what Burke calls “the sublime” – and they signify, for Burke, a confrontation of the subject the “emissary of the king of terrors (1998: 86), that is, with its own death.

What is most significant is that Burke introduces the concepts of “self-preservation” and “self-affirmation” in the passage of his text just before introducing the concept of the sublime. They are designed to explain the function of sublime. During sublime moments, according to Burke, the distinction between subjects and objects is dissolved and “the mind [is robbed] of all its powers of acting and reasoning” (1998: 101). What makes the sublime “sublime,” however, is precisely that the subject – although experiencing a momentary “cessation of its faculties” – does not die. Recovering from such a moment of horror and astonishment, the subject, in Burke’s rendering, falls into a soothing state of “tranquility shadowed with horror” (1998: 82). This state is the capstone of the feeling of the sublime, which Burke, consequently, names a “negative pleasure.” This negative pleasure, in Burke’s understanding, is a delight because, having escaped death, one is “astonished” and may, with “awe,” “rejoice with trembling” (1998: 111). The sublime, in this way, thus bolsters an instinct that drives the subject to affirm and preserve its life. A certain temporality of afterwardsness is critical in Burke’s exposition – for it is directly *after* the moment of the sublime that the negative

pleasure and, along with it, the instincts of self-preservation and self-affirmation kick into gear and serve to bolster the life of the subject.

From this vantage, Nietzsche's use of the phrase "sublime self-deception" may be understood as a critical play on Burke (and other English philosophers). In other words, for Nietzsche what is astonishing and horrifying is the *self*-deception by which the fear-driven subject grasps onto itself. *Self*-deception takes on the double meaning of an unquestioned belief and a procedure by which the self (soul, subject) arises as itself. Conversely, the subject is compelled to maintain this self-deception to distract itself from facing the terror of its death and the lies according to which it lives.

It is important to understand that, as much as he is referring to Burke, so too is Nietzsche gesturing toward Kant (a name he mentions explicitly when he calls the subject a "changeling" [1989: 45]). "Sublime" is also a key term in this gesture – however, I shall devote the next chapter to a discussion of this concept. For the present purpose, the significant term is "deception." And the significant reference is to a passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason*: "Nothing is more natural and tempting than the illusion of regarding the unity in the synthesis of thoughts as a perceived unity in the subject of these thoughts. One might call this illusion the subreption of the hypostatized self-consciousness" (1996: 422). Kant's language, even if somewhat obscure, is as provocative as Nietzsche's (for indeed he too is making fun of the way the subject is misunderstood within the history of metaphysics). Subreption, for instance, signifies a "trick" informed by "prejudice," according to which "sensibility

meddles in the task of the understanding and...points the understanding in a false direction" (1987: 114, 410). Conversely, in Kant's lexicon, hypostatization signifies "mere deception." For Kant, who loves the term "mere," this does not mean treating the conceptual as if it were real. More precisely, in Kantian language, it refers to the manner in which reason, oversteps its bounds, and applies the categories of possible experience to that which cannot in any way be an object of possible experience. In simpler language, hypostatization is a thingification perpetrated by reason – that is, it is reason's way of making something out of nothing. To put this another way: subreption and hypostatization are tools of reason that function to "seduce the understanding by an unavoidable illusion...which, though deceitful, cannot be restrained" (1950: 81). In other words, according to Kant's formulation – which he admits to be "strange though incontestable" – the "inevitable" process by which the subject arises as "a mere appearance to itself" (1999: 5) is configured by temptation. The ofcourseness of the illusion – "nothing is more natural" – is itself tempting. It comprises a kind of "hoodwink" (another Kantian term) by which the subject comes to believe in itself as self.

Thus Nietzsche's reference to Kant may be less disparaging than his play on Burke. Nevertheless, he does not let Kant off the hook, so to speak. For, indeed, Kant's architectonic, the project of his entire life – as I will discuss in the next chapter – is designed to rescue the subject from all the deceptions of reason.

The Culprit

One of the most potent terms that Nietzsche develops to reconceive the subject is *fiction*. To get the full significance of this concept, it is important to look closely at Nietzsche's text, which moves quickly to dismiss the common (i.e., metaphysical) belief that the subject is a substratum, or an independent active entity, that exists and that relates to its world as an agent, cause, or doer of deeds. Rather, in a quite comic (at least to me) gesture, Nietzsche inverts the typical portrayal of the subject as a being that exists prior to and outside of an action which it enacts. Let us consider Nietzsche's text:

A quantum of force is equivalent to a quantum of drive, will, effect – more, it is nothing other than precisely this driving, willing, effecting, and only owing to a seduction of language (and of the fundamental errors of reason that are petrified in it) which conceives and misconceives all effects as conditioned by something that causes effects, by a “subject,” can it appear otherwise. For just as the popular mind separates the lightning from its flash and takes the latter for an action, for the operation of a subject called lightning, so popular morality also separates strength from expressions of strength, as if there were a neutral substratum behind the strong man, which was *free* to express strength or not to do so. But there is no such substratum; there is no “being” behind doing, effecting, becoming; “the doer” is merely a fiction added [*hinzugedichtet*] to the deed (1989: 45). (1989: 45)

In this passage, the concept *fiction* is multivalent. In my reading, fiction maintains the sense, which I described in the preceding chapter, of *play*. It does this, particularly through its signification, from the Latin *fictio*, of an “imaginary” something that is designed, or fashioned, to entertain. And yet a fiction may also be something that is patently false and designed to deceive. Within the context of

juridical procedures, this latter signification of fiction slips closely toward its opposite: that is, a fiction is something that is assumed in law to be true regardless of whether it really is. In this sense, then, the term *fiction* is close to my term *illusion*: it allows us to understand the subject as an imaginary play of the real, as a deception, that we, nevertheless, regard as true.

These trackings of the English term “fiction” are illuminating – and of course it is important to think closely about them, not least because the English translation of Nietzsche’s text has taken on a life of its own. However, it may be helpful to consider the original German text to understand more precisely the manner in which Nietzsche questions the subject – and this may also help to distinguish how Nietzsche is playing with Kant’s notions of subreption, hypostasis, and seduction. Nietzsche’s text does not say *fiktion* or *dichtung*. Rather, Nietzsche chooses the verb *hinzugedichtet*. There are several ways to translate this. For instance “poetic invention” (which certainly maintains the sense of play, fashioning, and entertainment that the Latinate term conveys). However, “poetic invention” does not communicate the active and processual quality of *hinzugedichtet*. *Gedichtet* signifies “to poetize” or “to compose,” and *hinzu* conveys a sense of afterwardsness, of something “added-*there*” or “sealed-to” *after*. Thus to the English noun, “fiction,” *hinzugedichtet* adds the signification of an action by which a something comes to be identifiable or

attached after-the-fact – a retroactively composed or poetized fiction that has the appearance of having come or arrived *there* beforehand.²⁵

Needless to say, Nietzsche’s understanding of this metaleptic relation between “the doer” and the deed is complex, if not somewhat mysterious – not least because no explanation can be sought by looking for any “being” that we may hold responsible for creating a subject. The subject, however, is not just a retroactively projected fiction, and it is not only a form of appearance. Nietzsche goes further. The subject is, more precisely, a *seduction*, a conceived misconception, around which inseparable processes appear to be other than what they are. It is not reason, however, that is the great seducer – *contra* Kant. Rather, the subject is a seduction of its own language, which bears forth petrifications of a fundamentally flawed reason. The subject, indeed, lives and thrives within and as a play of self-seduction and self-deception whereby it inhabits a fictive domain of separable and isolable subjects, objects, and others that cannot be said to have been created in the normal sense of the word.

In Nietzsche view, that is, it is precisely through a seduction of language and reason that the subject shows up as a pre-existent “doer.” Just as significantly, however, the seductions of language and the sedimentations of reason are configured morally. Thus “the doer” – i.e., the subject – is not just a poetic figure, but an ethical

²⁵ The issue of temporality is critical in Nietzsche’s formulation, and not only because of the way it plays off of Burke’s conception of afterwardsness which regulates the instincts of self-preservation and self-affirmation. In Nietzsche’s philosophy is an unprecedented exploration of temporality that Heidegger takes up, and which I shall discuss at length in the following chapters.

figure. Nietzsche, to accentuate this ethical configuration, uses the word *der Täter* (literally “culprit”) for the doer: “*the doer*” [*der Täter*] is merely a fiction added [*hinzugedichtet*] to the deed. This changes – or makes more precise – the significance of “the doer” and the attribution of causality that arises afterward, that comes to be “sealed to” a doing *as that which came before*. For Nietzsche, the fictive subject that is conceived and misconceived as a doer a deeds, and that can hence always be held responsible for a deed, is not just a “doer” but a “wrong-doer.” Conversely, causality is always a moral causality. In short, for Nietzsche, the fiction of the subject as a neutral, autonomous actor conceals within itself an ethics – the subject is not neutral at all. The subject – as a requirement within metaphysics – is the culpable subject.

Living In Thrall

Let me take a step back to reflect on the way that Nietzsche’s text develops the concept of the subject in a novel way. In his inimitable style, Nietzsche demonstrates quite clearly the collusion of metaphysics and common sense. By calling the latter “popular morality,” and by referring to the subject not as a neutral substratum but as *der Täter*, Nietzsche makes a basic point that the subject is always already an ethical configuration. The common belief in the reality of the subject is thus highly charged, and arises within a complex constellation of habit, fear, prohibition, seduction, desire, and compulsion. To put this another way, the life of the subject is a life lived in thrall. It lives in thrall to itself – and this helps explain what Nietzsche means when

he says that the subject lives “as one divinely preoccupied and immersed in himself” (1989: 15).

The very word *subject* embodies this signification of thralldom and bondage – and no doubt Nietzsche has this in mind. From the Latin, “sub” + “jacere,” *subjectus* conveys the sense of one that has been placed or thrown under the control or dominion of another. What is this other to which the subject is subjected? For Descartes, who very well may have introduced the concept of the subject into modern metaphysics, this other was of course a certain type of Christian God. The unquestionable status of the subject within the legacy of Cartesian metaphysics relates closely to the manner in which this subject entails, necessarily, a subjection to the unquestioned Lord of the Christian faith. It is for this reason that the Cartesian concept of the subject, which metaphysical tradition wittingly or unwittingly carries forth, may be called ontotheological.

However, for Nietzsche, the subject is that which is thrown or placed under the dominion of a different kind of “force” (to use Nietzsche’s term) – the world of belief, of language, of reason. This is not an otherness of other people, but the otherness of the subject itself – from which it is perpetually barred. However, here is the paradox – and if it is not a paradox it is at least what Nietzsche calls an “offence” – the subject does exist and does not exist. It is to the extent that it arises in thralldom that the subject may be seen to stand apart from or outside of world. At the same time, however, according to Nietzsche, while there may be “driving, willing,

effecting;” there is not one that drives, wills, or effects. In this sense, according to Nietzsche, the subject, properly speaking, *is not*.

Be that as it may: The point is that the illusion of being a subject entails a dividing up or indeed a severing. This dividing is not merely a separating of doers and deeds, and subjects from others or objects, but a severing of oneself from oneself – a self-severing by which the subject arises as subject, and according to which a subject is barred from knowing itself. This self-severing may very well be what Martin Luther King, Jr. had in mind when he referred to “man’s tragic estrangement.” The subject that is steeped in this severing has extreme difficulty conceiving, or experiencing, what Martin Luther King Jr. called “the interrelated structure of reality” and the “inescapable network of mutuality.” And, indeed, it may very well be the case, as King said, that violence, hatred, and war are born out of – “an existential expression of” – this fundamental self-severing.

This self-severing, concurrently, entails a temporalizing procedure which is fundamental for the common experience of the subject. Owing to the seductions of language and the petrifications of reason, the subject that exists on its own also comes on the scene as that which exists within time. The subject’s severing projects the subject into a prior time – as that which came before – from which it is separate and has no access. While sustaining it within an ever-elusive present of its own doing, it, likewise, separates it from a future. The subject’s culpability pertains to the possibility that it may always be found accountable for its deed. The timing of the subject and its culpability, in other words, go hand in hand. This is so because the

subject, as a being in time, binds itself to its own actions by conceiving itself as the deed's origin and cause. The subject, needless to say is barred from the past in the same way that it is barred from its own coming-into-being (i.e., the past cannot be changed, and yet the "I" is tethered to it). The subject is likewise barred from its future, and thus is persistently torn between a future and a past as it, sometimes anxiously, or with indifference, recalls, or not, what action it did commit and anticipates a future conceived of as a world of consequences. The subject, thus, is barely capable of being present – so filled as it is with prior priorities and futural anticipations. This aspect of temporality within the illusion of the subject leaves the subject in a peculiar situation. The subject lives within a world where seems to have the power to act as a doer and a cause – and yet, barred from its past and its future, and barely capable of being present, the culpable subject that is always culpable, lives with a sense of powerlessness.

From this vantage, Nietzsche once again gestures to Descartes and makes what – to my mind – is one of the best (and perhaps most horrific) jokes in the history of philosophy: “We *suffer* from man, beyond doubt” (original italics, 1989: 43). The joke, of course is this: whereas for Descartes what is beyond doubt is the “I” (which itself is supposed to be self-evident from the fact of Descartes’ own thought of doubt); what is beyond doubt for Nietzsche is a suffering – and this in many senses. In saying this, Nietzsche of course does not refute Descartes – for as he says: “What have I to do with refutations!” – but rather dispenses with any philosophical project that organizes itself around inquiry into knowledge from the basis of doubting

everything but the “I.” In contrast, Nietzsche playfully, though quite sincerely, positions suffering at the basis of his inquiry. Let me explain.

Self-severing is a suffering in the double sense that the word *suffer* conveys so well. That is to say: to suffer is both to undergo pain or discomfort and to endure or allow. In other words, suffering has a peculiar ambivalence pertaining precisely to the manner in which severance is the condition of possibility of the subject. The very life of the subject depends on, and thus allows, the discomfort of a manifold separation. On the one hand, the human, as a subject, as one caught within the double-binds of its own nature, is bound to suffer. On the other hand, the human, by being bound to its belief in its self as subject, suffers an illusion. In this sense, Alan Watts certainly has Nietzsche in mind when he writes: “We suffer from a hallucination, from a false and distorted sensation of our existence as living organisms.”

Conclusion: Living in Forgetfulness

The main point I have wished to explore in this chapter is quite simply that the trouble with the subject is not that it is an illusion. Rather, the trouble is with the manner in which the subject grasps onto that illusion (i.e., to which it is tethered). Considering what Nietzsche has said, it may be better to say that the subject, more precisely, is that grasping. One aspect of the grasping is that, residing within illusion, the grasping comes to be separated so that there appears to be a “being” – the “I” – that stands behind – prior to and outside of – the grasping as the one who does the

grasping. This is akin to taking the wave to be separate from the ocean. Or, more precisely, misrecognizing the subject as an independent sovereign doer is akin to saying that the wave is not the ocean.

Is it any wonder that it is so difficult to draw the subject into a questioning? Approached from within a domain of the illusion, the subject is a force that repels examination. This is one reason that my own attempts, as an anthropologist and historian, to ask the question of the subject ultimately accomplished little more than drawing knowledge into question. Let me return to that story for a moment.

To be fair to myself, however, I must confess that, during that period of anthropological and historical research, I was not being completely honest. I concealed how I really felt about the subject. In my publications and scholarly presentation, I did not reveal my disposition for the otherwise that derived from the fundamental experience of being, in a sense, both me-and-not-me. This I did, despite the fact that I had begun to develop a pedagogical practice organized precisely around my own perplexity around the world of “beings.” My texts, in hindsight, performed an active forgetting of the figures of Socrates, Martin Luther King, Jr., and others, for whom philosophy, on the one hand, begins with wakefulness and wonder, and, on the other, compels an inquiry in which the one who is questioning is put into question by the questioning.

Why did I do this? In many ways, it remains a mystery to me. However, I can say, at the very least, that I was seduced by what I called “the disciplinary game.” That is, I wanted desperately to be intelligible to anthropologists, historians, and

others in the humanities and social sciences. At the same time, I was compelled by a desire to be clever – to perform and mimic a certain kind of linguistic and analytic brilliance that I saw in a small group of scholars who were my heroes. Needless to say, this manner of performing “brilliance” did not make my writings very intelligible to a general audience. Thus, I was caught in a Catch-22 of sorts. I feared a future in which I would not be able to get a job. I feared that, if I said what I really felt about “I myself,” colleagues and potential employers would think I was crazy. Yet I felt driven to write in a way that was incomprehensible to most colleagues and potential employers, who, as a result of my past actions, thought I was wacky anyway.

Thus, by investing, wittingly and unwittingly, in the ofcourseness of the disciplines where I wanted to reside, I enacted a specific kind of refusal of the question of the subject. This was a refusal saturated with fear and driven by a compulsion. While presenting an image of myself as a singular subject who had knowledge, and while conducting a smoke-and-mirrors routine to hide my own inchoate sensibility of being something quite otherwise, was I not compelled to turn away from the question of the subject? At any rate, this kind of melodramatic, self-inflicted refusal may very well have been related to a much more mundane one – which returns me to the kind of refusal I have discussed in the previous chapter. For, indeed, I really did believe I was answering the question of the subject (while, all along, I had not even asked it). Ultimately, residing within a refusal, and torn between preoccupations with past actions and anticipated futures...I suffered. Funnily

enough, based on a public presentation that I tried to convince myself was true, I seemed to become a somewhat successful scholar!

My own suffering, my fear, and my forgetting – all of which formed a basis for my putative success – indicate, in a mundane fashion, an important aspect concerning the illusion of the subject conceived of as self-deception, as fiction, and as severing. To maintain the belief that one is a sovereign, autonomous subject entails a particular, and quite energetic, act of ignorance. I mean this in the sense of an ignorance that is an ig-noring of the fact that the life of the subject is a life lived in thrall. Nietzsche uses the term *forgetfulness* to account for this ignorable process. As he says: “*Forgetfulness*...is no mere *vis inertiae* as the superficial imagine; it is rather an active and in the strictest sense positive faculty” (1989: 57). By calling *forgetfulness* a “faculty,” needless to say, Nietzsche is poking fun at the philosophers he loves to make fun of – in this case the English who follow John Locke’s depiction of the mind as a “blank slate.” Thus he says, forgetfulness allows us “a little quietness, a little *tabula rasa*” (1989: 57). But more poignantly, forgetting, in this sense, is not something that a subject does – forgetfulness, rather, is the condition for the life of the subject, including all affect and indeed temporality: “That is the purpose of active forgetfulness, which is like a doorkeeper, a preserver of psychic order, repose, and etiquette: so that it will be immediately obvious how there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no *present*, without forgetfulness. The man in whom this apparatus of repression is damaged and ceases to function properly may be compared (and more than merely compared) with a dyspeptic – he

cannot ‘have done’ with anything.” In the same way that “Man” *needs* to believe in the neutral subject, and *cannot* help but *not* know itself, it also “needs to be forgetful, in which forgetting represents a force, a form of *robust* health” (58). In short, to be ignorant of living in forgetfulness is the specific feature of forgetfulness.

The concept of forgetfulness speaks to what I would call a disavowal of the severing and suffering that comprises the basis of the life of the subject. It is a bearing-forth of the illusion of the subject *as all there is* that entails a turning away from an examination of the illusion and a turning away from an examination of what one undergoes in sustaining of the illusion. However, forgetfulness, as disavowal, is not so much a negation as a veiling: in the very fact of its veiling, it reveals what it conceals. In this sense, forgetfulness entails a *meconnaissance* – a term that quite well signifies a “misrecognition” that is a “recognition.” To put this succinctly: forgetfulness is a turning-away-from and bearing-forth that is simultaneously an acknowledgement of and a turning-toward a severing that is a suffering.

Nietzsche’s discussion of forgetfulness helps extend the simple formulation I provide in the last chapter of the illusion of the subject as composed, on the one hand, of the sensation of oneself as a separate singular ego enclosed in an isolated body; and, on the other, of the belief that one lives within a world of likewise constituted others, both of which (i.e., the world and others) one is decidedly *not*. Not least, an exploration guided by Nietzsche also shows the manner in which this illusion is misrecognized by both common sense and the history of metaphysics. The ways that common sense and metaphysics interlace in their concealing of the subject as a

fundamental requirement is itself revealing. At the very least, this concealing reveals (1) how the illusion of the subject is a fundamentally ethical configuration, and (2) how it operates according to, and in collusion with, the desire of knowledge and the seductions of language and reason. It is perhaps for this reason that so much of what passes as “questioning” today appears (as it did for me in my by-gone-days) more like a boxing-match over right and wrong in a ring of knowledge.

To restate this in the terms I introduced in the last chapter: every individual being *as* a subject lives in forgetfulness of its true nature – a forgetfulness which it is compelled to sustain. This forgetfulness, as Nietzsche demonstrates so well, is a basic feature of the concept of the subject as a grasping onto illusion. Here, then, is another way of portraying the trouble with the subject – not just that it is an illusion, but that it lives in forgetfulness.

From one vantage, the subject, to put it quite simply, comprises the single most challenging obstacle, or detour, on the way to philosophy. The “I,” so to speak, keeps getting in its own way, and in so doing tends to distance itself from what is closest or in its own nature – while philosophy itself withdraws. However, to this extent, the forgetfulness of the subject identifies precisely the path to take toward a possible questioning. In brief, this trouble with the subject is no trouble at all.

Chapter 3

The Moment

...to view the ocean as the poets do...

Introduction: For the Time Being

I now turn to the question of wakefulness. As I have said, the first step in this turning entails putting the “I” into question. This first step, however, is never complete. Each turning is an iteration of a putting into question of the “I,” a subjecting of the subject to a fundamental questioning that, nevertheless, is never the same. This turning-toward and putting-into a questioning is oriented toward a transformation that clears the ground for a returning to philosophy, i.e., to that which bore forth this questioning as its beginning. Each turning is a returning. That is to say: At stake is transforming the concept of the subject into a vehicle along the way to philosophy – a vehicle that conveys, transports, or facilitates passage to the birth of philosophy in the fundamental experiences of wakefulness and wonder.²⁶ This is another way of saying that, in pursuing its aim (*telos*), philosophy concerns itself with its site of emergence (*arche*).

The transformation that I have pursued in the preceding chapter amounts to this: the subject is a grasping. By grasping I mean: a severing that is a suffering, a

²⁶ As such a vehicle, the subject, in this sense, is an indispensable concept that ultimately must be dispensed with. Of course I needn't say that the concept is like a raft. One uses it, for instance, to cross from one side of a river to the other. Arriving at the other shore, one may leave it and move on.

living in thrall and forgetfulness. Forgetfulness, conversely, is the condition of possibility of...possibility. This is not just the possibility of the segmentable world of the individual subject as individual subject. It is a marking out of the world of possibility as such. Within this domain of segmentability and possibility, not least significant is temporality. Without forgetfulness, as Nietzsche says so simply, there is “no present,” nor is there any “after” or “have done.” For the time being, then, let me say this: the subject, as a grasping, resides within a world of possibility as a time-being among other beings-in-time. Grasping, like humor, is a matter of timing (which may explain Nietzsche’s famous laughter at the illusion of the subject). All manner of causing, doing, creating, suffering, succession, and succeeding arises with and becomes attributable to the culpable subject as a time-being. The subject, conversely, shows up as that which came before, passes through a now, and moves on toward the future. Grasping, in this sense, is a concealing, which is in the very nature of the subject.

And yet this concealing is also a revealing – and this is why the concept of the subject as a grasping may provide passage to wakefulness and wonder. From the vantage of a grasping, wakefulness and wonder comprise a *letting go*. This is not just a letting go of the illusion of the subject as an individual subject; nor is it only a letting go of possibility and timing – although it is that. It is letting go as such. This is another name for impossibility. Try with all its might, the subject will never let go (for there is not one that lets go and there is nothing to let go of). And all talk of

letting go – needless to say – expresses itself only from within grasping (including, not least of all, this dissertation).

However, grasping and letting go arise mutually. I find, here, that the image of the ocean and the wave is helpful. The grasping is the wave; the ocean, the letting go. What is the relation of the ocean and the wave? It is the same way for grasping and letting go: the two are indissoluble. There is no relation. Or rather: the relation is a nonrelation. Indeed, in the same way that the wave is the ocean, is it not the case that the grasping *is* the letting go? *is* the condition of possibility of...impossibility?

This is another way of saying that individual subjects possess wakefulness and wonder in their very nature; that for each time-being, wakefulness is always available, and already present; and that every being-in-time as subject is always already awake. The grasping subject cannot let go because it is already a letting-go. In this way, the individual human subject *that* is simultaneously no individual human subject is also a time-being *that* is, at the same time, a non-time-being.

Is it any surprise, then, that the texts of Kant and Kierkegaard develop their explorations of wonder and wakefulness in terms of the concept of *Augenblick* (German) and *Oieblik* (Danish) – in other words, *The Moment*? Both the German and Danish words translate literally as “instant,” “in the blink of an eye,” or “moment of vision.” The choice of this word – I hold Kant responsible – is extremely provocative, and quite fitting, precisely because, to put it plainly, within the moment of vision, not only is there no time but there is no vision – nor is there one, i.e., a time-being, that sees. Likewise, the moment does not take place in time. The

moment may be said to – as Kant is tempted to say – cancel the conditions of time and representation (i.e., the conditions of experiencability and knowability).

However, in my view, this would be imprecise (a bit of haste on Kant’s part, perhaps): the moment is not a process that takes place or does anything. Rather, the moment is an unconcealing of awakening (Kant’s word is *erweckung*), that is, of what is always the case: a letting go. *The Moment*, then, has all the features of a turning-toward the “I” – indeed of a confrontation of the “I” with itself in itself – that is a returning to philosophy. That is, as a name for the nameless, it is a concept of the subject as a grasping.

This concept of the moment of wakefulness is as old as the hills. The cryptic fragments of the pre-Socratics are saturated with it, as they are with the paradoxes of wakefulness. Heraclitus, for instance: “The waking have one Cosmos, but the sleeping turn aside, each into a world of his own.” And of course, the very word Buddha translates as “the one who woke up.”

The history of western philosophy likes to attribute the resurrection of *the moment* to Kierkegaard. This, perhaps, has much to do with Heidegger, who said: “What we here designate as ‘moment of vision’ [*Augenblick*] is what was really comprehended for the first time in philosophy by Kierkegaard – a comprehending with which the *possibility* of a completely new epoch of philosophy has begun for the

first time since antiquity.”²⁷ Nevertheless, for me it is Kant that ought to be identified as the one who cleared the path and made this inquiry possible.²⁸

In this chapter, then, I spend more time attending to the Kant: to his iteration of the questioning of the subject, and to his elaboration of the moment. I do this for a number of reasons. It is not just that Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and numerous others variously studied, recuperated, redeployed, or played with Kant. This is certainly so, and, thus to “understand” the emergence of inquiry post-Kant it is helpful to “understand” Kant – not least to get the funny parts (cf., my footnote on the above quote by Heidegger). And it is not only because Kant may have been the first, since the figure of Socrates, to draw the subject into a fundamental questioning through his own questioning. This too is also the case – and I believe it is critical to track the basic features of this questioning to which Kant subjects the subject (and from which Kierkegaard and Heidegger depart). Most important, however is this: Kant, for me, is the first philosopher – in the modern western tradition – to identify, precisely, wakefulness within the very nature of the individual subject. In other words, whereas for Socrates the philosopher is the *one that awakens*, Kant’s texts demonstrate that

²⁷ The private joke that Heidegger is making here will become apparent after my discussion of Kant. The point is this: within the “moment of vision” there is a complete failure of what Kant calls “comprehension” – i.e., to encompass a totality in one intuition. Wakefulness, in other words, is characterized by, among other things, the impossibility of comprehension (in this case, because *the infinite* and *the absolute* which are boundless and formless cannot be intuited as a whole or as a totality). Heidegger is playing on this and attributing to Kierkegaard the attainment of the impossible (i.e., redescribing him as a Knight of Faith).

²⁸ I do insist that I have nothing new to say. However, I am confused about why more recent writers have not attended to Kant in this way. Despite Heidegger’s claim about Kierkegaard, Heidegger knows well how his own inquiry emerges from, and is indebted to, Kant (as I shall demonstrate in the next chapter). I suppose if this dissertation is to make any contribution it is this very small one: to draw attention to Kant’s mentioning, in a few paragraphs, the two words “moment” and “awakening.”

every being, as individual subject, is a philosopher. It is perhaps for this reason that Kant said: “Philosophy can never be learned...; rather...one can at most learn only to philosophize” (1996: 759).²⁹

Be that as it may: Kant, ultimately, makes a choice to turn away from wakefulness, to turn back to the subject, and to provide the subject more powerfully than ever before with support for its autonomous and individual graspings. He thus nearly excludes *Augenblick* from the architectonic – he calls it an “appendix.” As I shall discuss, whereas Kant returns to a grasping of the subject, Kierkegaard, and then Heidegger after him, seek the impossible: to make *the moment* central to all inquiry, and to reside within the domain of letting go.

Policing Reason

Let me sketch out some basic features of Kant’s mode of inquiry. However, rather than take the conventional route – which may describe the development of Kant’s inquiry into the limits of knowledge and the practical expansion of reason – I wish to set up some key points that will help clarify the concept of *Augenblick*.

²⁹ Kant, in this beautiful passage, portrays philosophy as an impossible, “hyperbolic” object, indeed as a thing-in-itself, that does not “exist” but toward which we nevertheless continue to clear a path. As he says: “[Philosophy is that] which we endeavour in various ways to approximate, until we have discovered the right path to pursue – a path overgrown by the errors and illusions of sense – and the image we have hitherto tried in vain to shape has become a perfect copy of the great prototype. Until that time, we cannot learn philosophy – it does not exist; if it does, where is it, who possesses it, and how shall we know it?” That philosophy in this sense is that which is unconcealed in the moment of the sublime is, unfortunately, only something that I can mention here in passing.

As is well known, Kant's philosophical project begins with a confession: "I openly confess my recollection of David Hume was the very thing which many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy a quite new direction" (1950: 8). What is less often noted is the manner in which this interruptive moment (which did not happen while he read Hume but only afterward) compelled Kant to return to philosophy. His goal became this: to develop "a very powerful agent to awaken [*erwecken*] philosophy from its dogmatic slumber and to stimulate it to the arduous task of undertaking a critical examination of reason itself" (1950: 86). (In anticipation of my later discussion, I need to point out that *erwecken*, along with *erweckung* – as I noted above – shall be a definitive term for Kant's discussion of *Augenblick*.) That is, having awakened, Kant identifies his own prior turning away from philosophy (i.e., represented in his unwitting adoption of the metaphysical dogmas of his predecessors), and seeks a returning-to the domain of wakefulness. In this, Kant turns directly toward self-examination; that is, he pursues an examination of the self (or as he said "soul" or "subject"). He calls this kind of examination "critique:" that is, in Kantian terms, an examination of reason by reason itself, whose purpose is to establish the powers and limits of its own use.

In the wake of this awakening, Kant proposes a fundamental transformation in the concept of the subject. As he describes it, the subject is split within itself: it is both a sensible form of appearance (phenomenon) and a supersensible thing-in-itself (noumenon). The former aspect, the phenomenal domain, according to Kant,

comprises possible experience – including knowledge, understanding, cognition, pleasure and displeasure, and sensibility; conversely, the latter, the noumenal domain, signifies that which is unknowable, unthinkable, unimaginable, etc., including freedom, the domain of the ethical. Time is a key feature that helps distinguish these two domains. For instance, as forms of appearance, subjects may be said to have “existence in time;” yet, temporality cannot be attributed to subjects as noumenal beings (1999: 86). This relation between the noumenal and phenomenal is spectacularly resistant to explanation (not least because they are, for Kant, mere postulates of practical (i.e., ethical) reason and thus their certainty may only be, as Kant likes to say, apodictic). According to Kant, the two domains are separated by an unbridgeable gap. And yet, it is not merely the case that the noumenal is “immanent” to the phenomenal subject – although it is. More-so, what is immanent to the subject is this unbridgeable gap itself.

In other words, the subject is “at the same time” (1999: 6) phenomenal and noumenal: “An immense gulf [*Abgrund*] is fixed between the domain of the...sensible...and the domain of...the supersensible, so that no *transition* from the sensible to the supersensible...is possible, just as if they were two different worlds, the first of which cannot have any influence on the second; and yet the second *is* to have an influence on the first, i.e., the concept of freedom is to actualize in the world of sense the purpose enjoined by its laws” (1987: 14-15).³⁰ These two domains,

³⁰ I italicize “transition” in anticipation of my discussion of Kierkegaard. As I note below, Kierkegaard, *contra* Kant, but clearly directly gesturing toward him, describes the *moment* as a category of “transition.”

nevertheless, in their separation and incommensurability, comprise a “union” (1999: 5). The *Abgrund*, as that which separates, is also that which joins. In this sense, the groundless (*Abgrund*), according to Kant, is indeed the condition for, i.e., the ground (*Grund*) of, the world of sense.

On the basis of this distinction, Kant makes a radical claim. Despite popular belief and the desires of metaphysics, the subject cannot know itself as subject, but only as object *qua* form of appearance: “I am conscious of the existence of my soul in time; but this soul is known only as *an object* of the inner sense [i.e., time] by appearances that constitute an inner state and of which the being in itself [i.e., noumenal], which forms the basis of these appearances, is unknown” (1950: 84). This nonknowing, however, is not to be considered a fault – it is rather of the nature of things. In Kant’s words: “It will be well to consider that the human understanding is not to be blamed for its inability to know the substance of things – that is, to determine it by itself – but rather for demanding definitely to know the substance, which is a mere Idea, as though it were a given object” (1950: 81-82). In contrast, we must learn to be content with the fact that we can know ourselves only as objects that are forms of appearance to ourselves. More precisely, according to Kant, not only is the subject a “mere form of appearance,” but it is an appearance of the “inner intuition” or the “inner sense” – these latter, in Kant’s lexicon, are synonyms for “time.” Concurrently, time itself is a form of appearance that arises mutually, inseparably, with the appearance of the subject. As he says: “The question whether I myself as an appearance of the inner sense [i.e., time]...exist apart from my faculty of

representation in time...must be answered in the negative” (1950: 85). Kant declared that this manner of distinguishing time was a singularly important accomplishment of the self-examination pursued in the first *Critique* (1999: 86).

The basic obstacle to this self-examination, as far as Kant is concerned, has to do with reason, which he also calls the “faculty of desire.” Quite simply: Reason resists its own role in critique (i.e., in its own self-examination). Reason, by its very nature, is a force of compulsion. It compels itself and the other faculties to transgress the limits of possible experience and apply the basic categories of human understanding in a way that is unconditioned by sensibility. As Kant says: “When reason, which cannot be fully satisfied with any empirical use of the rules of the understanding, as being always conditioned, requires a completion of this chain of conditions [i.e., knowledge of the subject], then the understanding is forced out of its sphere. And then it...represents objects of experience in a series so extended that no experience can *grasp* it; partly even (with a view to complete the series) it seeks entirely beyond it” (1950: 81).

Reason, in other words, as a faculty of desire, is the faculty of grasping. The grasping is an extending, a reaching out beyond itself. It is so powerful that the cognitive faculty (the understanding) is compelled to grasp along with it, to seek to cognize what cannot be cognized. It strives to fulfill an insatiable desire to know and experience what cannot be known or experienced. It strives to know itself as subject (i.e., as noumenal being). And so it is: reason, as faculty of desire, in its grasping, functions to “seduce the understanding by an unavoidable illusion...which, though

deceitful, cannot be restrained” (1950: 81). Seeking to grasp that which is ungraspable: here then is another way to describe the processes of subreption and hypostatization by which the illusion of the individual human subject comes to be taken (“naturally” and “inevitably”) as all there is (which I attend to in the prior chapter). The reasonable subject, as a grasping, resides within illusion.

The only way to remedy this situation, for Kant, is to “restrain” reason so that it may “never venture beyond the boundary of experience” (1996: 27). Here then is another definition of the Kantian critique: a policing of the grasping of reason. The grasping must be limited: “Critique [insists] on *letting*...our own subject...*hold* only as appearance” (italics mine, 1999: 5). In this task, reason is put to work to limit itself.

Needless to say, this is a turning toward philosophy that, as Kant sees it, “actually abolishes” and, indeed, “serves...totally to destroy all materialistic...[i.e., Cartesian] explanations of...the soul” (1980: 82, 85). It is for this reason, perhaps, that many of Kant’s contemporaries and successors (even those who had not read his work) referred to him as *der Alleszermalmer*, the “all-destroyer” (Adorno 2001: 85; Arendt 1992: 34). In this, Kant remained very close to Hume. Hume also concluded that not only “personal identity” (i.e., “the notion of a *soul*, and *self*, and *substance*” [2001: 166]) but also time are “illusion” or “fiction” (2001: 133, 144, 166). Likewise, in his own inimitable style, Hume claimed that, on the basis of his inquiry, “the universal and primary opinion of all men is soon destroyed” (1993: 104).

But destruction is not the goal for Kant. Rather his aim is to present a teaching on how to limit reason's grasping – and to do so in the service of an ethics of the human subject as sovereign, autonomous individual that is comprised of an immanent infinitude. This is a seemingly never-ending task, for, as Kant says: “That the human mind [i.e., reason] will ever give up metaphysical researches is as little to be expected as that we, to avoid inhaling impure air, should prefer to give up breathing altogether” (1980: 116). Thus, against the metaphysical compulsion (i.e., the unceasing grasping of reason), Kant seeks to detail the constitution of the subject as form of appearance. In Kant's view, the power of the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) plays a decisive role here. Let me explain.

The imagination in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is initially presented as a force that mediates between sensibility (including the intuition of given objects *qua* appearances) and understanding (including concepts, rules, and the categories). As a force of synthesis, the imagination gathers elements for a certain cognition and unites them to form a certain content. But concurrently, synthesis, itself, is a product of the imagination: “Synthesis as such...is the mere effect produced by the imagination...*without which we could have no cognition whatsoever*, but of which we are conscious only rarely” (italics mine, 1996: 130). As such, ascending to higher and higher levels of constitution, the imagination is held responsible for the creation of not merely cognition, but the possibility of experience as a unity, or experience as such: “Hence we have a pure imagination, as a basic power of the human soul which underlies *a priori* all cognition. By means of pure imagination we link the manifold

of intuition, on the one hand, with the condition of the necessary unity of apperception, on the other hand. By means of this transcendental function of the imagination the two extremes, viz., sensibility and understanding, must necessarily cohere; for otherwise sensibility would indeed yield appearances, but would yield no objects of an empirical cognition, *and hence no experience*” (italics mine, 1996: 171). Finally, and perhaps ultimately, what the imagination produces, according to the Kantian text, are the “schemata” (1996: 214), which pertain to not only the experience of time, but the conditions of possibility of temporality – which, for Kant, is an “invisible force” that “itself cannot be perceived” (1996: 277). In Kantian language, the schemata determine time: “The schemata are nothing but a priori *time determinations* according to rules; and these rules, according to the order of the categories, deal with the *time series, the time content, the time order, and finally the time sum total* in regard to all possible objects” (italics mine, 1996: 217). The imagination, thus, is responsible for a crucial element constitutive of possible experience: that is, not just the cognition of objects (as appearances), and not just cognition as such, but the temporalized appearance, to the subject, of cognitions and objects in relations “of succession, of simultaneity, and of what is simultaneous with succession” (1996: 100).

The Sublime

I now may turn to Kant’s discussion of *Augenblick* as a moment of wonder and wakefulness. For Kant, in my reading, the critical moment is the *Augenblick* of the

sublime. The sublime is what Kant calls an “attunement” of the mind, or a “disposition” of the soul (*Stimmung*).³¹ Despite the mundane quality of these terms, however, the sublime is not an everyday feeling, although it may be available to anyone at any time. This is because the *Augenblick* is incommensurable with mundane experience. For Kant, only “cultured,” or, indeed, “attuned,” rational subjects (i.e., those who have learned the practice of Kantian critique) may gain proper access to it. According to Kant, without cultivation and education in critique, a subject is not prepared to recognize the profundity of the sublime: “It is a fact that what is called sublime by us, having been prepared through culture, comes across as merely repellent to a person who is uncultured and lacking in the development of moral ideas” (1987: 124).³²

³¹ To anticipate my discussion of the next chapter: Kant’s formulation seems to be critically important for Heidegger, who also arrives at an inquiry into *Augenblick* through an elaboration of “attunement” (e.g., boredom, in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, and, for instance, fear, in *Being and Time*); and he likewise describes the moment as a self-encounter (as I discuss later in this section). In contrast to Kant, however, Heidegger does not conceive of an attunement as a means of encountering the essence of “mind” or the “mental.” On the one hand, his discussion of attunement repositions “mind” and the “mental” as questionable designations (e.g., pertaining to “the psychical” or a “subject’s” interiority) which belong to the common (i.e., metaphysical) description of beings. As he claims, attunement “is far removed from anything like finding a psychical condition...it comes neither from ‘without’ nor from ‘within’...it is not an inner condition which then in some mysterious way reaches out and leaves its mark on things and person...” (*B&T*: 128-129). On the other hand, displacing both the privilege accorded to “mind” and the “mental” and the conventional priority given to *beings* in metaphysical inquiry, he develops the concept of attunement as a mode of access to the ontological domain of *Dasein* – in the face of which, he claims, various categories of “the psychical” (e.g., the mind/mental) function as masks/veils that facilitate an “evasive turning away” or forgetting of Being (*B&T*: 128).

³² Commonly, this attunement appears to be aroused by an object of nature (e.g., a mountain, the ocean). However, according to Kant, it is only due a certain “subreption” that the source of the feeling of the sublime is projected onto, and thus mistakenly attributed to, sensible objects of nature. Subreption is the process by which “respect for the object [of nature] is substituted for respect for the idea of humanity within ourselves, as subjects” (*3rd Crit*: 114).

According to the exposition in the *Critique of Judgment*, the sublime is characterized by a complex simultaneity of emotions: a mixture of awe/fear, respect/terror, disgust/arousal, and repulsion/attraction (1987: 97-140). This collision of affect arises with a collision of faculties, particularly the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) and reason. In this extraordinary moment, reason's grasping toward the noumenal is allowed free reign to strive to think its own immanent infinity; conversely, the imagination fails to comprehend reason's idea of immanent infinity. In contrast to experiences of beauty, which, according to Kant, are typified by a harmonization of the imagination and the understanding, it is precisely because of the conflict between imagination and reason that the sublime is so powerfully affective. Kant uses Burke's term "negative pleasure" to portray this domain of conflicting affect and colliding faculties (1987: 98). However, in contrast to Burke, what is at stake is not a terror at coming face to face with one's death. Rather, it is a self-confrontation: an encounter of the subject with its own immanent infinity, i.e., the noumenal aspect of the subject or, as Kant says, "the humanity within ourselves, as subjects" (1987: 114). Let me explain.

The training that is required to become attuned to the possibility of the otherwise impossible is very specific. In brief, the subject needs to learn how to allow the imagination and reason to collide. In order for this to happen, of course, the subject must know what it is that each of these faculties commonly do (i.e., by reading Kant's texts). Thus, on the one hand, reason must be allowed to apply the

In other words, rather than an encounter with something outside of itself, this attunement signifies a self-encounter.

categories of possible experience to that which cannot in any way be an object of possible experience. On the other hand, the imagination must temporarily be allowed to cease to gather elements for a certain cognition and unite them within a concept to form a certain content. “We must not...presuppose the concept of purpose [and]...we must not base our judgment upon any concept” (1987: 130). In short, the subject must allow the voice of reason to demand the infinite, without, at the same time, thinking, judging, distinguishing purpose, or anticipating feelings of gratification or pain.

According to Kant’s exposition, this form of allowing can really happen at any time and any place – so long as the subject can quiet its own thought and its compulsion to know. *Critique of Judgment* provides quite a long list of possibilities. My favorite example is the instruction that Kant gives for generating the sublime in the presence of the ocean:

When we judge the sight of the ocean we must not do so on the basis of how we *think* it, enriched with all sorts of knowledge which we possess (but which is contained in the direct intuition), e.g., as a vast realm of aquatic creatures, or as the great reservoir supplying the water for the vapors that impregnate the air with clouds for the benefit of the land, or again as an element that, while separating continents from one another, yet makes possible the greatest communication among them; for all such judgments will be teleological. Instead we must *be able to view the ocean as the poets do, merely in terms of what manifests itself to the eye* – e.g., if we observe it while it is calm, as a clear mirror of water bounded only by sky; or, if it is turbulent, as being like an abyss threatening to engulf everything...We must not have in mind, as bases determining our judgment, concepts of...purposes...(1987: 130)

From this example, it is clear that most of this discipline really comes down training the imagination to, in a sense, just relax. The subject must merely be present

to this allowing. In Kant's language: "The imagination must on its own sustain the mind in a free activity" (1987: 131).

Let me be precise about the corollary aspect, pertaining to reason. Simultaneous with the imagination's allowing is an upsurge of the grasping of reason. Reason speaks, or rather orders. That is, in the moment of the sublime, "the mind listens to the voice of reason within itself, which demands" of the imagination that it comprehend – "in *one* intuition" – the subject's own infinity "as a whole," as "absolutely large," as "totality" (1987: 111). Thus, the imagination simultaneously seeks to fulfill the impossible demand of the faculty of desire. Here is what Kant says: "What happens is that our imagination strives to progress toward infinity, while our reason demands absolute totality as a real idea, and so the imagination, our power of estimating the magnitude of things in the world of sense, is inadequate to that idea" (1987: 106).

This is the point at which Kant identifies wakefulness specifically: "Yet *this inadequacy itself* is the awakening [*Erweckung*] in us of the feeling that we have within us a supersensible power; and what is absolutely large is not an object of sense, but *is* the use of that judgment makes *naturally* of certain objects so to awaken this" (1987: 123). Kant's identification in this passage is so precise, and so subtle, that it seems to have been passed over in Kantian commentary. Kant, of course, speaks of this in his own special language. The key word is *Erweckung*: "awakening," or a "process of waking up" that is also an "arousal" and a "bringing back to life." In terms of Kant's architectonic, *Erweckung* is a "disposition of the

soul” that is inherent to, or a natural part of, the faculty of judgment, i.e., in contrast to the faculty of reason and the faculty of understanding. Put in slightly different terms: for Kant, *Erweckung* is a peculiar element in the nature of the subject. *Erweckung* is not an effect of the imagination being inadequate; it *is* that inadequacy. Conversely the view of the ocean as vast or as an abyss is not what causes the awakening. Rather, what is absolutely large is the faculty of judgment’s using itself. *Erweckung* arises with the faculty of judgment (*Urteilkraft*) doing what it does innately or naturally (*Natürlicher*) – concurrently, it is in the nature of the faculty of judgment to use objects for that which is in its own nature (for awakening). And what one awakens to is oneself as the infinite, as the absolutely large, as formless, as the supersensible – each terms of which, in Kant’s lexicon, are synonyms for “human nature” (1987: 142).

Kant spells out –with typical rigor – the significant elements of *Erweckung*. What is most important is the way he describes the inadequacy of the imagination and its implications for the subject, which, in this moment of vision (*Augenblick*) “uncovers” within itself its own limitlessness:

Comprehending in one moment of vision [*Augenblick*] what is apprehended successively...is a regression that in turn *cancel the condition of time* in the imagination’s progression and *makes simultaneity intuitable*. Hence, (since temporal succession is a condition of the inner sense and of an intuition) it is a subjective movement of the imagination by which it *does violence to the inner sense*...Hence the effort to take up into a single intuition a measure for magnitude requiring a significant time for apprehension is a way of presenting which subjectively considered is contrapurposive, but which objectively is needed to estimate magnitude and hence is purposive. And yet this same *violence* that the *imagination inflicts on the subject* is still judged purposive for the whole vocation of the mind...The subject’s own inability uncovers in him the consciousness of an unlimited ability which is also his (italics mine, 116).

Die Zusammenfassung der Vielheit in die Einheit, nicht des Gedankens, sondern der Anschauung, mithin des Sukszessiv-aufgefaßten in einen *Augenblick*, ist... ein Regressus, der die Zeitbedingung im

Progressus der Einbildungskraft wieder aufhebt, und das *Zugleichsein* anschaulich macht. Sie ist also (da die Zeitfolge eine Bedingung des innern Sinnes und einer Anschauung ist) eine subjektive Bewegung des Einbildungskraft, wodurch sie dem innern Sinne Gewalt antut...

The language that Kant uses to describe the *Augenblick* of awakening is critical here – particularly in its portrayal of the violence that accompanies the collision of the faculties and the proliferation of impossibilities (e.g., “the impossibility of ever arriving at absolute totality;” “the impossibility of thinking the infinite as given” [116-117]) and paradoxes. The condition of time, which is the condition of an intuition, is cancelled, and yet simultaneity is intuitable; the effort is contrapurposive, yet purposive; the subject’s inability signifies its own unlimited ability. This complex configuration of contradiction (which corresponds to the subject’s division into sensible/supersensible or phenomenal/noumenal) must be understood as more than just a failure of the *Einbildungskraft* to do its work properly. What is at stake is that the imagination inflicts violence on the subject and on the inner sense (1987: 112-113). The subject subjects itself to a violence – a violence, indeed, that takes the appearance of its own dissolution.

The significance of temporality here should not be overlooked (as I have noted: “inner sense” for Kant, of course, signifies temporality). What is ultimately definitive of the *moment* of the sublime is the *cancellation of the condition of time*. The moment, then, is decidedly not a moment *in* time: it is not one in which time is elongated, nor is it fleeting. Likewise, for the subject, *Augenblick* does not signify an experience *within* time (i.e., duration, succession); nor is it the case that this moment concerns objects of nature perceived *in* time. The *Augenblick* emerges, rather, as a non-temporal “instant” which, concurrently, discloses or “uncovers” the limitlessness of the subject’s immanent infinitude. This latter, however, is not perceivable by the

intuition (i.e., at most, the phenomenal subject may only become “aware” of, and “respect,” it as an “idea” of reason).

Nevertheless, as Kant claims, from *within* this *Augenblick*, a certain intuition is indeed possible. Specifically, what arises is the possibility of intuiting a distinctive “mode” of time: *simultaneity* (*Zugleichsein*) (as Kant says: the *Augenblick* “...makes *simultaneity* intuitable...”).³³ This is a critical point because, in all other cases, as Kant repeatedly claims in the *1st Critique*, “time itself cannot be perceived” (B219, B257). Nevertheless, in the sublime moment, all at once, *just as* the condition of time is cancelled, time itself becomes an object of intuition.³⁴ Since the condition of time, the inner sense, is canceled, it seems that what makes time *qua* simultaneity (*Zugleichsein*) intuitable in itself is, more precisely, its *coexistence* with the absolute totality, the whole, or the *all-at-onceness* of the infinity.³⁵ What is intuited, in short,

³³ In the *1st Critique*, Kant claims that there are “three modes of time:” permanence, succession, and simultaneity. These three modes of time govern “all time relations of appearances, whereby every appearance’s existence can be determined in regard to the unity of all time; and these rules *will precede experience and make it possible* in the first place” (italics mine, A177/B219).

³⁴ This is such a significant, and surprising, proposition that I feel compelled to accentuate it in a footnote: A violent act against time – its *cancellation*, signifying the finitude, or perhaps even the *momentary* destruction and death, of time – makes temporality itself intuitable. May the *Augenblick* be thought of as a tomb bearing forth the corpse of temporality clothed in the guise of the thing-in-itself? Kierkegaard makes an interesting claim that resonates with this possibility: “In the New Testament there is a poetic paraphrase of the moment. Paul says the world will pass away in a moment [*ophthalmou*: ‘in the twinkling of an eye’]. By this he also expresses that the moment is commensurable with eternity, precisely because the moment of destruction expresses eternity at the same moment” (*Concept of Anxiety*: 88). As I discuss below, in contrast to Paul, and possibly Kant, Kierkegaard claims that the moment is exactly *opposite to*, and incommensurable with, eternity – precisely because it is that out of which eternity arises.

³⁵ In making this claim, I am following the lead of Kierkegaard (*Concept of Anxiety*: 83) and Heidegger (*Logic*: 197), both of whom, in their critique of traditional metaphysical principles, demonstrate that the conception of time as a succession of simultaneous nows can only be

is that the individual human subject is simultaneously no individual human subject. In this way, *Augenblick* identifies the position, within the Kantian architectonic, of the possibility of the impossible.

According to Kant, however, such a moment of awakening cannot form the ground of a subject's possible experience. This is precisely because the imagination, *Einbildungskraft*, ceases to function (i.e., the imagination is what generates the conditions – including synthesis, the schemata, time – for all possible experience [1996: 130, 214]). In other words, the *Augenblick* is not just unimaginable; it is inexperienceable.

This latter is a key point for it pertains to what Kant takes to be the task of his entire critical enterprise: in my reading, it is through an exposition of reason's grasping in the sublime moment that Kant seeks to reposition the inexperienceable and

generated by contrasting it with the postulation of “eternity” or “infinity.” Following from their critical questioning, it seems reasonable to me to claim that Kant here spatializes time. This claim requires a justification that I can only outline briefly. In the *1st Critique*, although it is defined as a “mode of time,” simultaneity (*Zugleichsein*), as a determination of the appearance of objects, is intimately related to space – and this relationship is necessary because, in order to be perceived in simultaneous succession by the subject, objects must be presentable spatially as interacting in “community” or “coexistence.” Indeed, and more to the point, *Zugleichsein* designates a cognition of multiple objects interacting *in space*. Conversely, as Kant says, “this interaction is also the condition for the possibility of the things...as objects of experience” (A211-212/B257-258). In other words, simultaneity is not merely a “mode of time;” it is a spatio-temporal designation, which is required for the constitution of all experience. However, it must be emphasized, what is at stake in the sublime is not cognition of objects in time, but the intuition of time as such. Time – as simultaneity – becomes an object of intuition only through a contrast with infinity, which, within the *Augenblick*, displaces time as permanence and succession. Amputated from permanence and succession, however, simultaneity loses its designation as a “mode of time” (Kant claims as much in the *1st Critique* when describes how simultaneity can only acquire its quality as “a mode of time itself” through its relations with permanence and succession [A183/B226]). Outside of a relation to the latter, thus, simultaneity appears merely as coexistence/community (i.e., a spatial designation).

the unimaginable (*viz.*, the noumenal) in relation to the domain of possible experience.³⁶ Thus, this “violent” moment of “a negative pleasure” is “simultaneously” re-assembled, *according to reason’s demand*, into the experience of an “attuned” subject who precisely experiences, and is profoundly affected by, vicissitudes of terror, respect, disgust, and arousal (1987: 116-117). Most critically, this transformation of the inexperiencable into the experiencable is organized around a subject gaining access to the intuition of time (something from which it is otherwise barred). In other words, as that which arises all at once – as an event *of being minus* the functioning of inner intuition, cognition, and *Einbildungskraft* – the *Augenblick* signifies an encounter of a being with *temporality as such*. In turn, this encounter grounds the possibility, or “prompts,” the subject “to become conscious of [the] foundation [of human nature]” (1987: 142). The profundity of the sublime, to reiterate, is its power of opening a critical means for the subject to become aware of its own noumenal (infinite) essence *contra* its status as a phenomenal subject of finitude.

Let me say this in another way. Although what is required for awakening is the giving up of all concepts of purpose, Kant ultimately wants the *Augenblick* to serve a purpose. The encounter with one’s own immanent infinitude understood as “humanity,” for Kant, needs to be *put to use* in the service of an ethics of the (phenomenal) human as an individual human subject that must live according to the

³⁶ This identification of a possible connection, mediation, or passage between the noumenal and the phenomenal – bridging the aporias of practical and theoretical reason – is also a critical aspect of the project of the 2nd *Critique* and its elaboration of “moral feeling.” The sublime and the moral feeling are, I believe, the only two sites of such passage.

moral law. In Kant's language, the way that reason extends itself in the moment of the sublime to comprehend the absolute must be directed solely to a practical expansion that is purposive. This means: by virtue of the sublime, the phenomenal subject must use (1) the absolute to postulate the absolutely good, (2) the absolutely large to postulate the law that obligates absolutely, and (3) the formless to postulate the contentless (mere) form of the moral law.³⁷ This is because, according to Kant, to serve humanity, ethics must *not* be grounded in the sensible. As Kant says: "In the case of the sublime, the reference is to subjective bases as they are purposive in relation to moral feeling, namely against sensibility but at the same time, and within the very same subject, for the purposes of practical reason" (1987: 127).

There is, however, problem with the sublime, for Kant. The problem is that it is characterized by "an utter lack of anything leading to objective principles" (1987: 99). By this he means: objective principles which determine the good for the phenomenal subject. For these, the only source is a strictly policed reason, guided rigorously by critique (i.e., by itself). The subject must not get attached to what the sublime uncovers: "We must not hold anything at which we can arrive to be an ultimate subject, and that substance itself never can be thought by our understanding, however deep we may penetrate, even if all nature were unveiled for us" (1950: 82). It is for this reason that Kant, ultimately, calls the moment of the sublime a "mere appendix" to his entire enterprise of critique (1987: 100). Critique, itself, may now

³⁷ Each of these is fundamental to Kant's exposition in *Critique of Practical Reason*. Sadly, I shall have to leave a discussion of this extremely interesting aspect of Kant's work for my next dissertation.

be understood as a procedure for restricting access to wakefulness to a select few, and for a singular purpose.

Hence, from the perspective of reason, the paradoxes and impossibilities of the sublime moment are paradoxes and impossibilities only for the imagination and the understanding of the phenomenal subject. They are resolvable – and reason is the resolver. The Kantian *Augenblick* ultimately, stands for the triumph of pure reason which, in the service of practical reason, resolves, in an “instant,” the paradox of the immanently divided subject, and sides with the phenomenal subject as form of appearance.³⁸

By Virtue of the Absurd

In many ways, Kierkegaard follows Kant very closely. However, I wish to indicate some critical points of divergence. The first point is that Kierkegaard sees Kant’s return to the phenomenal subject for the sake of the ethical to be an egregious error. As he says, quite simply: “The phenomenal is a deception” (1992: 54) – which of course Kant knew. Kant analyzed the emergence of this deception so well – and yet seems to have forgotten. From this vantage, taking the phenomenal subject of “sense certain” as a terminal point (through a vigilantly policed and valorized reason) seems exactly what one must avoid. As Kierkegaard says, in his own inimitable paradoxical

³⁸ In his typical fashion, Kant ultimately claims that pure reason (i.e., the speculative, the theoretical, the “is”) is pure practical reason (i.e., the ethical, the “ought”). And, in the same way, he collapses so many of the distinctions that he systematizes: not least of which are the faculties of judging and thinking. The latter is a spectacular move because the faculty of judging concerns “feelings of pleasure and displeasure” and the faculty of thinking is of course the faculty of reason.

fashion: “Every subject is an existing subject, and therefore must be essentially expressed in all of his knowing and must be expressed by keeping his knowing from an illusory termination in sensate certainty” (1992: 81). However, Kierkegaard goes further. It is not just the phenomenal domain that is illusory; so too is the noumenal (or “speculative”). In other words, as Nietzsche commented after him, Kierkegaard says that the subject as thing-in-itself is a fiction:

Sensate certainty is a delusion...; and the speculative result is a phantom. That is, all of this positive fails to express the state of the knowing subject in existence; hence it pertains to a fictive objective subject [i.e., the noumenal subject], and to mistake oneself for such a subject is to be fooled and to remain fooled (1992: 81).

For Kierkegaard, the reason why Kant mistakenly returns to the phenomenal subject is that he has, quite simply, left God out of the picture. Within the Kantian moment of awakening, there is a confrontation with one’s immanent infinitude that Kant calls humanity – not God. God, in Kant’s understanding, is merely a postulate of pure practical reason, about which nothing can be said. Kierkegaard brings God back into the picture, and, accordingly, he develops a distinctive concept of the subject. The subject is not immanently divided, one side of which is fictive and the other “real” (which is also Kant’s word for the noumenal). Rather, the three elements are critical for the structure of the subject: the singular individual, the ethical or universal, and God. Let me explain.

According to Kierkegaard, the singular individual comes into being as a phenomenal subject by passing through the universal. This is a very Kantian formula: the ethical or noumenal is the condition of possibility, the ground, of the phenomenal; and, born out of the noumenal, the individual subject must continually express the ethical in its own existence as a singular being, and thus take the universal as its aim. In Kierkegaard’s words: “The single individual, sensately and psychically qualified in immediacy, is the individual who has his *telos* in the universal, and it is his ethical task continually to become the universal” (1983: 54). Conversely, because of always already having passed through the universal/ethical, the singular individual is comprehensible and intelligible. It is for this reason that “the ethical is a temptation” (1983: 115): “It is beautiful and beneficial to be the singular individual who translates himself into the universal, the one who, so to speak, personally produces a trim, clean, and, as far as possible, faultless edition of himself, readable by all...He knows it is glorious to be understood by everyone” (1983: 76)

The singular individual and the universal, for Kierkegaard, thus have a special relation. The very life of the individual depends on a grasping of the universal; that is

how the individual as isolable is possible. The subject's isolation as singular individual is a gift of existence from the universal, and yet it is also a prison that defines the limits of the possible: "No one is so dreadfully imprisoned, and no captivity is so impossible to break out of as that in which the individual holds himself captive" (1985: 17). Nevertheless, the universal is a phantom, an illusion. The grasping of it by the singular individual gives it "actuality" just as it grants the individual singularity. This, perhaps, is what Kierkegaard means when he says: "The illusiveness of existence, when I grasp it, isolates me" (1992: 83).

In contrast, God is the origin of being, for Kierkegaard. It is the origin, and yet the singular individual is barred from God, as is the universal. And what bars the singular individual from God is, precisely, the universal/ethical. In other words, the singular individual has no relation to God – or rather, its relation is a non-relation. This barring of God by the ethical, however, produces an impossible desire within the singular individual to have a relation to God. The existence of the singular individual, thus, becomes a striving for the impossible: "Existence, itself, existing, is a striving" (1992: 92). This striving is a striving for what Kierkegaard calls a "teleological suspension of the ethical." He calls it this because the arriving at a relation with God would entail a "suspending" or a "surrendering" of the universal (1983: 54) – allowing for an "absolute relation with the absolute" (i.e., nonrelation). This latter – this suspending – is a contradiction because, in a "surrendering" of the "striving" the singular individual would cease to be a singular individual and, in forming an "absolute relation with the absolute," be utterly incomprehensible to itself and all others. This striving for the impossible – for a surrendering – is a passion, and, for Kierkegaard, its name is faith. One with faith expects the impossible, while simultaneously living in acceptance of the impossible in all its impossibility.

Kierkegaard realizes that, although marginalized within the Kantian

architectonic, *Augenblick* (Danish: *Oieblik* [1983: 378]) is actually an indispensable cornerstone for an inquiry into existence – for it signifies the very "condition" of proof of faith by disclosing the immanent (non)relation of the human to god through the revelation of the individual as a meeting point of time and eternity (1985: 58, 61).

Accordingly, Kierkegaard redescribes the moment. As the possibility of the impossible, *Oieblik* cannot be put to use, and it cannot become the ground for an ethics (i.e., it signifies the suspension of the ethical). More simply, it cannot be spoken, and thus, it transforms the Cartesian understanding of the subject as the speaking being that doubts. Indeed, Kierkegaard envisions in the *Oieblik* a silencing

that is a healing: “But if the doubter can become the single individual who as the single individual stands in an absolute relation to the absolute, then he can get authorization for his silence. In that case, he must make his doubt into guilt. In that case, he is within the paradox, but then his doubt is healed” (1983: 111).

That is to say: against the Kantian model, *Oieblik*, for Kierkegaard, is constituted not by a rigorously trained and prepared “mind” listening to its own voice of reason, but by a “singular individual” receiving an impossible communication from God. Likewise, because its provenance is not within a subject’s “mind,” it does not occasion a subject’s self-inflicted violence in a collision of the faculties, nor does it give rise to the cancellation of the condition of time. As Kierkegaard says, the *Oieblik* “does not clash inimically with time but is *incommensurable with the categories of temporality*” (1983: 62). Conversely, this proposed incommensurability with temporality should not be taken to imply the equivalence of the *Oieblik* with eternity. Rather, despite the fact that “dialectical sorcery ... makes eternity and the moment signify the same thing,” in Kierkegaard’s view, eternity and the moment are “extreme opposites” (1980: 84).

Although dissatisfied with the Kantian formulations, Kierkegaard nevertheless is clear that the moment does have a critically important relationship to temporality and eternity. For him, however, clarity about this relationship requires a radically different form of thought that resists being seduced by either the fixating powers of the understanding or the triumphal resolutions of reason. Toward this end, Kierkegaard’s rethinking of the moment finds inspiration in Plato, whose category

exaiphnes or “the sudden,” he claims, may be taken to stand for *Oieblik* (1980: 88). Accordingly, extrapolating from *Parmenides* and *The Sophist*, Kierkegaard defines the moment as “the nothing” or “nonbeing (*to may on; to kaynon* [that which is not; the empty])” (1980: 84, 82). *Oieblik*, thus, is a “strange entity (*atopon*, [that which has no place] the Greek word is especially appropriate) that lies between motion and rest without occupying any time, and into this and out from this that which is in motion changes into rest, and that which is at rest changes into motion” (1980: 83).

Based on these basic Greek distinctions, by which the moment as “nonbeing” or “the nothing” is conceived *not* as a temporal category but as a “category of transition,” Kierkegaard redefines *Oieblik* as that peculiar, transitional, or even “in-between,” non-place in which “time and eternity touch each other” (1980: 89). Thus, although it is tempting to describe *the moment* in temporal terms as something “past” or “passing;” and although, conversely, *the moment* may be said to be “filled with the eternal;” *Oieblik*, rather, signifies that out of which eternity and temporality are constituted and emerge as such (1985: 18; 1980: 83, 91). It is, then, a paradox, figuring “the eternalizing of the historical and the historicizing of the eternal.” This is a specific re-characterization of Kant’s notion of *Abgrund*: the groundless, unbridgeable gap that comprises a unified domain that is heterogeneous to itself.³⁹ Consequently, because it is something signifying an irresolvable touching of incommensurabilities, the moment is something that cannot be thought at all. For this reason, Kierkegaard also calls the moment the “absolute paradox,” the “unknown”

³⁹ An important distinction: For Kant, the *Abgrund* is dissolved within the moment of the sublime; for Kierkegaard, *Oieblik* is, in a sense, the abyss.

(1985: 39), and the “unique” (1985: 18) – a term which Kierkegaard deploys in very precise terms to mean “absolute difference” or “the absolutely different” (1985: 44-45).

In contrast to Kant, this redefinition of *Oieblik* excludes the violent explosion of ambivalent affect (Kierkegaard calls the latter affect “offence”). Offence, rather, is “in its essence a misunderstanding of the moment, since it is indeed offense *at* the paradox [i.e., that it cannot be known or understood]” (1985: 51). The Kantian affect of offence, as a product of the understanding, “remains outside the paradox [i.e., outside the moment]” (1985: 52). The affect of *Oieblik*, if there is an affect that may be attributed to *Oieblik*, is *wonder* (1985: 52).

From a Kierkegaardian perspective, Kant disavows the significance of the moment by deploying the categories of the understanding and reason, on the one hand, to transform the *Augenblick* into an object of possible experience and, on the other, to demonstrate knowledge of the unknowable (i.e., making the incomprehensible comprehensible) (cf., 1985: 39-42). Kierkegaard distinguishes himself from Kant, then, by refusing to admit three basic aspects of the aim of critique: (1) the resolution of the paradox (i.e., that the human is both finite and infinite), (2) the dissolution of the impossible in “comprehension,” and (3) the demonstration, or “determination,” of the unknowable (1985: 39-42). In other words,

Kant's desire to explain and resolve the paradox in a moment of "comprehending" amounts to a forgetting that fails to make room for faith.⁴⁰

The "passion" for the divine (i.e., "faith"), and the "wonder" at the emergence of being from nonbeing, according to Kierkegaard, originate *within* the moment as an *incomprehensible, irresolvable* paradox. Accordingly, to make room for faith, he finds within the moment an imperative to dispense with epistemology:

It is easy to see...that faith is not knowledge, for all knowledge is either knowledge of the eternal, which excludes the temporal and the historical as inconsequential, or it is purely historical knowledge, and no knowledge can have as its object this absurdity that the eternal is the historical (*Frag*: 62).

Kierkegaard thus seeks to generate an inquiry that may open a clearing for the paradoxical "moment" to arise without resolution, so that one may, "by virtue of the absurd," *in the everyday* (i.e., the "pedestrian"), "expect the impossible" (1983: 47-53). Hence, he declares: "*To change the leap into life into walking*, absolutely to express *the sublime in the pedestrian* – [this] is the one and only marvel (1983: 41). To achieve this aim – i.e., to become aware of the moment's everydayness, or of the fact that the pedestrian is always already the sublime – the singular individual must,

⁴⁰ My reference here is to Kant's clarification of why he excludes God from the domain of knowing. Regarding this, he claims in the preface to the second edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*: "I therefore had to annul [*aufheben*] knowledge in order to make room for faith. And the true source of all lack of faith which conflicts with morality – and is always highly dogmatic – is dogmatism in metaphysics, i.e., the prejudice according to which we can make progress in metaphysics without a critique of pure reason" (1996: 31). I believe it is clear from the exploration in this chapter that the normal translation of *aufheben* in this passage as "annul" or "deny" is not accurate. For Kant actually salvages knowledge as he salvages the phenomenal subject. I hesitate to translate *aufheben* as "sublate" because Kant is not Hegel before Hegel (indeed, for Kant "dialectical" signifies precisely "illusion"). However, it is interesting to reflect on how Kant's project, as it pertains to *erweckung*, is one that strives "to cancel" and "to keep," "to abolish" and "to preserve" (all of which *aufheben* signifies). For this reason, I would say "salvage."

ceasing to appeal to the (Kantian) understanding, “let go” of the attempt to demonstrate the existence of the moment and resist the common compulsion of the “someone” who “wants to have it forgotten” (1985: 43). This letting go, for Kierkegaard, is the waking up from slumber induced by the seductive security of the ideas of pure reason. As he declares with characteristic humour: “When you wake up, we shall begin again where you stopped. And that, of course, is how it really is: trying to get rid of something by sleeping is just as useless as trying to obtain something by sleeping” (1985: 43). In this way, *Oieblik* has a central place in Kierkegaard’s exposition for upbuilding and awakening.⁴¹

Conclusion: Of Romance, Passion, and Faith

While I was completing this chapter, I read my horoscope, written by Rob Brezsny, in the *Santa Cruz Weekly*:

Philosopher William Irwin Thompson says that we humans are like flies creeping along the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. We literally cannot see the splendor that surrounds us. As a result, we don’t live in reality. We’re lost in our habitual perceptions, blinded by our favorite illusions, and addicted to beliefs that hide the true nature of the universe. That’s the bad news, Libra. The good news is that every now and then, each of us slips into a grace period when it’s possible to experience at least some of the glory we’re normally cut off from. The veil opens, and previously undetected beauty appears. The weeks ahead will be the closest you’ve come to this breakthrough in a long time.

Writing, for me, is a mystery that is saturated with such instances – wherein everything that shows up in my life during the writing appears to have everything to do with the writing, and vice versus. I cannot claim to know anything about William Irwin Thompson. However, Brezsny is of course correct, and his astrological reading

⁴¹ The subtitle of Kierkegaard’s *The Sickness Unto Death* is *A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*.

for Libra during this week of July 25, 2012, summarizes quite well many of the aspects of wakefulness that I have been exploring in this dissertation: including the play of illusion and forgetfulness, as well as concealing and revealing. What is not immediately clear is that this prognosis for Libra is always the prognosis – and to this extent it is no prognosis at all. That is, in the same way that the fly is always in the Sistine Chapel, Libra, as subject, is always furthest from what is closest: the “breakthrough” of the unveiling. Brezsny, I am certain, knows this quite well, and thus his horoscope is a riddle in the same way that *Know Thyself* is a riddle: the veil is no veil and that is why we call it the veil. For the fact is this: while lost in our favorite illusions (i.e., addicted to the belief in the “I” as subject), we “don’t live in reality;” and yet, at the same time, we also do live in reality (i.e., the Sistine Chapel). Our getting lost is not separate from our getting found. The bad news is the good news.

In relation to Brezsny, I cannot help but think of John Caputo (“Jack”). When I was a professor of anthropology at Swarthmore College, Jack was a philosopher who taught up the road at Villanova University. I did some intensive studies of Heidegger and Kierkegaard with Jack. During one semester, I read through every sentence of *Being and Time* with him while, back at Swarthmore, I was teaching three classes and doing all of the usual committee work that a junior professor does. At that point, in 2003, Jack was teaching Heidegger out of obligation – it was clear he, for many years already, had lost all passion for Heidegger. As he writes in his 1993 confessional, *Against Ethics*: “I cannot, for the life of me, hear the call of Being”

(1993: 2). It seems that Jack's own pursuit of the path of deconstruction – for which he seemed to have been well-known – led him to an uncomfortable place. Here is how he describes it: “My situation is to be compared to a man who discovers that the ground he hitherto took to be a *terra firma* is in fact an island adrift in a vast sea, so that even if he stands absolutely firm he is in fact constantly in motion. Add to this the thought that the sea is endless, the sky starless, and the island's drift aimless, and you gain some measure of the level of my consternation” (1993: 3). One subject's Sistene Chapel is another's endless sea. Except: Jack's case demonstrates how the moment of vision is refused in relation to a grasping of the subject as isolable and isolated. He had lost all faith in “the Big Story...of Being's bends and turns...which assure us of Something Saving” (1993: 3). He dismissed that latter as “romanticism.” Still: he was a great guide through Heidegger and Kierkegaard. However, it is only now that I realize the extent to which his walking the path of deconstruction with Derrida led him to reside within an isolated domain of despair.

I don't know about “romanticism” – but I openly confess to being a romantic. I have a romance with philosophy – in the sense, which I describe in my Introduction, that, for me, philosophy signifies the love of Love and the love of death. This romance returns me to life, with a passion and love that, after Kierkegaard, I call faith: whereby I expect the impossible by virtue of the absurd.

With this, however, I am not heralding a return to metaphysics. And I think this is where Jack's view differs from my own. For me, wakefulness is not an assurance of Something Saving – i.e., according to which the Something is a

supersensible something that is distinct from, and therefore is capable of saving, the sensible subject. Metaphysics, of course, is based on this latter distinction of the sensible and the supersensible, the temporal and the eternal.

Aside from introducing *Erweckung* and *Augenblick* as concepts of the grasping subject, another reason why I feel that Kant is so important for my own inquiry is precisely because he came so very close to departing from the legacy of metaphysics. For him, the sensible and the supersensible are a “union.” And so too: for him, to gaze upon the endless sea is not to gaze upon the endless sea; it is to gaze upon an immanent vastness that “uncovers” the fact that individual subject is no individual subject. Jack Caputo’s longing for *terra firma* is the grasping of a “subreption” – as Kant calls it – by which the subject severs itself from objects and others, and maintains itself in a suffering of isolation. In contrast, Kant’s discussion of the *Augenblick* entails a most powerful questioning that draws the questioner as a time-being into a timely questioning. Indeed it responds to the question: the phenomenal subject *is not*, and it is precisely because it *is not* that we are seduced into investing into the illusion that it *is*. For Kant, this *is not* is the *Abgrund* that is the ground for the is-as-appearance.

And yet, Kant chooses to turn away from the *Erweckung* that, as he demonstrates so precisely, is in the nature of the subject. Returning toward the illusion of the subject, Kant turns toward metaphysics. Kant, of course, avows this turning. The goal of his critique is to clear the path for a metaphysics to come: “to mark a place in the system that still remains that must be filled in the future” (1996:

771). As he says in 1787's second-edition preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*: "In the course of these labors, I have advanced considerably in age (this month I reach my sixty-fourth year). I must therefore spend my time frugally, if I want to carry out my plan of providing the metaphysics both of nature and of morals, and thus confirm the correctness of my critique of both speculative and practical reason" (1996: 39-40).

Kierkegaard, in contrast, departs utterly from metaphysics. Indeed he disavows any pretense to philosophy as such. And, he is a comedian: "The present author is by no means a philosopher. He is *poetice et eleganter* [in a poetic and refined way] a supplementar clerk who neither writes the system nor gives promises of the system, who neither exhausts himself on the system nor binds himself to the system. He writes because to him it is a luxury that is all the more pleasant and apparent to fewer there are who buy and read what he writes" (1983: 7). Kant's project to annul [*aufheben*] knowledge in order to make room for *faith* ultimately equates to a project to save [*aufheben*] knowledge and thus make the incomprehensible comprehensible. Kierkegaard's aim is quite different. He has no choice but to let faith be. "Even if someone were able to transpose the whole content of faith into conceptual form, it does not follow that he has comprehended faith, comprehended how he entered into it or how it entered him" (1983: 7).

In his turning toward faith, and toward the possibility of the impossible, Kierkegaard makes it plain that both the sensible and the supersensible – as well as the distinction between – are illusions. They are illusions, nevertheless, that have "actuality." And at the basis of this actuality is an incomprehensible paradox: that of

God and the absolute relation to the absolute. Kierkegaard's "moment of vision" is an honoring of this paradox. The *Oieblik* of waking up is a letting go that, from one perspective, requires the passionate striving of the grasping. That is because the knight of faith, residing within the domain of the possible, must "passionately acknowledge the impossibility with his whole heart and soul" (1983: 47). From another perspective, the grasping *is* the letting go. As Kierkegaard says, the knight of faith must also expect the impossible. This is, of course, the leap of faith. And this is the marvel of the *moment*, whereby one resigns everything infinitely, and grasps everything by virtue of the absurd (1983: 40).

Chapter 4

Wakefulness

...where there is the perilousness of being seized by terror do we find the bliss of astonishment...

Introduction: Perilousness of Philosophy

Kant and Kierkegaard herald a radical shift for an inquiry into wakefulness – at least they do in my reckoning. The key to this shift is in the way they identify wakefulness in the very nature of the human being as individual subject. At stake, here, is not merely an inquiry that draws the subject into a fundamental questioning – although it is that. And it is not only that the questioning draws the questioner into its questioning. More significantly, with wakefulness in its nature, the “I myself,” rather, becomes itself a living question mark. In the wake of wakefulness, which is ever-present, how can one look in the mirror and *not* ask what is *already* being asked by the fact of one’s own appearance: “What really was that which we have just experienced? and moreover: “who *are* we really?” (Nietzsche 1967: 15).

The fact is, however, that we do not – at least not for the most part. In Kant’s view, this has everything to do with what he calls the “idle flaw” in human nature. By this, he means to refer to the inevitable procedure by which reason allows itself to

generate the illusion of grasping the subject as the substantial basis of action, thought, and knowledge.

One aspect of Kant's notion of illusion which corresponds with the formulations of Kierkegaard is this: that the world of illusion is to be contrasted with another dimension that is real or superior – a proposition which I have been trying to avoid in my own discussion of illusion as semblance at play. This kind of dualistic language is most prevalent, for instance, in Kant's distinction of the phenomenal and the noumenal. What Kierkegaard adds to Kant's understanding is that the illusion is not confined to the domain of the phenomenal. The noumenal is an illusion as well. With this, of course, Nietzsche agrees.

To put this another way: illusion's distinction itself raises a critical issue. Is it not the case that the distinction between illusion and non-illusion (or real) is itself an illusion? In which case, would not the experience of wakefulness reveal something much more banal than the vastness of the sublime? And would it not be the case then that Knight of Faith need not be the great figure of Abraham, but may also appear as a supplementary clerk or even a tax collector?

What is significant about Heidegger is that, in pulling these kinds aspects of wakefulness out of his predecessors' works, he, in a sense, pushes them to their extreme limits. Not least significant for this latter is his experimentation with developing an analytical lexicon that strives to evacuate itself of dualistic modes of conceptualization. His departure from normative (i.e., easily intelligible) modes of analysis, however, serves a critically important function. It, at the very least, resists

the temptation to proliferate, or rely upon, “stock phrases.” At most, in developing nondualistic concepts, it is a form of philosophizing that cannot be easily accommodated by, or explained away, in terms of a world that is severed into subjects, objects, and others. Rather, precisely in its appeal to the domain of wakefulness that is always already the case, his philosophizing opens a novel path which, if attended to, extends the questioning of the individual being as something quite otherwise into an entirely new direction.

In this way, Heidegger’s work, then, not only seeks to make the incomprehensible more salient; it also, and quite often, appears quite incomprehensible itself. For instance, whereas Kant claims that he intends to destroy the Cartesian notion of the subject, Heidegger calls his method of philosophizing *Destruction*. This is a method which, in seeking to “shatter [the entirety of metaphysics] in its very foundations” (1995: 61), also abandons the notion of the subject altogether. Thus, very seldom does one find the figure subject – illusory or not – as a category to grasp onto, like a kind of raft in the Heideggerian text to carry one over to the shore of wakefulness. Likewise, whereas Kant’s inquiry entails a critique of the limits of knowledge, and Kierkegaard’s inquiry comprises an attempt to make the incomprehensible more salient, for Heidegger what is at issue is an exclusion of knowledge altogether – and with that, so too logic and provability. As he says: “What can be proven is only whatever is essentially irrelevant” (1995: 14-15). The reason for this latter is that, quite simply, the aim of philosophizing for Heidegger is not to develop an ethics (as it is for Kant), and neither is it to champion

the domain of faith (as it is for Kierkegaard). His philosophizing, in contrast, aims for what he considers to be “something ultimate and extreme” – that is, it has the singular task of transporting one into the domain of wakefulness, which is always already the case. As such, as he says, this mode of philosophizing, in comparison to his predecessors, “is something totally other, something that stands incomparably on its own with respect to everything else” (1995: 23). It is compelled to disturb the “habitual somnolence of prevailing opinion” (1993: 250) – not because of any sadistic intention, but rather because “it constantly remains in the perilous neighborhood of supreme uncertainty” (1995: 19). So, friends – hold on to your hats.

Of Being and beings

Let me sketch out some of the basic features of Heidegger’s mode of inquiry. My main interest here is to set up some of the key points that will help clarify the constellation of concepts pertaining to his discussion of wakefulness. I do this, however, with the disclaimer that, because of Heidegger’s vigilance in introducing new words and modes of analysis, it would be excessively cumbersome to elaborate his position in all its nuance. I, thus, must admit to truncating and collapsing many of his novel distinctions.

In order to understand Heidegger’s project, I find it helpful to recall what, according to Kant and Kierkegaard, the moment of wakefulness “uncovers”.

Whether God or the infinitude of humanity, the point is that there is something unknowable, unimaginable, and inexperienceable at the basis of all human beings.

This ground of all beings is incommensurable with beings, and yet, at the same time, it is what is common to all beings; it is central and basic to the existence of “I myself,” and to this extent it is always “my own” – and yet, at the same time, as the condition of possibility of all beings, it is not “mine.”

For Heidegger, that which wakefulness uncovers is not the infinite (Kant) or the absolute relation to the absolute (Kierkegaard), but rather the Being of beings. This choice of words signifies a broader distinction that is fundamental in Heidegger’s work: the difference between Being (as the Being of beings) and beings. Heidegger uses the word “ontological” to refer to that which concerns the Being of beings (1995: 358); conversely, his term for the domain of beings is “ontic.” Heidegger’s central interest is with the ontological; thus his inquiries turn away from beings, and toward Being.

The significance of the way Heidegger differentiates the domains of Being and beings – and the significance of his turning toward the ontological – becomes clear through a comparison to traditional metaphysics. The latter, especially since Descartes, concerns itself only with beings, with the relation between beings and beings, and particularly the distinction among beings between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. Because of this kind of fixation on the ontic, inquiries carried out within the legacy Cartesian metaphysics are limited to the domain of subject-object relations organized around epistemology (this is a point I have elaborated in different terms in Chapter 2). Within this domain, beings are understood in a self-evident way as commensurate with what is “present at hand.” Metaphysics and “ordinary

understanding” conjoin in this prioritizing of the ontic. Both share a fundamental attitude that, as Heidegger says, “considers that which properly is to be that which is always present at hand” (1995: 295). This is another way of saying that metaphysics and common sense misrecognize the present at hand as all there is – conversely, all “thought” of what *is* remains confined to that dimension (and, in Heidegger’s view, this includes the normal way of understanding God, which, conceived, in terms of a world of beings, is understood to be one kind of being, i.e., a supersensible being, that relates to beings). A basic point, then, about this distinction, is that, in prioritizing the ontological, Heidegger seeks to develop a thinking that abandons subjectivity and, with it, epistemology. This is because, to put this quite simply, Being is not something that can be said to exist, and, conversely, not only can it not be known, but also nothing about it can be elaborated according to metaphysical procedures of logic or proof. Let me explain.

Being, for Heidegger, is not the name for some being that resides among or relates to other beings in an empirical sense. Conversely, it cannot be made into an object to be observed and evaluated by beings. And, as such, any statement that may be made about it is ultimately a misconception. It is, in other words, a name for “the nameless.”

Being, in this sense, makes possible beings as what appear present at hand. In Heidegger’s language, Being is a “making-possible.” Heidegger uses the image of the symptom to clarify this distinction (no doubt, in deploying this peculiar image, he is playing with Nietzsche’s idea that man and modern civilization are a disease). A

symptom is an occurrence that is an appearance, or a showing, of something that does not show itself. In his words: “Appearance, as the appearance ‘of something’, thus precisely does *not* mean that something shows itself; rather, it means that something makes itself known which does not show itself. Appearing is a *not showing itself*” (1996: 25-26). From one vantage, then, Being is a not-showing-itself. However, from another vantage, it is indeed a self-showing. That is to say, in the same way that an illness is an invisible something that appears through its symptoms, Being may be understood to manifest itself through the beings that it makes possible. As appearances, beings may be understood as a “how” of the self-showing of Being which veils or conceals itself in the appearance. Being, in this sense, is a concealing that is a revealing.

The word that Heidegger uses for the Being of human beings is *Dasein*. *Dasein* literally means “being-there.” With the word *Dasein*, Heidegger is able to draw into relief some of the critical aspects conveyed in the concepts of self-showing, concealing, veiling, and revealing. For, although it is a making-possible of the coming to presence of beings as appearance, *Dasein*, as a being-there, has the peculiar quality of *Nicht-Da-sein* – a “not-being-there.” It is for this reason that *Dasein*, as the Being of human beings, cannot be known, and is not subject to the laws of logic or demonstration. As Heidegger says: “Something that is simultaneously there and not there...intrinsically contradicts itself. For being-there [*Da-sein*] and not-being-there [*Nicht-Da-sein*] is a straightforward contradiction. Yet whatever is contradictory

cannot be. It is – and this is an ancient proposition of traditional metaphysics – intrinsically impossible” (1995: 61).

Thus, Heidegger says, of Dasein, that it is *the empty* or *the nothing* in which beings manifest themselves. However, such terms are not meant to imply a nihilism (a point which Heidegger is vigilant to reiterate). Thus, Heidegger also qualifies Dasein with such diverse images as *clearing* and *openness*, which convey a sense of luminosity and making-possible. As Heidegger says: “We never experience anything about Being subsequently or after the event of beings; rather, beings – wherever and however we approach them – *already stand in the light of Being*” (1995: 357).

Heidegger has a special word for the aspect of Dasein that makes things possible: projection. As he says: “The essence of man, the Dasein in him, is determined by this *projective character*. Projection as the primordial structure of this occurrence is the fundamental structure of world-formation” (1995: 362). In the same way that Dasein is also a Nicht-Da-Sein, and that veiling is also a revealing, the occurrence of projection is a “turning toward that is also a removal” (1995: 363). With the term “removal,” Heidegger wishes to highlight the manner in which, to the extent that we say beings *ex-ist*, this is to mean that beings *stand outside of* or *away from* Being. Here Heidegger plays with the relation of “exist” and “exit.” He thus says: “To that being which we say *exists*, i.e., *ex-sists*, is an exiting from itself in the essence of its being” (1995: 365). Removal, as an exiting of that which *ex-ists*, in this sense, is a “raising away [i.e., from Being] into the possible [i.e., the domain of beings].” Conversely, through this removal, which comprises the world-formation of

beings, beings are, precisely, bound to Dasein: “Projection binds us – not to what is possible, nor to what is actual, but to *making-possible*” (1995: 363).

The concepts of projection and binding help to accentuate the mutual arising of Being (Dasein) and being. Heidegger addresses this in an extremely condensed formula: “In projection there occurs the letting-prevail of the Being of beings in the whole of their possible binding character in each case. In projection world prevails” (1995: 365). To the extent that removal binds beings to Being (Dasein), the removal is a “bridge” (1995: 356). Heidegger uses the word “transcendence” to portray the relation of Dasein to beings across this “bridge.” However, transcendence, in this sense, is not to be taken to mean that Dasein relates to beings as others or objects in a world (a prospect which would imply that Dasein was just one of kind being among beings). Rather transcendence is an ontological distinction: it is a happening of the making-possible (1992: 213, 217). In this sense, transcendence, for Heidegger, designates the origin of beings.

Two key features about Dasein are finitude and temporality. These distinctions are directly relevant to the understanding of the transcendence and origin of Dasein as the “making-possible.” As distinct from Dasein, beings exist in time, which they experience according to the common understanding of a past, present, and future. However, according to Heidegger, Dasein, as the being of human beings, is temporality itself. Hence, the making-possible of Dasein, by which – through elements of projection, removal, and binding – beings arise in the clearing of Being, is a process of temporality temporalizing itself. That is to say, the common experience

of time is made possible because Dasein *is* temporality; and as temporality, Dasein is the making-possible that temporalizes. As Heidegger says: “The *origo* of transcendence is temporality itself, and it is origin in such a way that transcendence too, and that means world-entry, happens with temporalization. There is time, in the common sense, only with the temporalization of temporality, with the happening of world-entry” (1992: 210). Finally, this “origin” of time, and of beings as beings, is not to be understood in terms of common understanding. The origin is not a time before, or an anteriority. Rather, for Heidegger, temporality, as an ontological distinction, is futural. As he says: “Temporality temporalizes itself primarily out of the future” (1992: 211). Let me try to clarify this complex formulation.

Several key points distinguish Heidegger’s exposition from the propositions of “traditional” metaphysics. The main claim is that temporality, for Heidegger, is to be distinguished from “time, in the common sense” – it is not to designate a linear “passing” from a past through a present to a future; rather, temporality is a fundamental ontological domain out of which all (ontic) modes of time arise. Thus: 1) transcendence is not an essential feature of subjects comporting themselves in relation to a knowable world of objects, but is a “happening” of “world-entry;” 2) the “temporality” of the “origin” as a “happening” is not a fixed point which orients transcendence, but it is a process *with which* transcendence “happens;” 3) that is, origin as “temporality” is “temporalization”; 3) the origin as process of temporalization, does not take place “in” a past, “in” the before, as anteriority; but rather *the origin arises out of the future*. This latter ontological distinction of futurity

is critical. It is not to be conflated with the ordinary understanding of time. Rather, this futurity is simultaneous with the making possible of beings and with the constitution the everyday time of beings (i.e., considered normatively as past, present, and future – the this futurity). “This temporality does not stand alongside ‘objects’ and ‘subjects’, but constitutes the ground of possibility of the subjectivity of subjects, and indeed in such a way that the essence of subjects consists precisely in having Dasein” (1995: 158).

In short, Dasein is not merely temporality as such, but is the extreme limit, or extremity, of temporality. In this sense, Heidegger identifies Dasein not just as futurity, but as the limit of possibility that makes beings possible. To put this another way: Dasein is not only that which is always already enveloping beings as a whole in advance – although it is that. Moreover, as future, and as the extreme limit of possibility, Dasein signifies the finitude of beings. In this way, Dasein, as the making-possible of beings being-there, is also, and fundamentally, the making-possible of the end of beings, i.e., of beings no longer being-there. What is at stake here, to put it simply, is death. For Heidegger, death is Dasein’s ownmost possibility. Death, in this sense, signifies not only that which makes possible the life of beings as beings. It also signifies Dasein’s specific self-relation. As a specific way of relating to itself, as a way of coming toward itself in its ownmost possibility, and as a way of relating to itself from out of its most extreme possibility; Dasein, as the Being of human beings, in short, is Being-toward-death.

This notion of Being-toward-death is critical for Heidegger, and yet it is extremely cryptic. In order to try to convey what is at issue here, let me appeal to an etymological fable concerning the origins of the word “person.” “Person” – or so it is said – emerges from the Etruscan *phersu*, which, at some point, came to intersect with the Greek *prosopon* (“to see or be seen”) and the Latin *persona* (“speaking through”), both of which, more commonly, signify “mask.” For the Etruscans, however, *phersu* did not signify “mask” in general, but one particular mask – and it is in this signification that the story of “person” becomes relevant for Heidegger’s analysis. The Etruscans were devotees of Persephone, and *phersu* was the name for the mask used to represent the goddess during religious rites: to make the goddess “be seen.” Persephone was the wife of Hades. Hades, in Greek, has a multiple signification: “the unseen,” “death,” “the abode of the dead,” and the “God of the dead.” In relation to Persephone, Hades/death is not just her lover, but her home (*arche*), and her end (*telos*). Persephone’s “death” is the definition of her life in the same way that Hades’ love of Persephone constitutes Persephone as Persephone, i.e., the wife of Hades. The figure of “person” – as an ontic being – may be seen to embody this relation. The seen, by its very appearance and its speech, veils the unseen; concurrently, the veiling is a revealing of that which is concealed. The concealing and the revealing are not separate: the two are a union.

The story of Persephone and Hades – along with the fable of the figure of Socrates – certainly has its limits. But in striving to speak about what Heidegger calls “the nameless,” it is helpful to seek out the help of mythology. One point, I hope, is

clear. That is: When Heidegger speaks of death, he is not talking about a not-yet-arrived moment conceived of in terms of a normative understanding of time as moving from a past, through a present, into a future. What is at stake is not the fact that, as Rousseau says somewhere, I begin dying the moment I am born. What is at stake is simultaneity. This is the simultaneity, and mutual arising, of the “I” and the “not-I” – or in Heidegger’s language beings and Dasein. To this extent, the “I-Death” (as Richard Brautigan calls it) is indissoluble from the “I.” To put this in Kantian terms, it is the *Abgrund*, the groundless, which comprises the ground of the subject.

For Heidegger, however, death is a specifically ontological distinction. In other words, as Heidegger never tires of repeating, Dasein as Being-toward-death, is not to be taken ontically, that is, as an aspect of the dimension of beings relating to beings. It is not to be understood “as something *present at hand*” (1995: 295). Although Being-toward-death is Dasein’s “authentic” form of self-relation or self-encounter, it is not the case that “man must be constantly thinking about death” (1995: 295). In fact, according to Heidegger, the situation is exactly opposite. In the same way that Dasein is concealed in the appearing of beings, so too is death. Moreover, beings – as forms of appearance, as speaking beings, as beings that see and that are seen – live with a fear of what is their ownmost possibility, i.e., their Dasein as Being-toward-death.

This ontological distinction of Being-toward-death as the making-possible of Dasein, clarifies a fundamental characteristic of the procedures of projection and removal by which beings arise as beings: that is, they are fear-driven modes by which

Dasein distances itself from what is its ownmost; they are modes of turning away, and flight. As Heidegger says: “In this flight, Dasein precisely does not bring itself before itself” (1996: 173).

This characterization allows Heidegger to describe more precisely the everyday way that beings appear to themselves in a world of beings, objects, and others. In doing this, Heidegger develops a concept that clearly derives from the etymological fable of “person” (although, in typical fashion, he does not explicitly state his inspiration). He speaks, in other words, of the mask or masquerade of beings. In other words, arising with their flight from self-encounter, the form of appearance of beings is, thus, more specifically, a mask – a mask that allows beings to hide from, and hence to live with, their finitude. Borrowing from Nietzsche’s lexicon, Heidegger calls this masquerade *living in forgetfulness*. Living in forgetfulness, beings may live among others without being burdened by fear and anxiety. This everyday mode of somnambulizing existence is a basic characteristic of Heidegger’s notion of the *hoi polloi*, which he calls *Das Man*, or “the they.” As he says: “The they disburdens Dasein in its everydayness. Not only that; by disburdening it of its being, the they accommodates Dasein in its tendency to take things easily and make them easy” (1996: 120).

However, conversely, the forgetfulness and the masquerade of beings appearing as *Das Man* are nevertheless Dasein’s mode of self-showing. It is, thus, a mode of concealment that is revealing – in which case, the flight from death, the living in forgetfulness, and the masquerade of beings never completely occlude the

Being-toward-death of Dasein. In Heidegger's words: "Dasein speaks about itself and sees itself in such and such a manner, and yet this is only a *mask* which it holds up before itself in order to not be frightened by itself...Such visibility is the mask in which factual Dasein lets itself be encountered, in which it comes forth and appears itself as though it really 'were' it – in this masquerade of the public manner of being-interpreted, Dasein makes itself present and puts itself forward as the height of living" (1999: 26).

Heidegger's notion of masquerade illuminates an element that, for the most part, is not elaborated within Nietzsche's understanding of forgetfulness or Kant's understanding of the illusion of the subject as a form of appearance of the inner sense (i.e., time) – both of which Heidegger is engaging very closely. For Nietzsche, forgetfulness is that which makes possible the past, present, and future. Likewise, for Kant, the constitution of the subject as a form of appearance to itself and others is a specific function of time, itself, conceived of as a form of appearance of inner sense. For Heidegger, forgetfulness and everyday time are fundamental structures by which Dasein as futurity, and as Being-toward-death, masquerades itself. In other words, they are the way that temporality temporalizes itself. In this sense, the common or ontic understandings and experiences of time – as past, present, and future – are themselves modes of "tranquilization" and "entrancement." They are manifestations of (ontological) temporality that, appearing as and in (ontic) time, allow Dasein to show itself through its concealment and flight. This is the condition of possibility of beings. As Heidegger says: "Looking away from finitude, the inauthentic [i.e., ontic]

temporality of entangled everyday Dasein must fail to recognize authentic [i.e., ontological] futurity and temporality in general” (1996: 389). Beings, in the ontic sense, arise with tranquilization; entranced by time, they remain entangled in the everyday, looking away from their most extreme possibility as Dasein. Time, in other words, is the entrancement, forgetting, and masquerade, i.e., is “the flight from death” (1996: 389). And this flight, this masquerade, conversely, is the possibility of Dasein encountering itself – although it may do so only by “taking a detour” through time (1996: 321). In this way, although beings may be understood to live in time, it may be said, more precisely, that beings *are* time, *are* forgetfulness, *are* masks – in the same way that it may be said that Dasein is temporality, is futurity, and is death.

Wakefulness

Let me now turn to Heidegger’s discussion of wakefulness. Heidegger speaks specifically about the question of wakefulness in two lecture courses: 1923’s *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity* and 1930’s *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. In both instances, following the lead of Kant and Kierkegaard, he draws a close connection between the notions of wakefulness and the moment of vision. For some reason (which is not immediately clear), he only mentions Kierkegaard as a predecessor to this inquiry. For instance, in his 1923 lecture course, Heidegger acknowledges Kierkegaard in passing: “Strong impulses for hermeneutical explication presented here stem from the work of Kierkegaard” (1999: 25). And in

the 1930 lecture, he acknowledges Kierkegaard more powerfully: “What we here designate as ‘moment of vision’ is what was really comprehended for the first time in philosophy by Kierkegaard – a comprehending with which the *possibility* of a completely new epoch of philosophy has begun for the first time since antiquity. I say this is a possibility; for today when Kierkegaard has become fashionable...we have reached the stage where the literature about Kierkegaard...has ensured in all kinds of ways that this decisive point of Kierkegaard’s philosophy has not been comprehended” (1995: 150). His privileging of Kierkegaard, notwithstanding, I believe it shall become evident that his discussions of wakefulness and *Augenblick* owe as much to a close engagement with Kant.

One of Heidegger’s basic contributions is, in a sense, to salvage *Augenblick* – a term previously saturated with significations of a Kantian immanent infinitude and a Kierkegaardian prioritizing of faith – and redeploy it as a critical aspect of his own inquiry into Dasein. In a later text (1938-1939), translated into English as *Mindfulness* (2006), Heidegger, like Kierkegaard, describes the moment as a category of “suddenness” (96). However, in contrast to Kierkegaard, he does not define the moment as the “nonbeing” out of which being, time, and eternity arise. Instead, for Heidegger, *Augenblick* is the “suddenness of the clearing of Being” (2006: 96). In terms more relevant to his lectures of 1923 and 1930, the moment pertains most emphatically to the ontological distinction of Dasein. In this sense, Dasein may be seen to replace Kant’s “noumenal” and Kierkegaard’s “God” or “the eternal” (the latter of which are not commensurable). In displacing these, however, Heidegger

retains specific elements of both Kant's notion of the sublime *Augenblick* and Kierkegaard's notion of *Oieblik*: for instance, as indexing of an encounter with that which is the foundation of beings, as an experience of waking up to that which is always already the case, as a quality pertaining fundamentally to temporality, as defining the goal of "philosophizing." He also redefines and redeploys several Kantian and Kierkegaardian terms, including: the understanding, the concept, forgetting, sleep, time, and the unknowable.

The exposition of wakefulness and *Augenblick* in the 1923 and 1930 lectures pursues two distinct, but intersecting, themes. In the first, wakefulness signifies the aim of philosophizing conceived of as hermeneutics; and in the second, extending this, it also signifies what is disclosed by the attunement of profound boredom (i.e., how the temporality of *Dasein* temporalizes itself).

Let me first describe the significance of wakefulness and *Augenblick* within Heidegger's 1923 exposition of the aim of hermeneutics. This exposition is almost excessively cryptic – particularly because Heidegger does not provide a way of understanding things outside of his own lexicon (which, in this text, is as relentlessly adhered to as it is poetic and provocative). Thus, the definition of wakefulness as a "fundamental experience...of the *being-there of our own Dasein*" remains obscure. A preliminary grasp of this definition may be arrived at by indicating its intimate intersection with a constellation of other Heideggerian terms introduced in the 1923 lectures, specifically: the task of hermeneutics, access, the concept, fundamental experience, and understanding.

Here is a brief gloss on each of these terms using Heidegger's lexicon. **1.** The "task of hermeneutics" is to "mak[e] the Dasein which is in each case our own *accessible* to this Dasein itself with regard to the character of its being, communicating Dasein to itself in this regard" (1). **2.** To gain "access," for Heidegger, always signifies Dasein's *access to itself*, i.e., a process by which it may "arrive at a grasp" of itself "which is free of covering up" (1999: 59), or of "forgetfulness" (16), or of the "masquerade" and "mask" – all of which (i.e., covering up, forgetfulness, masquerade, mask) are proliferated by *Das Man* or "public manner... in order to not be frightened by itself [i.e., by its fundamental nature as *Dasein*]" (1999: 26, 65, 80). **3.** Dasein frees itself of this forgetfulness/masquerade by means of the concept. In other words, a "concept" is not akin to a Kantian "schema," but is that by which Dasein gains a "preliminary ontological access" to itself (1999: 28, 12-13). **4.** The "concept" achieves this because, developed rigorously by *Heideggerian* hermeneutics, it "transports us to a fundamental experience – i.e., transports us into the *being-there of our Dasein*" (1999: 12-13). In other words, the concept transports us into *Augenblick*.⁴² And thus, **5,** "a concept...is constitutive of the moment" (1999: 12). **6.** The moment, conversely, as a "fundamental experience," is a "radical" or "philosophical wakefulness, in which Dasein is encountering itself" (1999: 12, 14). **7.** Finally, wakefulness is linked to

⁴² For Heidegger, more precisely, the concept may either obstruct or provide access. What determines whether the concept acts to obstruct or provide access is its mode of development. In the instance of Cartesian metaphysics, the concept that obstructs access is the "average concept of being in the sense of being-produced" (1988: 154); and the reason why it obstructs access is that it "was developed with a view toward the extant, toward the being that the Dasein is not" (1988:154).

Heidegger's redefinition of "understanding" – which, returning us to point **1**, is defined as the goal of hermeneutics: understanding (*contra* Kant) is not "a knowing comportment toward the life of another...but rather a *how of Dasein itself*."

Terminologically, it may be defined in advance as the wakefulness of Dasein for itself" (1999: 12). In sum, within this constellation of terms, all of which index the possibility of Dasein's unimpeded self-encounter, *Augenblick* signifies the fundamental experience of radical wakefulness which, as the aim of hermeneutics, is Dasein's gaining access to an understanding of itself (1999: 11).

In his 1930 lectures on boredom, Heidegger revitalizes the same intertwined themes of "the moment" and "wakefulness," elaborating them in new ways, and relating them to a recognizable philosophical genealogy. He thus redefines the task of philosophy ("hermeneutics" has somehow – and very significantly – dropped out of the picture and is substituted by "philosophizing") in terms of an inquiry into "attunement" – indicating a specific extension of and departure from Kant: "Our fundamental task now consists in awakening a *fundamental attunement* in our philosophizing" (1995: 59). In a manner that is certainly designed to evoke laughter (especially for those intimate with the excitement and complex affect of Kant's discussion of the sublime as a fundamental attunement), Heidegger's lead-up to *Augenblick's* moment of wakefulness is organized around a plodding exposition – passing not through the ambivalent vicissitudes of a sublime "negative pleasure," but through the mundane, indeed *pedestrian*, elements of *profound boredom*. In this case,

Heidegger uses the fable of “‘it is boring for one’ to walk through the streets of a large city on a Sunday afternoon” (1995: 135).

In Heidegger’s terms, this exposition embodies the method of *Destruktion*: it entails, but does not elaborate, a dismantling of the categories of ordinary common-sense and of epistemology – both of which disavow contradiction as “intrinsically impossible” (1995: 61). Additionally, and, seemingly in the footsteps of Kierkegaard, Heidegger claims that the achievement of wakefulness is not something that can be done or made (e.g., like “making” something conscious, which, for Heidegger, is an epistemological operation that kills its object). Rather, it is a matter of “letting go” or “letting be” (1995: 61).

In this latter sense, Heidegger’s exposition of boredom does seem to agree with Kant as well. In Kant’s discussion of the sublime, what is required is a kind of relaxing of the faculties, and particularly of the imagination: the subject makes no judgments, ceases to react to its environment, and does not interact with it in terms of what it knows about it. Heidegger says almost the same thing in terms of what beings do (i.e., not do) so that the experience of boredom may open into a moment of vision:

This boredom becomes essential of its own accord, if only we are not opposed to it, if we do not always immediately react to protect ourselves, if instead we make room for it. This is what we must first learn: *not to resist straightaway* but *to let resonate*. Yet how are we to make room for this initially inessential, ungraspable boredom? Only by not being opposed to it, but letting it approach us and tell us what it wants, what is going on with it. Yet even to do this, it is necessary in the first place that we remove from indeterminacy whatever we thus name and apparently know of boredom. We must do this, however, not in the sense of dissecting some psychological experience, but in such a way that we thereby approach ourselves. Whom? Ourselves – *ourselves as a Da-sein* (1995: 82).

In short, what this means is that what is required is precisely that we not drive boredom away. The *Augenblick* arises through this act of non-resistance and letting resonate – in other words, through an engaging with boredom by, precisely, not engaging. That is to say: the moment of wakefulness arises through a doing that is a nondoing.

As I indicated above, what is required to facilitate this act of letting go, this doing that is a nondoing – in other words, what is required to facilitate access to the moment of wakefulness – is precisely a specific “concept.” This, as may be evident at this point, is specifically not the concept of the subject. The concept of the subject comprises an obstacle to wakefulness. As Heidegger says, of the path to wakefulness: “It is a path on which, even before setting out and going along it, we have already comprehended that precisely the essence of consciousness and the essence of subjectivity must be put into question in advance in order to remove the chief obstacle preventing out access... We must therefore take careful note that the conception of man as consciousness, as subject, as person, as a rational being... must be put in question” (1995: 133). In other words, the concept that facilitates access must “point into Dasein itself” (1995: 296). This concept is the concept of being, understood to be the concealing-revealing of Dasein. This concept, however, according to Heidegger, is already available, for it is in the nature of Dasein itself. Thus, a being in the midst of profound boredom may be said to always already have the capacity to not resist boredom, and, thus, to have access to *Augenblick*, to wakefulness, and to Dasein.

What arises within the Heideggerian *Augenblick* is as powerful as it is banal. Within such a moment of wakefulness, according to Heidegger, “we are not merely relieved of our everyday personality, somehow distant and alien to it, but simultaneously also elevated beyond the particular situation in each case and beyond the specific beings surrounding us there. The whole situation and we ourselves as this individual subject are thereby indifferent” (1995: 137). The point of this “indifference” is critical. Indifference does not signify some kind of apathy. Rather, in-difference signifies the arising of non-differentiation. It heralds the cessation of the forgetting that is a severing which differentiates beings into a world of subjects, others, and objects. In this respect, Heidegger’s words are quite clear:

Each and every thing at once becomes indifferent, each and every thing moves together at one and the same time into an indifference. This indifference does not first leap from one thing over onto another like a fire, so as to consume each thing; rather all of a sudden everything is enveloped and embraced by this indifference. Beings have – as we say – become indifferent *as a whole*, and we ourselves as these people are not excepted. We no longer stand as subjects and suchlike opposite these beings and excluded from them, but find ourselves in the midst of beings as a whole...Beings as a whole do not disappear however, but show themselves precisely as such in their indifference. The emptiness accordingly here consists in the indifference enveloping beings as a whole (1995: 139).

By letting Dasein be or go (or “become”), and by being “relieved of personality” and the “petty I-ness” (1995: 139) of the everyday, one “all at once” and “of a sudden” realizes that Dasein is always already awake in the everyday. Here then is a further clarification of *Augenblick* for Heidegger: as “moment of vision,” or a “blink of the eye,” Dasein resolutely discloses to itself its essential nature: it is always already awake.

The possibility of this self-disclosure is intrinsically related Dasein's entrancement and self-forgetting. Indeed, Heidegger claims that the very processes of masquerade, forgetting, or "entrancement" by which beings "refuse themselves" (148) are, in themselves, constitutive of a disclosure of Dasein to itself. The very processes of refusal and entrancement index that which is refused or masked as always already *there* (i.e., *Da-sein*). In its most profound sense, what beings are entranced by are the normative (i.e., ontic) categories of time. In Heidegger's words (which reintroduce and redeploy the Kantian notion of "simultaneity"): "The time that thus entrances Dasein, and announces itself as thus entrancing in boredom, *simultaneously* announces and tells of itself as that which properly makes possible" (1995: 148). In this sense, the ontic categories of time comprise what Heidegger calls a telling refusal: "The telling refusal tells of these possibilities of Dasein. This telling refusal does not speak about them, does not lead directly to dealings with them, but in its telling refusal points to them and makes them known in refusing them" (1995: 140). Time, in brief, is "indicative concept" that points into Dasein itself.

It is possible to read this fundamental element of *Augenblick* as a critical engagement with the Kantian category of time ("inner intuition"), which is redescribed, in Heidegger's terms, as "entrancing time." Heidegger may be understood to view this (Kantian) inner intuition (and along with it all of the categories of the understanding) as a mode of distraction and seduction operating to conceal from beings the Dasein that is their possibility. Thus: against entrancing time, or rather *simultaneously with it*, what is disclosed, or what opens, ultimately,

within the moment of vision is the “temporal horizon...which makes possible the manifestness of these beings *as a whole*” (1995: 150) (I note only in passing that this “as a whole” is a clear redescription of the Kantian notions of totality and wholeness significant for the sublime moment yet evacuated of infinitude).

This latter claim is crucial for Heidegger, and it further indicates his reorientation of the disparate claims about temporality made by Kant and Kierkegaard. Against Kant, *Augenblick* is not portrayed as a moment of violence and offence prompted by the cancellation of (ontic) categories of time. Rather, those very concepts, as entrancements, are integral to Dasein’s gaining access to the moment – that is, through their refusals they lead Dasein to itself as that which is refused. However, in a way that is somewhat similar to Kant’s claim that that sublime includes a moment in which time as such becomes intuitable, in Heidegger’s portrayal *Augenblick* does indeed convey Dasein to an encounter with temporality. For Heidegger, as I have said, the “foundation” or “essence” of Being is not the infinite (as it is for Kant) but rather the extreme limit of temporality – and, hence, when Dasein has a self-encounter, what it is encountering is finitude as such.

Thus, *Augenblick* signifies the “fundamental experience” of everyday “wakefulness” by which Dasein “as a whole” discloses itself *as* the temporality that “temporalizes itself” (1995: 152). This proposition, itself, both conflicts with and parallels Kierkegaard’s discussion. For instance, whereas Kierkegaard claims that *Oieblik* is “incommensurable *with the categories of temporality*” (*Frag*: 62), for Heidegger, *Augenblick* is clearly identified with temporality; however, to the extent

that Heidegger takes the moment to be that out of which temporality emerges, and to the extent that he claims that this *atopos* is fundamentally unknowable, he is clearly in agreement with Kierkegaard. Nevertheless, although sharing these views with Kierkegaard, and although equally convinced that these claims must compel a radical questioning of philosophy as epistemology, Heidegger is most rigorous about evacuating any indication of “eternity” or the “infinite” from his exposition. Rather, and more precisely, wakefulness, for Heidegger, signifies “Dasein’s being impelled into the extremity of that which properly makes possible” (1995: 149). This is an encounter, in short, with what is Dasein’s ownmost, its extreme possibility: Being-toward-death.

Conclusion: Of Philosophy and Philosophizing

At this point, I wish to recall the figure of Socrates. In doing so, I wish to tease out some of the critical aspects of Heidegger’s inquiry into wakefulness, and indicate its relation to what he sees to be the distinction between philosophy and philosophizing.

As I described in Chapter 1, for Socrates, the philosopher is the “one who awakens.” It is easy to be distracted by the ambiguous transitivity of the phrase “one who awakens” (as if it were the job of the philosopher to put a white coat on in the morning, head to the office, and set about waking people up). It is the same with Huxley’s utterance: “Our business is to wake up.” Likewise, with the “Remain Awake” of Martin Luther King, Jr. As is often the case, the wise-one’s tools are analogies and puzzles. In other words: *awakens* takes no object. Conversely, with

wakefulness in one's own nature, there is no need to look outside oneself to find an awakener. The philosopher is one who awakens oneself. Socrates knew this quite well: "But I have no time for such things [i.e., things other than philosophy]; and the reason, my friend, is this. I am still unable...to know myself: and it really seems to me ridiculous to look into other things before I have understood [myself]...I look not into them [i.e., other things] but into my own self" (1995: 5).

In other words: With wakefulness, so too is philosophy in the nature of beings. This is, perhaps, one reason that Kant – when at his most Socratic – says philosophy can never be learned. One cannot learn philosophy – for it is that which, of all things, is most one's own already. It is one's *ownmost* – to borrow a word from Heidegger.

To use Socratic language: philosophy cannot be learned because it is a gift of recollection of the gods. Likewise, one cannot learn the philosopher's love. Not least because, as Socrates says, this love, too, with philosophy, is the gift of the gods. As the figure of Socrates demonstrates so well, the philosopher, the one who awakens, is a lover that awakens to one's love. (And if there is any doubt about the intense passion of the philosopher-lover, one need only read the lover's fable in *Phaedrus*.) The philosopher, however, has no control over wakefulness, just as the lover has no control over loving. That is because the "tender virgin soul" that awakens does not utilize the gift of the gods, as if it were a tool, but rather is in a state of "possession" by the gods. For this reason, Socrates says, of "philosophical love," that it is a "god-sent madness" (1995: 29). The madness of the one "possessed by the god" is

signified in the way the philosopher, in loving his lover, on the one hand, sees not the individual boy that he loves, but rather sees Beauty as such; and, on the other, loves not the individual boy, but loves Love (1995: 37).

To put this another way: Wakefulness, although it is in one's nature, is not something that one possesses. It is rather the case that one is possessed by it. Likewise, just as *awakens* takes no object – so too with philosophical love. The philosophical love that is in the nature of all beings is a love *of* that to which one awakens. The “of” here signifies this: that which loves *is* wakefulness, or, rather, perhaps – following Nietzsche – it would be more precise to say that wakefulness is a loving. Be that as it may: *awakens*, as with *love*, also has no subject. It is not the “I” that awakens or loves. In the moment of wakefulness, there may be waking, and there may be loving, but not one that wakes or one that loves. Wakefulness' self-encounter or “moment of vision” – this “look...into my own self” that, as Socrates says, is a state of possession – discloses the “I” as not-I.

In no small way, then, wakefulness signifies the death of the “I.” That to which one awakens is the death that is one's own. Socrates portrays so well the correlation of death to the one who awakens: the philosopher is the lover of death, or even, death's lover. This is what Socrates means – at least in my rendering – when he says that to be a philosopher is “to desire only death” (2008: 112). Conversely, the individual human being as subject, as philosopher, may be said to have a love of death in its own nature. Death, like philosophy and love, is one's *ownmost*.

This understanding of wakefulness as the wakefulness of death relates to the challenge of self-examination. And, needless to say, it lends a particular uncanniness to the prospect of looking into the mirror as a way of examining “my own self.” Does not the appearance in the mirror of the “I” signify precisely its dis-appearance? Or, to put this somewhat differently: do not “I myself” signify my own death? This may, perhaps, explain why, in the history of western philosophical inquiry, the figure of the philosopher seems often to have sustained an ambivalent relation to the norms of the normals or, as the Greeks say, the *hoi polloi*. It may also speak to the vicissitudes of “negative pleasure” – the repulsion and attraction, the fear and arousal – that, according to Kant, arise simultaneously with the *Augenblick*. And, no doubt, it pertains to Heidegger’s formulation of beings as masquerade. Is it not the case that, within the banal moment of wakefulness, with the dropping of the mask, so to speak, Heidegger is demonstrating something about the possibility of a philosophical self-encounter?

With his rethinking of wakefulness, Heidegger redescribes philosophy and philosophizing. Needless to say, philosophy and philosophizing, for Heidegger, are not what “ordinary understanding” believes them to be. “Philosophy...is not some arbitrary enterprise with which we pass our time as the fancy takes us, not some mere gathering of knowledge that we can easily obtain for ourselves at any time from books” (1995: 4). Rather, philosophy has “something to do with the whole, something extreme” (1995: 4). Philosophy is “something primordial” that “permeates the whole of human life” (1995: 22, 23). In other words, philosophy is an

ontological distinction, and it pertains specifically to Dasein. “Philosophy belongs essentially to the self-hood of Dasein” (1992: 212). Philosophizing, conversely, is an ontic distinction, and pertains to the domain of beings. In this sense, it is not merely the case that “philosophizing...constitutes a fundamental occurrence of Dasein” (1995: 22); more radically: “all existing is already a philosophizing” (1992: 212). Or: “Philosophizing fundamentally belongs to each human being as something proper to them” (1995: 13). The relationship of philosophizing and philosophy, then, mirrors the relation of beings and Dasein. As Heidegger says: “Philosophizing is a fundamental way of Dasein. It is philosophy which, in a concealed way for the most part, lets Dasein first become what it can be” (1995: 22).

This relationship between philosophy and philosophizing may be put in terms of Heidegger’s inquiry into wakefulness. As is clear: wakefulness is not, for Heidegger, something that an individual being undergoes. Wakefulness is the name for a “fundamental experience of Dasein...in which Dasein is encountering itself” (1999: 14). This self-encounter, as Dasein’s giving of itself to itself, is another name for philosophy. Conversely, for Heidegger, wakefulness is always “philosophical wakefulness.” As Heidegger says: “The wakefulness is philosophical – this means: it lives and is at work in a primordial self-interpretation which philosophy has given of itself” (1999: 14). From this vantage, philosophizing, while it pertains to the domain of beings, is yet “an indication which points to a possible path of being-wakeful” (1999: 6). In other words, philosophizing arises in the wake of wakefulness and is oriented toward constituting the moment (*Augenblick*) as that which “transports us

into the *being-there of our Dasein*" (1999: 13). Dasein, however, is always already awake. It is for this reason that Heidegger claims that "task [i.e., of philosophy] has already been fulfilled" (1995: 69).

This idea goes along very well with the Socratic notion that the philosopher is the "one who awakens" and that philosophy, as wakefulness, is in the nature of every being. However: That every being is a philosopher: is this not an outlandish thing to say? Is it not the case that each human being as a subject that says "I" immediately includes itself within a constellation of questionable assumptions about its own existence? "Of course I am what I think I am and if I am not then I am crazy" – as my students would say. In other words, each individual being, as a grasping-being, residing within a domain of illusion, in quite a mundane way, appears to be, not so much a philosopher, but rather a "thinker" that requires its own existence as beyond doubt. Configured by, and arising within a normative (i.e., compulsory/ethical) domain of being-thinking-knowing, the being that says "I," hence, tends to flourish within its own metaphysical common sense.⁴³ From this vantage, it seems, rather, that every being is a metaphysician that proliferates its own somnambulizing discourse

⁴³ Alan Watts makes this point clear, although he uses different terminology. For him, however, "philosophy" is metaphysics, and to be a philosopher is to be a metaphysician. In a specific way, as may become evident in this chapter, I agree most strongly. At any rate, his words are relevant in this context: "But anyone who thinks at all must be a philosopher because it is impossible to think without premises, without basic (and in this sense, metaphysical) assumptions about what is sensible, what is the good life, what is beauty, and what is pleasure. To hold such assumptions, consciously or unconsciously, is to philosophize. The self-styled practical man of affairs who pooh-poohs philosophy as a lot of windy notions is himself a pragmatist or a positivist, and a bad one at that, since he has given no thought to his position" (1966: 140).

as a self-lullaby. In this case, every being, as one who awakens, seems, quite simply, at the same time, to be the one who sleeps.

And, yet, this too is the case, according to Heidegger. For what philosophizing signifies is the possibility of ushering beings into an encounter with the extremity of Dasein: with their own Being-toward-death. Hence, beings flourish in a flight from what is their ownmost – and it is for this reason that they are capable of looking in the mirror and not envisaging their own death. The fact is, in other words, that “we ourselves do not know whether we are philosophizing or not” (1995: 19). In the face of this uncertainty and ambiguity, Heidegger asks: “Does not everything then really begin to vacillate?” Heidegger answers this question in a way that is certainly not surprising: “Indeed. Everything should start to vacillate” (1995: 19).

The point here is that, just by the fact of existing, beings, whether they are aware of it or not, are drawing themselves into a fundamental questionableness. The masquerade that Dasein holds up to itself is indeed an index of this fundamental questionableness. And beings, for the most part, flee: which is the condition of their own possibility. For Heidegger, however, the terror in the face of our very nature is not something that we should heed. As he says: “We must rather uphold and hold out in this terror. For in it there becomes manifest something essential about all philosophical comprehension, namely that in the philosophical concept, man, and indeed man as a whole is in the grip of an attack – driven out of everydayness and driven back into the ground of things” (1995: 21). This attack, however, is

misrecognized, taken as if it were a threat that was present at hand. Wakefulness, in contrast, signifies a philosophizing that dispenses with the metaphysical (i.e., the concept of the subject). It signifies a cessation of a compulsory-metaphysical forgetfulness that is always already the case. Things, thus, from the vantage of wakefulness, appear otherwise: “In philosophizing the Dasein in man launches an attack on man. Thus man in the ground of his essence is someone in the grip of an attack, attacked by the fact ‘that he is what he is’, and already caught up in a comprehending questioning” (1995: 21).

Just by the fact of existing, beings, in philosophizing, are providing themselves with their own access to Dasein. In their very nature, according to Heidegger, beings may “catch sight of...something entirely other” (1995: 304) and “understand the innermost power of the nothing” (1995: 299). Misrecognition and the recognition, however, go hand in hand: “Transposed into the possible, he must constantly be mistaken concerning what is actual. And only because he is thus mistaken and transposed can he become seized by terror. And only where there is the perilousness of being seized by terror do we find the bliss of astonishment – being torn away in that wakeful manner that is the breath of all philosophizing” (195: 366). This then is the task of philosophizing: “To understand the innermost power of the nothing.” And why? “Precisely in order to let beings be as beings” (1995: 299).

Chapter 5

Conclusion: Welcome Home

...and the world will live as one...

Nabokov, with typical tenor of tenderness and humility, says of his own self-examination: “The confessions of a synesthete must sound tedious and pretentious to those who are protected from such leakings and drafts by more solid walls than mine are” (1989: 35). And so it seems for me that my life-long attempts to attend to the myrmidons of wakefulness have been met, for the most part, with a similar vicissitude among the domain of the *hoi polloi*. Needless to say, I now tend to surround myself with a fine group – though too dispersed – of question-mark-loving companions whose walls are as similarly leaky and drafty as mine. I have a special name for this gang of wonderers who find comfort in each others’ weirding ways: the remainders. I mean this in the sense of that which follows the decimal point after a procedure of long division – a quantity that, somehow resisting the severing compulsions of the normals, cannot be divided exactly by another. Does anyone do long division anymore? We remainders: we are, it seems, very old fashioned.

As a child, however, there was less vicissitude and more explicit antagonism. The severings of the *hoi polloi*: they inspired confusion and fear within a boy like me who had a tendency to stare about and not “get” what he was witnessing. My far-away-ness, coupled with other qualities that, in retrospect, I could only distinguish as

the birthing of my weirding way – these inspired other boys to want beat me up (which they did), while teachers would “give” me detention for daydreaming (as they called it), and my family really did seem to be quite concerned. One may wish to pause at the point of “daydreaming” and wonder at its placeless place, into which, and out of which, that which arises may seem to undergo cessation.

Be that as it may: There is a joke that my friends and I tell each other when we are confronted by the challenges of present-moment-suffering. We talk about the “cosmic hoodwink” (for me a specific reference to Kant and his well-chosen words to describe the subreption and hypostasis of the subject as a “cosmic idea”) – and we gesture to a future moment when, in its afterwardsness, the hoodwink shall reveal itself in all its glory with the grand outpourings of the “cosmic laughter.” And so it is: My prior uncanniness in the neighborhood of a childish public domain, in hindsight, is more than just a cherished mystery of childhood. Fabled by the daughters of memory, as Joyce would say, it now, surprisingly, all makes sense. It evokes a relishable familiarity, a canny meaningfulness. The fable of my childhood now stands as a monument to whatever it is I seem to be now, living a life filled with a lifelong passion for the absurd and a sensibility for the impossible – a disposition for the otherwise. Thus may I reflect on the singular path that, as a retroactively composed – or perhaps poetized – fiction (*hinzugedichtet*), appears to have led me to this very point. It is as if I have been waiting all my life for this moment.

I feel compelled to reveal a few more aspects of this autobiographical fable – for indeed, as I have always been convinced, philosophy, if anything, is

fundamentally personal. And, needless to say, as Foucault shows so well in his *History of Sexuality, Volume 1, An Introduction*: the confession is one of modernity's privileged modes by which the "I" arises as subject. In other words: it pertains to the person.

One tale I wish to tell shows the banal intersection of Foucault and Lacan: for it is the tale of my very own interminable mirror-phase. Lacan likes to use the figure of the mirror to talk about how the "ego" comes to be constituted, through procedures of *meconnaissance*, as a self-image that is simultaneously an other to itself. In terms of my own mirror-phase, what I have to reveal is something that most of my friends, and indeed many of my students, have known for some time. That is: when I look at myself in the mirror, I cannot help but see a question-mark. I cannot help but see it because, between my eyebrows, a single hair grows in such a way that, from the vantage of a mirrored self-reflection, it appears as a question-mark. Someone looking directly at me just sees a singular hair growing from this in-between-the-eyes place. But if they look in the mirror with me, the question-mark appears. There have been a few occasions when I have pulled the question-mark-hair out of my face as an act of rebellion. "I've had enough of that!" – I'd say, by which I meant: all this questioning really has gotten tiresome. One time, when I was having stitches removed from my forehead, a nurse pulled out the hair without asking me! Just before I sat down to write this dissertation, I pulled the hair out in more of a philosophical-ritual fashion. As the writing commenced, and as it took over my life, and as it arrived at its conclusion – I have watched the question-mark-in-my-face grow on a daily basis. I

cannot help but see myself, my own person, indeed, the masquerade that is me, as a question-mark. No joke.

The second tale I wish to relate concerns Jacques Derrida – and particularly the 2002 movie *Derrida*. The fact is that, each time I see this film, I weep. I weep for many reasons, but usually the tears come from a place of gratitude for someone who taught me how to read and play with the joy of reading. The last time I saw the film, however, I wept like never before. This weeping came from a different place. The relevant scene in the film comes when the director, Amy Kofman, asks Derrida to speak of love (“l’amour”). Derrida’s immediate response: “L’amour ou la mort?” Love or death? Kofman clarifies: Love. What a beautiful French Freudian Slip! However, there was no laughter. And, in fact, I – of a sudden – realized that I had never felt the laughter of the figure of Derrida – a Derrida who knew Nietzsche so well, and who lived a life committed to demonstrating how texts undergo a *Destruction* that is their very own, and of their own. Derrida’s response, without laughter, was: “Love? I have nothing to say about love. At least pose a question. I can’t examine ‘love’ just like that...No, no...It’s not possible.” The figure of Derrida could not examine “love” just like that. The Derridean figure did not see that love-death does not require a question to be posed; rather, its examination is already the case a self-examination. In itself it is the questioning that draws the questioner into a fundamental questioning. It examines itself. In that moment I wept because what I saw in the figure of Derrida was a figure of refusal. I understood at that moment why the figure of Derrida, for me, was always a great reading-teacher but not a

Socratically inspired visage of *one who awakens*: One who awakens to the love that is one's ownmost as an absolute relation to the death that is one's ownmost. Is this an impossible demand? Yes. And yet what I have seen in the figures of Socrates, Martin Luther King, Jr., Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger – and yes, even Kant – is an attunement to, and a resonating with, a faith in the impossible by virtue of the absurd.

Recently, a friend, who has been following closely my journey of dissertation-composition, sent me a text message: “My question is what have you awakened to in the process of writing on past revelations of the waking state?”

The fact is, of course, that there is no way to answer her question. Or, rather, perhaps it is that this entire dissertation is a questioning-answer to the question.

Be that as it may: The response that I did send to her seems to me to serve quite well as a summary of the journey. “Welcome home! Haaha you funny person!” In other words, is there really anything one can say about wakefulness other than...it is homeliness? While Novalis so very aptly declares homesickness as the very determination of philosophy – and while Nietzsche says it is the fate of the subject to remain ever homeless, living with an impossible desire “to bring something home” – is it not the case that the moment of wakefulness, as impossible as it may be, is an unconcealment of always already being home? Living in forgetfulness, the person, as masquerade, appears so much like a comedian – and really an old style slap-stick comedian – one that suffers all sorts of wacky adventures while looking for that which is right there all along. This idea does seem to correspond to what Heidegger

says about the relation of beings to Dasein: as beings, we *exist*, and to the extent that we exist we have *exited* Dasein. Existence is Dasein's "binding" self-egression. As such, the individual being, as subject, is an uncanny, or more precisely, *unheimlich* – unhomely – character. And yet the unhomely is precisely the revelation of the homely – and that is wakefulness.

This, then, is what I want to dwell within, or upon, during this brief conclusion. I want this conclusion to convey a sense of dwelling. That is: Although I have spoken at length about homesickness, homelessness, and suffering as comprising the life of the subject – and although, in Chapter 1, I have spoken of the discomfort of becoming enigmatic to myself – what has inspired this dissertation, at the most fundamental level, is the experience of profound peace and joy that arise in the wake of wakefulness – what Heidegger calls the "bliss of astonishment."

Wonder is another word for this experience. Wonder, in this sense, encompasses many things. As that which arises in the wake of wakefulness, it is, as I have said, a disposition for the otherwise. And while it does seem to propel one ever onward in a turning toward its site of emergence, the most significant aspect of wonder, at least for me, is that of an enabling: *to let beings be as beings* (as Heidegger says). To let beings be as beings: this pertains not just to others, but also to oneself. And to this extent, the profound peace and joy, that is, the wonder, that arises in the wake of wakefulness, may be said to have the quality of equanimity. Equanimity – let us call this a mode of opening to oneself and others, an opening that is an enabling-presencing in the face of the question that is already being asked by the

fact of one's own appearance and the appearance of others as individual human beings. To put this another way: that "I myself" may let myself be – this in itself signifies a cessation of suffering.

It is in this sense that wonder may be said to comprise and inspire – and perhaps even compel – a sifting humour. The sifting humour, however, is not a drive to test people, or to challenge them to confront themselves. As I describe in Chapter 1, it seems more like a speaking – for one's own sake – of the question that one already is. In this respect: it occurs to me that when Heidegger speaks of *Destruktion*, he is being quite playful. And, this, for two reasons: first, of course, because there is no object of *Destruktion* and nothing to "destroy;" and second, because the very life of individual beings, as subjects that have wakefulness in their nature, bears forth a questioning that draws the questioner into a questioning of its own that is its ownmost.

Thus, as I have said, there is a certain quality of the detour that goes along with asking the question "Who are you and how do you know." But that can't be helped – or so it seems to me. For really, if wonder were to speak, it would not ask a question. Rather, in the presence of the question mark – the quidditas – that the human being is, wonder utters a mere:

WHAT

This is another way of saying that, in the wake of wakefulness, wonder positions one in such a way that one may not be exceedingly distracted by the

severing of the world into subjects, objects, and others. Wonder signifies an attunement, in other words, to the *one* – or what Martin Luther King, Jr., calls the “interrelated structure of reality.” It enables *one* to be in the presence of difference, to honor difference and *one-self*, as the only mode of being for individual beings – and yet it allows one not be hoodwinked by difference’s play of semblance. In the wake of wakefulness, one may say, with Martin Luther King Jr., “I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be.” This is true – particularly if one chooses to follow the path of Kant. And yet, one may also say: “I am always what I am because you are always what you are” – to the extent that, at the same time, “I am not what I am and you are not what you are.”

The difference between the two statements may seem like the difference between Kant and Heidegger. For Kant, as I have discussed, the moment of wakefulness awakens one to an immanent infinitude that is humanity – from which to generate an ethics of the individual. For Heidegger, there is the finitude and indifference of the nothing – from which arises the enabling-healing of letting beings be as beings. However, it occurs to me that, whether one calls it humanity or the nothing, in the wake of wakefulness, residing within wonder, it is possible to inspire projects of peacefulness that seek the impossible. John Lennon, for me, embodies such inspiration. We may perhaps witness a meeting of Kant, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger in Lennon’s song “Imagine:”

Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky

Imagine all the people living for today

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people living life in peace

You, you may say
I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one
I hope some day you'll join us
And the world will be as one

Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people sharing all the world

You, you may say
I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one
I hope some day you'll join us
And the world will live as one

Lennon's vision of the oneness of the world organized around the dissolution of identity demonstrates a profound faith in the possibility of the impossible – and it is for this reason that its dream seems absurd and paradoxical, even an offence to modern sensibility. However, the key to this vision is not a nihilism of the nothing, but the making-possible-enabling of sky. Is his vision not driven by a love of Love that is a love of death – in other words, philosophy and wakefulness?

In this dissertation, I have merely wished to explore four basic possibilities: First, that beings, or individual subjects, possess wakefulness and wonder in their very nature. Second, that wakefulness is available to, and already present for, each being in every moment. Third, that every being is always already awake. And

fourth, that every individual being *as* a subject lives in forgetfulness of its true nature – a forgetfulness which it is compelled energetically to sustain. As I have said, this exploration has comprised a personal journey for me, precisely because, to put it simply, wakefulness and wonder have been fundamental experiences for me throughout my life. Conversely, this is a journey that I have found to be not singularly my own.

I have spoken with countless people over my life who tell their own tales of wakefulness. Some people are confused by these experiences, or even frightened; others find in them inspiration for pursuing projects oriented toward peace and healing in the world. Some people can only say that they have had the moment of wakefulness once – and even after a long life still find it powerful. For others it is a common occurrence.

I wish to end this dissertation with a tale of wakefulness of my own. As I have noted – such experiences seem to have accompanied me throughout my entire life. There have been moments of wakefulness that, afterward, upon recollecting myself, appear to have been as dramatic as the Kantian sublime. At least one was utterly terrifying. While others have seemed quite pedestrian. The one I am about to relate is of the pedestrian sort, and certainly it is a tale of a certain suddenness. The difficulty of telling such a tale is that – as with much of this dissertation – I am attempting to convey something of a letting-go from within the domain of the grasping-subject. In fact, the tale itself is situated within my own diary, written in my own hand, sometime after the fact. Thus I cannot help but transpose this placeless

encounter into a location that appears to be located within, and moving along through, time. Indeed, from the vantage of my diary, it looks like I was taking a walk after breakfast just before the closing of the cafeteria. Be that as it may, all I can say is that each instant of its seeming movement was no instant at all – and every reference to myself as a time-being having an experience in time is a trick of the narrative. For indeed, within such a moment there was no experience, and not one that experienced. Or to put this another way, arising with a fundamental experience of wonder, is a living of a loving that returns from oneness to life:

Walking toward the entrance of the cafeteria after breakfast, tea cup in one hand, banana in the other, I briefly turn to notice the yellow flowers. Sun is rising at this instant over the hill behind, light streaking through trees, prisms of color...I think: "Oh, they are turning to the sun" – and they are. Of a sudden: I enter into a distinct lush domain of warmth light color tingling relaxation peace awareness equanimity relief wonder awe relief. I see the flowers and breathe with them – we breathe together – and find their beauty unfathomable and almost excruciating but at the same time utterly familiar and soothing like a balm. I see the bees going into the flowers and I see/feel their total oneness – I feel my oneness with the flowers and the bees...where so...I occasionally close my eyes and there inhabit impossible beautiful worlds of yellow and light and prisms and warmth and entities that all unfold into each other and arise and dissolve into each other as one as unity and I experience...The soundscape is exquisite. I experience the sounds of birds singing to my left and of dishesilverware cleaning to my right – together as a sonic dance of such loveliness I have never known... Yet such a normal experience, even though I don't "have" it everyday and occasions like this are very special – still I see that I have them everyday...I momentarily see how I regularly experience this in brief passing sensations of beauty, which I depart from, keep moving as if compelled. The compulsion to keep walking, move away, I see now as a normal procedure of evasion (like past/future fantasy evasions, dozing, pain-reactivity, etc.). And I watch that sensation arise in me and see it pass and thus I stay, remain in this moment holding banana and teacup standing near the entrance to food hall as occasionally others passed through the door moving in their silent way – So many things to say! And yet, not. Yes...

Chapter 6

Appendix: Of The ‘I’ and Illusion

.....
..... *..this is, still, the instant ..*
.....
..... *.. this, presently, neither my absence nor me, neither
death nor light – and my absence and me, death and light – a light
laugh rises in me like the sea, fills the absence immensely...*⁴⁴

I have been invited to write an appendix to my dissertation, *Of Wonder and Waking*. More particularly, I have been given the task of clarifying a few issues that may have arisen for the reader along the path of reading. These are issues that, on the one hand, may have been important for the text as a whole, and yet, on the other, may not necessarily have been central to the project I have been pursuing. Attending to such a task, indeed, seems quite appropriate for an “appendix,” which, conventionally understood, comprises supplementary material that, appended to a text afterward, contains information that is significant for, but is not essential to, a text’s body. In this case, I shall address three questions, which are, no doubt, intimately related: How do I account for my insistence on deploying the first person singular throughout the

⁴⁴ Georges Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge* (p.99).

body of text? What do I make of the “narrative authority” of the ‘I’? And, what is illusion?

At the end of Chapter 3, I reflect on the mystery of writing. One aspect of this mystery is that everything that shows up in my life during the writing appears to have everything to do with the writing, and vice versus. As usual, this too is the situation with this appendix. I have faith that my explanation of this situation may clear a path toward addressing the three questions that comprise a supplement to this dissertation.

I have always felt a strong connection to appendixes of all sorts – and particularly the appendix that is found in humans. The vermiform appendix – as it is known in medical discourse – is a narrow, “blind” tube protruding from the cecum (the first part of the large intestine) near the junction with the small intestine. Situated in the lower right-hand part of the abdomen, this “worm-shaped” element is usually three to four inches long. The fact that medical discourse describes this tube as “worm-shaped” and “blind” is fascinating enough. What is a blind tube? What does the shape of the appendix have to do with worms? But even more interesting is the fact that – ongoing research notwithstanding – the appendix is said to have “no known useful function.” *No known useful function*. The very expression is saturated with the seductions of the scientific industry, which is so often interleaved with the banalities and redundancies of modern nation-states and their lullabies.⁴⁵ One

⁴⁵ One cannot help but think of the molecules that the US government has labeled “schedule one.” These comprise substances or drugs that, according to the government, have “no currently accepted medical use in treatment of the United States.” Any substance that is labeled “schedule one” is illegal. What this means is that the government never has

wonders: may something have a useless function, a useful nonfunction, or, indeed, a useless nonfunction? When I attend to the vermiform appendix as an element of scientific discourse, I get the sense that this little blind, worm-like tube stands in for, and presents, a gargantuan challenge to the life of a modern scientific practice driven by an ancient project: *Know Thyself!* To put this in other terms, the appendix represents a threat to the life of science, which believes that a something must have a function and must – out of the unknown – come to be known. In a specific sense, then – that is, within medical discourse – the appendix is a monster. It is an incomprehensibility within a domain of comprehensibility that, at any moment, and under certain circumstances, may threaten to subject comprehensibility, that is, itself, to violence.

Be that as it may: When I was six years old, I had my appendix removed. This appendectomy, of course, was not of my own choosing. In fact, I could not comprehend what had exactly taken place for many years to come. All I knew at the time was this: one moment I am sitting in a doctor's office – confused, and in pain; the next moment I am laying in a strange bed with my family all around explaining to me that I am in a hospital and that I have just “had my appendix out.” A week afterward, I was back home, and all that was left of my experience was a scar on my lower right abdomen.

Or so I thought. For my entire life – or at least since elementary school – I have suffered from acute muscle spasms in my lower back. The onset of these

conducted research to discover any use, and that citizens are forbidden to conduct experiments on these substances to find out whether they may have a use.

spasms has always seemed unpredictable – however, in more recent years they have become more intense and occasionally quite debilitating. One particularly intense episode took place just prior to the completion of this dissertation. Following the suggestion of a doctor, I arranged to have X-rays of the area. The X-rays revealed two things. The first, quite predictable, was some mild degeneration in two discs in the lowest part of my spine (which the doctor said was typical for a man of my age and body type). The second, however, was a surprise: a small staple in the area between the cecum and the junction of the lower intestine. In other words, the surgeon who, decades ago, had conducted my appendectomy had left something behind! Following upon this discovery, I began working with a chiropractor and a rolfer. Both of these specialists explained that – as a procedure that cuts through skin and muscles, and that pushes organs aside – an appendectomy comprises a powerful trauma that typically leaves scar tissue deep within the body (i.e., not just at the initial point of incision). When this happens at an early age, the still-growing body develops around the site of trauma and scar-tissue, and generates life long habits of posture and movement designed to protect that traumatized area as if it were protecting an organ that is no longer there. In the case of my own appendectomy, the abandoned staple in my abdomen supplemented these normal compensatory developments. Hence, someone who looks at my body when the QL and the SOAS muscles are in the midst of an acute spasm notices that a kind of nexus of restriction forms around the place where the appendix used to be and where now remains only a scar. Presently, i.e., every week during the period when I am writing this appendix, I see a rolfer who is

training my body to reorganize its movings and restings in new ways that are not oriented toward protecting an appendix that it does not have.

The appendix is a paradoxical entity. Or rather, it is a figure of paradox itself. A presence that is present through its absence: scar, scar tissue, abandoned staple, spasms around a ghost organ, lifelong compensation for a haunting sense of lack, a presence-absence of something that – within scientifico-medical discourse – is an icon nonknowing and purposelessness. Its removal is no removal. Is it any wonder that the appendix, whether mine or the one of medical science, comprises a force of compulsion? A compulsion that takes the form of an incitement to discourse? A discourse that, before one knows it (i.e., compulsively), seeks to identify, explain, and track the origins of an identity (whether mine or the status of a scientific subject supposed to know)? Is it any wonder – also – that Kant called the “Analytic of the Sublime” an *appendix* to his entire philosophical enterprise – an enterprise which, hence, comprises a disavowal of the function of the sublime, and identifies its “purposelessness” as a danger that must be policed by the postulates of pure practical reason in service of developing a true metaphysics-to-come? One day I shall write a book on the sublime and call it, simply, *Kant’s Appendectomy*.

By now one would hope that this need not be a surprise – and yet one is surprised nevertheless. That is: so long as I am ‘I’, I shall retreat from the figure of the paradox – and the retreat shall take the form of a fable that accounts for my very being as being present now, as having been then, and, hopefully, as enduring afterward. This retreat, or refusal – as I call it in my introductory chapter – this desire

to remove the paradox from oneself, or to remove oneself from the domain of paradox, appears to be a habitual impulse. More often than not it is fear driven and, concurrently, veiled in the productive mists of forgetfulness. In contrast: The tale of Socrates is a testament to a life lived otherwise. Residing within the domain of paradox is quite a task (not least because it requires a doing that is a nondoing). Why? Deleuze says it quite well: “Paradox is initially that which destroys good sense as the only direction, but it is also that which destroys common sense as the assignation of fixed identities” (1990:3). In short, the appendix *qua* paradox, often enough, inspires a seemingly reactionary drive toward identification: a process of grasping onto a visage of fixity or stability, a return to the subject – the ‘I’ – so as to protect it from its true nature. The appendix, then, has all the features of a detour on the way to philosophy (as I elaborate in Chapter 1).⁴⁶ And yet, as I discuss in Chapter 2, this detour is no detour at all.

To put this in other words: the appendix, by its very nature, raises the question of the subject. Whether in terms of scientifico-medical discourse, or in terms of the norms of textual practice, its definitive feature is its afterwardsness – an afterwardsness that returns one to a putative place of origin to tell the tale of

⁴⁶ In this sense, I cannot hide my giddy feeling at having returned to the Excursus of Chapter 1 and having re-read the first footnote on the first page, where I explain my understanding of *excursus*: I use “excursus” here, precisely, in the double sense provided by its definition as both “a digression” and a “detailed discussion.” Anticipating the point developed at the end of the excursus, it is indeed a detour on the way to a philosophy of wonder and wakefulness – a movement toward the beginning of the dissertation that may appear in the visage of a movement away. In this sense, it signifies the beginning of an inquiry while also indicating its end (i.e., traditionally, an “excursus” is also, often, used as an “appendix” to a text). The Latin etymology is most apt: a “running forth” which is “to run” (*currere*) “out” (*ex*).

beginnings in search of a doer of deeds. Is there not a purpose? Is there not a cause? Can it not be known? The answer, I hope it is clear by now, is very simple: Yes and No. Both. Simultaneously. My (necessarily) futile attempts to sustain paradox throughout this entire text may be related to a curious feature of the entire enterprise. That is: I have not wanted to write about the subject, I have not been writing about the subject, and yet that is the only thing I can write about (as I clarify in my introduction to Chapter 3).

Notwithstanding this intriguing situation (i.e., that all one can talk about is the subject): there is one thing that I have not concerned myself with in this dissertation – and that is subjectification or subject formation. It may be helpful to briefly explain why. To put it quite simply: I have already devoted 20 years to doing research on, and writing about, subjectification. I gesture toward this history in Chapter 2, where I look closely at the manner in which my own inquiries into subjectification ultimately did not serve my own desire to draw the subject into question. Rather, all that I drew into question was knowledge, while positioning what I called the questioning subject at the foundation of all inquiry, sequestering it from any questioning itself. And thus, unwittingly, my own work remained within, and proliferated, the legacy of Cartesian metaphysics. To put this another way: my work on such things as diaspora, violence, and disciplinarity led me to realize the limits of a model of inquiry organized around the rubric of subjectification. I wanted to learn how to conceive of moments characterized not by subject formation but by the dissolution of the subject. Or, in

other words: I wanted to address questions of being and nonbeing that did not rely upon, presume, or focus on the constitution of the human being as sovereign subject.

That said: it is important for me to acknowledge that everything that I have written in this dissertation comprises an honoring of the works of those who have written on the topic of subjectification. For me, these include, most significantly Jacques Lacan, Emile Benveniste, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler. I have studied, taught, and written about their texts for almost half of my life (which is a somewhat shocking thing to admit – 20 out of 45 years!). In ways that continue to astound me, their texts demonstrate – with precision, power, humour, and boundless ingenuity – the manner in which the subject arises at the intersection of, and simultaneous with, formations of language, power, discourse, desire, fantasy, corporeality, sexuality, gender, temporality, otherness, and abjection. And, needless to say, they owe what they accomplished to their own engagements with certain readings of Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Hegel, and Kant. Thus, when, in Chapter 1, I write of how Kant provides an analysis of performativity more than 200 years before Judith Butler, I am merely indicating a genealogical relation that, I have no doubt, not only Judith Butler already knows, but so too Emile Benveniste (who translated Austin into the French scene), and so too Austin (who acknowledges his debt to Kant in his own text). I would be honored if a reader were to notice my own debt to these figures in a genealogy of philosophical inquiry concerned with a questioning of the subject.

However, it has not been my aim to discuss Jacques Lacan, Emile Benveniste, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler in this text. They saturate my

possible thought at every turn, and they have made possible all that I have done. They pervade this text by way of a certain *paralepsis*. And, more so, their words, and their turns of phrases, can be found in almost every paragraph. That is what happens when one studies texts so closely – just as when one spends long years with a lover: one realizes that one’s words are not one’s words, and one gives up any desire to own one’s words as one’s own. We do not need Bakhtin to teach us this (ah! but we are grateful to him for saying it!).

And they – these thinkers of subject-formation – pervade this text in another sense, one which may be more pertinent to the fables of an appendix. That is: I began my dissertation project with the explicit intention of wanting to begin from where they left off. They have demonstrated so powerfully that the subject is an illusion – and they have tracked the multiple processes by which that illusion is constituted. I have felt that, in order to pursue an inquiry into wakefulness and wonder – into the nothing and the nameless – it is not necessary to rehearse all that these thinkers have said. Hence, in this text, I have avoided all of the normal themes that go along with a study of subjectification: including, for instance, the question of otherness. As far as I am concerned, Lacan put it quite well when, in a 1953 seminar, he said to his students: “I is an other” – but then quickly warned them not too get excited. He had already – for 20 years at least – reached the limits of an analysis that posited the other as an empirical someone that existed outside of the ‘I’. Rather, he transposed Heidegger and said that the “other” is that which is my ownmost: death. And he offered new aphorism: “Being of nonbeing: that is how I as subject come on the

scene” (of course, Lacan was a comedian, and he certainly intended the sexual innuendo). It is infinitely fascinating that what Lacan (and these others) have said still has not become common sense! And so I am happy that there are younger scholars who remain committed to the study of subjectification, and along with it questions of otherness. I am happy to turn their attention to the writings of Jacques Lacan, Emile Benveniste, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler.

It is interesting to note that, in order to depart from where these thinkers of subjectification left off, I have found it important, and necessary, to go back to those that came before. For indeed, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger were telling everyone to abandon the subject as a way of organizing inquiries into existence or Being. And, as I have indicated in Chapter 3, even Kant’s appendix tells a tale that leaves the subject behind (even if just for the moment).

And so: in the spirit of the appendix, I turn once again to the question of the subject. As I have said, in Chapter 3, each turning is a returning that is, nevertheless, never the same. In this instance, I return to the question in a manner that is somewhat different. The question looks like this: why have I seemed to have insisted upon writing in the first person singular throughout the body of the text?

I have several responses to this question – most of which shall raise further questions (no doubt requiring another appendectomy). Most immediately, and superficially – though not insignificantly: my seeming insistence on writing in the first person may be understood to be simply a matter of taste and style met with my own limited capacity as a writer. I am striving to learn to write as clearly as possible

– and I am hoping to learn to entertain the reader while reflecting on something that I feel passionate about. I have found that my favorite writers – whom I take as my tutors – succeed most when they write in the first person singular. I am trying to learn from them. These include all of the philosophers that I have discussed in this text, as well as many other writers that have inspired me in my life, including William Burroughs, Vladimir Nabokov, and Alan Watts, among many others. One basic reason why their writing succeeds (far beyond anything I could presently hope to achieve) is that their texts offer the opportunity to the reader to identify with the ‘I’ in the text – and, thereby, explore or inhabit the possibilities and impossibilities that the texts themselves elaborate.

It is important to note that this matter of taste and style, which is inspired by these writers, cannot be separated from what these writers say about the ‘I’. And in this way, I wish to insist that what I say about the subject in this dissertation is inseparable from the supposed subject of the text. In other words, the text is to be read as something that applies to itself, especially when it comes to the ‘I’ of the supposed author. This possibility immediately makes what I have said about the reader and identification more specific and more complicated. Let me explain.

What then is the ‘I’? The ‘I’ is an illusion. What do I mean by illusion? Kant speaks of the illusion of the self as a subreption and a hypostatization. That is, it is a particular form of deception by which the subject as appearance is taken to be the thing-in-itself. Kierkegaard says that so too is the thing-in-itself, the noumenal domain, an illusion. And Nietzsche, in agreement with Kierkegaard, calls this

illusion a self-deception – that is, the deception by which the self or subject arises as itself and invests in the belief that it is what it appears to be. Heidegger uses term illusion as well, and, with typical flare, also deploys the term mask. However, it is important to be clear about Heidegger’s use. He is not to be taken to mean that there is a someone that exists prior to or behind the mask, and that holds up a mask in front of itself. Rather, the subject is the mask – the other side of the mask is that which is one’s ownmost, that which is already the case: death.

There, then, is nothing bad about the illusion of the subject. It is the life of the subject – that is all. And this point is directly related to my understanding of wakefulness. For, as I say, wakefulness is in the very nature of the subject. What is the nature of the subject? Illusion. In other words, it is not only the case that the illusion hides nothing. Moreover, it may very well be that illusion, itself, is an illusion. In short, wakefulness is available to the subject at every moment; and, most significantly, the subject is always already awake. However, one of the distinctive qualities of the subject – as Nietzsche and Heidegger emphasize – is that it lives in forgetfulness of its true nature.

I like to define illusion by appealing to its etymology, *in + ludere*. This etymological appeal helps me emphasize the manner in which illusion may signify the “play of semblance” and, just as importantly, “semblance at play.” I wish, in other words, to emphasize play in the life of the subject as illusion. The subject is semblance that arises in play. Play signifies not only non-fixity (although it does do that, and that is quite important – I refer the reader to Bernard S. Cohn and Derrida,

who elaborate such things quite well). Rather, I wish to emphasize play in a double sense that may be conveyed by analogy. On the one hand, play is like the play of children who, while at play, do not play for a purpose but merely for the play. And, on the other, it is like the play of the theatre – except, in this case, the proscenium arch is also part of the play. Thus: that which plays is semblance; and it is semblance's play, playing at nonsemblance. The term masquerade seems to me to convey all of these significations.

To be caught up in the play, and to take semblance for nonsemblance, or to take semblance as actually an appearance behind which is a really real something that is awaiting unmasking – this is called *meconnaissance*. And it entails a form of seriousness that Nietzsche made fun of when he was referring to the metaphysicians (as I discuss in Chapter 2). It is a forgetting of the play of the masquerade – it is the normal life of the subject that, as a being-in-time, lives, for the time-being, in thrall of a severing that is a suffering.

For some strange reason – to use the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. – I have developed a kind of disposition for the otherwise, which, since I was a child, has occasionally allowed me to be attuned to the masquerade (in the specific sense I am using the term here). For this reason, and following Nietzsche and Heidegger, I also like to refer to the 'I' as a question-mark. I mean this in this sense: the 'I' is always already in itself the questioning that draws the questioner (i.e., itself) into a fundamental questioning. For many people, such a possibility is quite disturbing (as I describe in Chapter 1). However, for me, this possibility, this disposition for the

otherwise, is infinitely funny. And therefore, I find that what Hume called the philosopher's "sifting humour" to be always saturated with a laughter at what I call (in Chapter 5) the "cosmic hoodwink." Perhaps it is for this reason that Nietzsche was always laughing. Philosophy (as I define it in Chapter 4) is deeply personal, for it concerns the person – i.e., the masquerade – and, in this way, comprises a tight-rope act filled with wonder and slapstick.

Here then is another reason why I insist on writing in the first person singular: to persist in presenting the comedic masquerade to myself and the reader; that is, to reiterate the insistently iterable play of the question-mark that is the 'I'. I believe that Foucault said this quite well: "The genealogist will know what to make of this masquerade. He will not be too serious to enjoy it; on the contrary, he will push the masquerade to its limit and prepare the great carnival of time where masks are constantly reappearing. No longer the identification of our faint individuality with the solid identities of the past, but the 'unrealization' through the excessive choice of identities... Taking up these masks, revitalizing the buffoonery of history, we adopt an identity whose unreality surpasses that of God who started the charade" (1977: 160-161). In other words, as I have said throughout, the 'I' is an indexical icon of its ownmost possibility – that the individual human subject is no individual human subject. The insistence on using the 'I' is an insistence on the possibility of the impossible, that is, on the possibility of what Foucault calls "unrealization." And what I shall call the moment of wakefulness.

And this is what I invite the reader to explore. As I have said, in simple terms, when one reads a text that is written in the first person singular, a process of identification may take place. In my understanding, however, the reader is not an ‘I’ that shows up before the book, enacts a reading throughout the book, and closes the book when finished. Rather, it may be that the ‘I’ as a subject of reading is an after-effect that, only afterward, is constituted as that which came before, and as that which exists prior to and outside of a textualizing discourse. The ‘I’ of the supposed reader is as much masquerade as the ‘I’ of the supposed author (both, diversely, and strangely, appended to the text) – so much play of semblance! so much buffoonery! For, in my limited view at least, no ‘I’ is identical to itself, ever – not the supposed reader’s and not the supposed author’s. As I have said: If I am certain of anything, it is that I am not (me). And this, for some reason, is quite funny. I have infinite faith that one reader shall read this text and laugh and laugh.

Alas! what I am saying is not new. William Burroughs, perhaps, said it with the most spirit and wit of anyone in the last pages of his *Naked Lunch*. And, after him, Foucault said it quite programmatically in his 1969 essay “What is an Author?” There, in that essay, Foucault precisely identifies, and distinguishes between, diverse formations that all appear to congeal within the figure of the author: for instance, the author as proper name (e.g., Brian Keith Axel), the author as putative anterior referent (i.e., the one who, in a phantasmatic past moment, wrote a book), the author as a “rational entity” whose “intentions or original inspiration manifested in writing” (1977: 127), and the authorial ‘I’ as an indexical icon (or “shifter”) that generates a

fantasy of (i.e., indexes or points to) a time and place and body of a writing. The fact is, however, as Foucault demonstrates, these diverse formations definitively *do not congeal* within the figure of the author. The figure of the author – or what Foucault calls the “author function” – arises with, and out of, their “scission” (1977: 129); conversely, every instance of discourse in which the authorial ‘I’ arises is saturated with, and is interminably presenting, the vicissitudes of that scission. Another way to describe this scission is semblance at play, as masquerade, and, finally, as illusion. Foucault’s choice of word – scission – is quite apt, for it suggests the possibility of the author as arising out of an act or process of cutting. Needless to say, the correspondence with the concept of the appendix barely need be mentioned.

All of which to say – and this is to address the last question posed to the author: *there is no narrative authority*. Not in this text, and not in any text. And this is not just because there is no author (although that is the main reason). It is rather that the fantasy of authority is utterly, and simultaneously, disassembled by the figure of the author – in the same way that the ‘I’, as question-mark, is a figure of its own death that is always already the case. Likewise for supposed narrative. Derrida demonstrated this long ago: text is interminably aporetic; text does not cohere; text is heterogeneous to itself. And finally, recalling what I have said about time in this dissertation: it is just not the case that temporality is such a thing that begins in a past, moves through a present, and passes into a future. Or, to enact a typical Foucaultian inversion: let me note that it is precisely because of what I have been saying that narrativity is constituted, and with it the masquerade of the author. Judith Butler

knows this well: “The irrecoverability and foreclosure of the referent is the very condition of possibility for an account of myself...The irrecoverability of an original referent does not destroy narrative; it produces it ‘in a fictional direction’, as Lacan would say” (2005: 37). Indeed, to use Lacan’s expression, the fictional direction is all there is. To put this in the terms I have been using in this dissertation: narrativity and the figure of the author comprise fundamental (and fundamentally banal) aspects of the illusion of the subject that lives in forgetfulness, and that suffers through its fear-driven graspings onto impossible objects of desire (please see my discussions in Chapter 2 and the introduction to Chapter 3).

However, I need not say it, but I shall: there is no problem with such graspings! The trouble is no trouble! Narrativity, authority, and the ‘I’ present the possibility of the impossible – a possibility that is always present. That is: of letting go, of wakefulness and wonder. For, as I have said in Chapter 3, the grasping is the letting go. Their relation is the relation of the ocean and the wave – there is no relation. In other words, all of these graspings, all of this suffering, all of this longing to return home, for fixity, for comprehensibility – all of these detours – are themselves the very path of philosophy. And with it: the cessation of all suffering, the end of all violence, prejudice, and hatred.

When I was a child, my twin sister and I had a favorite book. It was called *The Monster at the End of This Book* by loveable furry old Grover. We loved to read it over and over again. Or rather: our Mom read it to us – and she dramatized it beautifully. It told the tale of loveable furry old Grover. Or, more precisely, it portrayed the tale in the moment of reading. Grover warns on the first page that he has heard that there is a monster at the end of the book – and he is very frightened. He beseeches us: whatever we do, we must not go to the end of the book. Of course, to Grover’s surprise, we turn the page. On the next page, he stands there baffled: why did we turn the page? It seems obvious that, since there is a monster at the end of the book, it is only natural that no one would even consider turning a page. Well, we turn the page again. This angers Grover. So he proceeds to try to tie the pages together so that we cannot turn another page – which we immediately succeed in doing. Grover attempts with more and more anger and exasperation to build structures that will make it impossible for us to turn the page. And yet, page after page, we do: and each of his elaborate structures fall apart. At one point, Grover has a moment of reflection. He says: you know, you are very strong! Well, facing the inevitable, that is, facing the fact that the next page is the last page of the book, and the page where the monster awaits; Grover makes one more simple, meager plea: Please do not turn the page. We turn it. And what do we see? Grover – just like on the first page – standing facing us. We laugh, because we love Grover. And, Grover says: Look, the only monster at the

end of this book is me – loveable, furry old Grover! (For, indeed, Grover is a monster – a blue monster.). And he says: I told you there was nothing to be afraid of!

And so a turning to the end of the book is a returning to the beginning – to the question of the ‘I’. This is because, for many years, and indeed since I was a child, I have been curious about personal identity. As I have traveled this path on the way to philosophy, I have often wondered: Is it I that speaks, or I that is spoken? And likewise, along the way, I have asked: What matter who’s speaking? I offer this text to you, with gratitude and love, as a transcript of my journey. It is my hope that it may serve you in some way as you pursue your own.

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