The Metaphysics of Ordinary Experience

By Stanley H. Rosen

The fundamental premise of this series of lectures is that everyday experience provides us with the only reliable basis from which to begin our philosophical reflections. Radical deviations from ordinary experience are indistinguishable from arbitrary constructions or even fantasies if they are not mediated by a careful exposition of their nature as responses to problems in everyday understanding. A construction having nothing to do with the everyday would, of course, be initially meaningless. Those who wish to begin their philosophical activity by an instantaneous departure from ordinary experience, as though they were shot from a pistol, as Hegel says of certain proponents of the absolute, must after all explain to us why and how they are justified in undergoing the immediate detachment in question. To take a prosaic example, the recommendation to employ a new technical language in order to clarify ordinary English is accomplished via a meta-linguistic exposition that is largely ordinary. To go to the other extreme, even Heidegger prepares his readers for the new type of thinking with a few introductory pages on the origination of genuine problems from the everyday experience of things and the manner in which we speak about them.

I want once more to emphasize that by calling attention to ordinary experience as the basis of philosophy, I do not mean to imply that extraordinary experience and discourse are to be excluded. To the contrary, the ordinary demands that we speak in extraordinary ways. Everyday life is never self-sufficient, but it is impossible to depart from it entirely, and furthermore would we understand what such a departure could mean? This may be illustrated indirectly by an example from literature. James Joyce’s Ulysses presents a long excerpt from the stream of consciousness of a single person, Leopold Bloom, which looks initially like a radical departure from normal syntax and the relative semantical stability of everyday speech. Underneath the hyperbolic representation, however, is the point of the imitation itself; we take our bearings by the very fact that we know

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ourselves to be listening to the flow of Bloom’s consciousness, a flow that is not homogeneous but that occurs at different levels and in different registers. Joyce, in other words, is making a point about human nature in its normal or everyday condition, which is itself the manifestation of the extraordinary. As an artist, Joyce explains indirectly by the act of representation, which is mimetic only in the sense that it presents the human soul by means of an artifact. The artifact distorts, exaggerates, adorns, and in countless ways transforms the ordinary original, but it does not deviate entirely from it or replace it with something uniquely other or entirely unintelligible.

Stated as simply as possible, an artistic construction is designed for two reasons: to enrich and to illuminate our ordinary experience and understanding. The work of art assists us in experiencing more than we would be capable of experiencing by ourselves. But it also sheds light on experience and thereby helps us to understand what we already know about ourselves. It is essential to note that, whereas philosophical disquisitions may be inner elements in a work of art (as for example in Thomas Mann’s Magic Mountain), the artwork itself is not a philosophical disquisition. Marianne Moore says that a poem must not mean but be. In my opinion, this is not quite correct, but it points us in the right direction. Of course, poems or novels have meanings, but they are presented indirectly as the silent penumbra of significance emanating from the illusion of direct experience, whether in word or deed. The long and brilliant reflection on art by the character Marcel in the last volume of Proust’s Remembrance of Things Past can be read apart from its function within the novel, as though it were an essay in a philosophical periodical. But to do this would be to do violence to Proust’s central intention, since the reflection emerges from the detailed experiences of his entire life, as transmuted by recollection within the soul of a person who is literally reconstructing himself by a long act of what one could call hermeneutical memory. The conclusions of this act are invalid apart from our own reappropriation of the experiences from which they emerge, a reappropriation that allows us to translate them into the terms of our own lives precisely because, at bottom, these terms are the same for every human being. They are the terms of ordinary experience. And they are not fully accessible except to the extraordinary speaker. But the extraordinary speech would be empty of genuine significance if it were not rooted in ordinary experience.

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terms) of the superiority of illumination and enrichment to explanation. But we do not write poems or novels in order to explain the superiority of art to philosophy. In this case the "demonstration" of the artist is a pointing out or exhibiting of an instance of the ostensibly superior genre. But something is still missing here, even for the artist: an explanation of the superiority of one genre to the other. And the genre of explanation is philosophy.

Let no one take me to be on the way toward an attempted demonstration of the unqualified superiority of philosophy to art. I do not doubt that art, understood broadly, has an essential role to play within the philosophical activity. My intention is rather to identify that role. Stated somewhat more abstractly, I want to discuss the relation between seeing and making in everyday life, in the hope of casting light on the question of whether we construct, or play an active role in the constitution of, what we discover. In other words, I ask whether the world is an artifact of human perception and cognition, and therefore an art-work, or instead possesses a nature independent of but accessible to our cognitive powers. And if it is an artifact, is it different for each of us or the same for all? This investigation will require me to say something about the nature of truth.

If we cannot ascertain the difference between truth and falsehood, employing these terms in their broad, not their narrow or propositional senses, then there is no difference between a wise or informative artifact and an arbitrary simulacrum. But in this case, there is no difference between philosophy and art, and none between good and bad works of art. In short, if there is no philosophy, there is also no art, because at bottom the truth of an art-work depends upon its philosophical significance. A true work of art expands and illuminates our experience by its own devices, but the discursive appropriation of this expansion and illumination, upon which depends the identification of the truth or genuineness of the work in question, is philosophical. Without philosophy, it would make no sense to speak of a "good" as distinct from a "pleasant" artifact. If there is no valid distinction between good and bad pleasures, or what comes to the same thing, if pleasure is held to be the good, then goodness disappears into neurophysiology. As Socrates pointed out in the Philebus, one must reason correctly, and hence speak the truth, in order to establish the principle that the good is the pleasant. In sum: without the truth, art has nothing to teach us. The successful defense of truth by philosophy is therefore in the best interests of art as well.

Perhaps the central thesis toward which the following remarks are directed is this: the distinction between truth and falsehood depends in turn upon the distinction between seeing and making. Even if it should turn out that we constitute the world by our cognitive activities, the result must be visible in a way that is accessible in principle to everyone. We must be in a position to see what we make, and hence to speak truly about it; and by "truly" is meant in a way that explains something about our common experience. Nevertheless, in keeping with my usual procedure, I do not believe it would be wise to begin with a strict definition of truth. In introducing the notion of truth, I have tacitly appealed to "what everyone knows," and in particular to the question of the difference between art and philosophy, something which perhaps not everyone knows but which can be ascertained without formal or rigorous defini-
tions of the truth-predicate.

The truth-predicate applies to propositions within a formalized language. I am aware of attempts by philosophers to transfer the work of Tarski and others on the formal predicate of truth to the domain of ordinary language, but I cannot see any point to these ventures. To express myself with excessive brevity, the meta-statement that “snow is white” is true if and only if snow is white” amounts to the assertion that the predicate “is true” adds nothing to the assertion of the statement itself, since obviously the expression on the right-hand side of “if and only if” is itself either an assertion or a discursive representation in thought of a perceived or assumed fact. In other words, the assertion “snow is white” has exactly the same meaning or force as the assertion “the statement ‘snow is white’ is true.” I have no reason to doubt this. But as Tarski himself presumably granted, one must understand English in order to apply the general criterion to any particular English statement. And if we understand English, we know more about the word “true” than the very slender information conveyed by the criterion just noticed. It is correct that we use “is true” to characterize statements that we believe to convey a state of affairs. I note in passing that it looks very much as if Tarski is committed to a correspondence theory of truth here; if this is so, his criterion is subject to the further difficulty that we must know that snow is white, and so that it would be true to say that snow is white, prior to the enunciation of the criterion in this particular case. In other words, it looks as though we know what “true” is implicitly whenever we apprehend a state of affairs, and only because of this implicit or intuitive knowledge are we able to define the term.

More important for my purposes, however, is the fact that Tarski’s truth-definition is not a satisfactory basis for constructing a doctrine of truth for ordinary language. The sentence “snow is black” might be true in a poetic sense even though snow is white. Or to take another example, I might utter the statement “it is a beautiful day” ironically when I actually believe that the day is quite unpleasant. There are, in other words, other meanings of “true” than those illustrated by the meta-statement or paradigm. What, for instance, of “true” as “genuine”? It seems to me that in order to follow Tarski’s procedure in the case of ordinary language, we would require a truth-criterion that corresponded to every use of “is true” in ordinary usage. But even if all these criteria could be formulated, how would we apply them? In other words, we could apply the correct criterion if and only if we knew which criterion actually applied in the given case. But if we know this, then the formulae are themselves redundant. We are using the language correctly on the basis of our understanding, not only of the language, but of life, that is, of when it is appropriate to say something rather than something else. Someone could know all the rules and still not know how to apply them; there are no rules for the application of rules.

Examples like “snow is white” are especially misleading because it seems a simple matter to determine its truth. After all, either snow is white or it is not white but, say, blue or red; and everyone knows the colors as well as what snow is. But what about sentences like “Machiavelli is evil” or “the quality of mercy is not strained”? I dare say that the statement “the quality of mercy is not strained” is true if and only if the quality of mercy is not strained. But what is mercy, and what is it for mercy not to be strained? What is the point of this apparently tautological proce-
dure? We surely do not wish to say that sentences are true if and only if they correspond to the state of affairs that is their content. As I have already noted, we must first know that the correspondence in question obtains in order to designate it by a true statement. But how do we know this? Not by uttering a statement that itself corresponds to the state of affairs, since again, we should first have to know that the state of affairs obtains in order to construct such a sentence. But this is trivial.

The interesting fact is that “true” is an equivocal term and none the worse for it. It has a range of meanings from which the normal speaker of a natural language is usually able to select the one that is appropriate to the linguistic situation. There are of course exceptions; sometimes we make a mistake. But the mistake is easily identified and corrected. And the linguistic mistakes cannot be legislated out of existence in advance, any more than the circumstances under which the individual meanings of “true” obtained can be defined in advance or codified by rules of correct usage. I am, however, very far from suggesting that we should not think as carefully as possible about truth. I believe that we can take at least one step toward a conceptual elaboration of the meaning of “true” in its everyday, as opposed to its formalist, uses. And we can do so in such a way as to bring out the relation between seeing and making. If this is so, then we shall at the same time be able to acquire a better understanding of the difference between art and philosophy.

Very frequently, if not always, we say that something is a true instance of a kind if it renders wholly visible the essential nature of that kind. By “wholly visible” I do not mean “in its entire structure” but rather “visible as a whole, and so identifiable as what it in fact is.” A true believer is one who displays enough of the properties of a believer to allow us to pick out believers from non-believers with great accuracy. And this is so even if we are unable to define with complete rigor the “concept” of the believer. This incapacity is rooted in the ambiguous and equivocal nature of all or most concepts of everyday discourse, which we employ successfully not thanks to rules but because of our linguistic tact. What I said above about the equivocality of “true” holds good for a wide range of other terms, perhaps for all of them. What is from a formalist’s standpoint a terrible defect of natural language is from the standpoint of everyday life a tremendous advantage. It is absolutely false to say that, unless we employ formalist analyses of language, we do not know what we are talking about. Rather, the reverse is the case. We do know what we are talking about (and how to correct errors when we make them) in ordinary language; we cease to be talking about anything in particular when we shift to a purely formal language, and so it becomes literally true that we do not know what we are talking about, unless of course we are talking about the symbols and syntax of the formal language itself. But this, however impressive from a technical standpoint, is not very useful.

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either to the average citizen or to the philosopher. The ability to speak a natural language is not grounded in rules but rather in the innate mastery of equivocity. And this in turn is not grounded in the mastery of syntax but in the ability to see what needs to be said as well as to discern what it is that someone means when he or she says something. All rules are a posteriori or ad hoc. The philosophy of language, very far from explaining how we speak meaningfully, is itself a product of our ability to see what ought to be said. I would myself go one step farther and say that there is, in principle, no explanation of how we see what we or others mean, if to explain is to analyze, that is, to break unities or syntheses into their component parts, and these again into simpler elements, until we arrive at something that resists analysis and that exhibits easily intelligible properties which we believe can be transferred upward through the increasingly complex levels of structure until we arrive at the totality or whole. This entire procedure is a waste of time because the unity of our mastery of equivocity, that is, the living intelligence, is no more a property of some set of psychological or neurophysiological elements than the properties of mass, charge, motion, and direction that characterize atomic particles are properties of the activities of my lived body, that is, the episodes of my life.

TO COME BACK NOW TO “TRUE” IN THE SENSE OF “genuine:” I am proceeding by calling up examples before the mind’s eye of my audience, not by formulating rules or defining configurations of symbols. When I spoke just now of a true believer, every person of normal intelligence and experience understood what I meant; and this understanding, although of course impossible without our access to a common language and culture, is not explained by these but rather expresses itself — brings itself into actuality — by producing them. A true believer is not an arbitrary cultural artifact but a phenomenon of the human soul. In the last analysis, it is by the spontaneous light of the human soul that we understand what we mean by “true believer,” and so by “true.” If this is metaphysics, then so be it. When I say that a kind is wholly visible in a true instance, I do not mean that every essential property of the kind is clearly and distinctly visible. In fact, I am hesitant to employ the term “essential” here because I regard it as possible that we are able to recognize true instances even if we should turn out to be incapable of defining essences — and even if there are no essences of an eternal or temporally unchanging nature. I know when I am in the presence of a true, that is, genuine, scoundrel, even though I cannot define the essence “scoundrel.” It is probably more straightforward to define expressions like “a genuine diamond” or even “a genuine tiger.” (Here, we neglect old-fashioned worries about how Aristotle would respond to a three-legged tiger. The answer is that he would call it a defective or deformed tiger, for tigers have four legs by nature.) We run into special trouble when we try to explain exactly what we mean in describing persons or actions. Not to make too great a fuss about it, let me just say that this is because Nietzsche was right to call man the not yet fully constructed animal. Not yet fully, but hence partly; animal, not vegetable or mineral. This extraordinary feature of our natures — namely, that we are so to speak always “half-baked” or require further cooking — is closely connected to our mastery of equivocity. If univocity and determinateness
were indispensable for meaning, then we could say nothing whatsoever about ourselves and so, by extension, about our relations to other entities.

In general, there are no univocal terms in natural language. But this is essential to communication, because there are also no univocal experiences or uniquely valid interpretations of experience. The capacity to select the correct sense of a crucial word for a given context depends upon the aforementioned mastery of equivocation. However, it does not lead to a destructive regress of interpretations, because the equivocity of meanings allows us to select the appropriate interpretation, and the mastery of equivocity allows our discursive partner to see what is intended. Confusion and misunderstanding can of course arise from the equivocal nature of empirical sense, but it can also be corrected; in the language of traditional hermeneutics, to subtilitas legendi there corresponds Einfühlung.

My examples are intended to suggest that the wholeness of truth in its everyday sense is partly imagined or inferred from the appropriate presentation of properties. We can see an entity in its wholeness thanks to the ability of the speaker to pick out a property or set of properties that evokes in the auditor the correct picture. It is not even necessary for the property in question to be essential; successful communication frequently transpires on the basis of accidental predications. It is precisely subtilitas legendi that enables us to select the property that is appropriate to the given discursive situation. In some situations, reference to an essential property would not work, for example in technical contexts in which the auditor is ignorant of the official terminology. Rigid univocity would preclude the possibility of understanding in these cases.

This makes immediately evident a crucial point in the relation between philosophy and art. The perception of wholeness, or, somewhat more precisely, the success of identification, is not simply the discovery of what is given by nature but depends upon the imaginative or productive capacity of the observer. On this point the advocates of hermeneutics are entirely correct. Philosophy no more records in language the rigid structure of beings than art photographs or rigidly copies the forms or natures of psychic states. No more; but by this I do not mean "not at all." There is an element of recording or copying rooted in our apprehension of what we wish to interpret. We must see in order to make. The wholeness of intelligibility, that is, the capacity to see a form or a formal structure, or a pattern of events, or the character of a human being even if we cannot identify every element in these totalities, functions by production as well as discovery.

If this is so, then discovery and production cannot be simply juxtaposed as the sources of philosophy and art respectively. Seeing and making function jointly in both philosophy and art, which, if they are to be distinguished at all, must be distinguished by some other criterion. I have been advocating the distinction between the explanation of the totality of experience on the one hand and the expansion and illumination of it on the other. I claim further that the root of these two modes of productive discovery is one and the same. The root is the living intelligence which has been represented most importantly here as the mastery of equivocation. We select the appropriate senses of the elements of our experience by an act of interpretation that in the case of artistic production can be likened to the telling of a story.
and in the case of philosophical discourse to an explanation of stories. A novel, a symphony, or a poem are distinct but related types of stories about some aspect of human existence. A philosophical speech spells out the significance of the story with respect to the wholeness of human life, and thus to the order of its defining aspects or dimensions. To this I add that something analogous, but not precisely the same, holds good of scientific theories. A theory of space and time is an articulated model or story about the inner structure of spatial and temporal phenomena. But the explanation of the significance of that inner structure for the totality of human life is philosophical discourse.

The last several paragraphs have been necessarily rather abstract; I want to get back to the everyday. In order to understand the distinction between seeing and making, or the relationship between philosophy and literature, we must begin, not with philosophy and literature themselves, but with the everyday experiences that give birth to these activities. I need, however, to make one more professorial remark. Despite the extensive criticism that I have directed elsewhere against such postmodernist movements as deconstruction, I do not reject outright the contention that the world is a text. This should have been evident from my discussion of hermeneutics as the mastery of equivocity. The world is a weaving together of discovering and making; we therefore participate in the process by which the "world" or "whole" emerges as a concrete determination of the horizon of intelligibility. Even what the Greeks called "cosmos" is an ordering suitable for human habitation. As such, it cannot be strictly synonymous with "nature" because neither in the Greek phusis nor in the modern senses of the term is nature suitable for human habitation without modification by human labor. The whole is an artifact to the extent that it is made to be visible by and for human beings only.

But this does not mean that the whole is unintelligible or that the task of understanding it is blocked by a vitiating equivocity of the discursively accessible senses of its elements. Equivocity is grounded in the unity of being. The different senses that one can attach to a horse in its relations to human beings do not succeed in transforming the horse into a dog. And the senses are themselves discernibly different because each preserves its own identity. I can make the same point in the language of textuality. A text cannot be woven together from sub-texts which are themselves webs of sub-sub-texts, and so on indefinitely. To anticipate a later point, a text is a story or the content of a potential story, and stories are not about an infinite regression of other stories. At each level of story-telling (and such a level is defined by the telling of an intelligible story) there are fixed points — things, persons, purposes, events, actions, values — the meaning of which within the given story may depend upon an integration of sub-stories, but an integration culminating in a totality that functions as an element within the whole of the story of the particular world, or part of the world, under inspection.

A true account of the world would be one that tells the whole story. The whole story contains more or less detail. If we could tell no whole story about the world as a whole, however general, then we could never tell a whole story about a part. Many would say that this is precisely our fate, but this is because they adhere to an unnecessarily strict conception of wholeness. I remind you of my previous
remark to the effect that we can see something as a whole, for example a thing or a person, thanks to the apprehension of appropriate properties, even when we cannot grasp the complete set of essential properties of the entity, assuming that such a set exists. In other words, we can identify a human being as distinct from a tree, a rock, a scarecrow, or an ape, as a fixed point of reference for the construction of an interpretation or story. There is nothing to argue about here; all arguments about the ambiguity of natures, the inaccessibility or non-existence of essences, the puzzles of sense-perception, and the endless variety of interpretations of sense, are arguments about individual beings of precisely this sort of fixed identity that we can say of them: the stories that can be told about this entity here — this man, this woman, this dog, this star — are endless and conflicting. If this were not true, there would be no experience, not even equivocal or ambiguous experience.

The demonstration of equivocity is rooted in the antecedent fixity of identifiable entities. As such, these entities are wholly accessible to a story about their role in our experience. I mean by "wholly accessible" that we can tell a story about a horse without fearing that it is actually a dog (or nothing at all). But to tell a story is to fit something into a larger context; in fact, it is the larger context of the world, or an ordering, however equivocal, of everything we come upon. Nor can the ordering be so equivocal as to prevent us from selecting from among candidates to the whole story. To summarize: experience just is the identification of wholes as fixed units capable of identification and (as Strawson puts it) reidentification. But it is the world or cosmos as context of the presentation of entities to be identified and interpreted that makes these fixed units accessible. We do not have experiences of a person or animal in a vacuum void of all reference to anything else, but always within a horizon, the openness of which is again dependent upon a total ordering, even if the structure of this total ordering is not itself totally accessible.

The whole story, then, is the story of the world or cosmos within which human beings tell their tales. One could say that the whole story is itself a part of the whole, and the most important part, since it is as it were the last touch to the process by which the whole becomes a whole. But the whole is not simply or entirely an artifact of story-telling, because we cannot speak without seeing what we mean. Even if we produced every element of the whole by discursive cognition, we would still have to identify what we had produced in order to interpret it. Seeing would continue to play a co-ordinate role with making in the philosophical or artistic or scientific account of the world.

My qualified acceptance of the metaphor of the world as text is related to the
thesis that the meaning of the world is elicited in, although it is not merely, a story. This in turn leads me to introduce the doctrine of authorial intentionality, as I shall call it. I mean by this that regardless of all subsequent modifications, a story is told by human beings to other human beings in order to accomplish an intention or to fulfill a purpose by the communication of meaning. The purpose is to achieve wholeness, in the sense of a correct ordering of activities or capacities to act; and by “correct” I mean conducive to the best life, which the Greeks described by the word *eudaimonia*. The stories that interest me primarily are those by which we attempt to complete our lives by rescuing them from meaninglessness. Nor am I concerned in the slightest by those who hold that only words have “meanings,” or still more radically, that there are no meanings but only words. Since life as a whole is a text, that is to say, a whole that includes its own explanatory story, it is entirely appropriate to refer to the meaning of life, and so too to its equivocity.

Just as there are no meaningless experiences, so too there are no unintentional stories. What is meaningless cannot be experienced but only encountered; it remains external to the web of existence that we weave by incorporating meanings into stories. What is unintentional is not a story but meaningless chatter. Even the desire to entertain or to play is intentional. When these intentions extend to other persons, they become co-authors of the text. To speak of the text as having its own intentions is merely to animate it, that is, to take it as representing the author. Whereas texts, like the world, may exhibit divine intentions, these become meaningful for human beings only when incorporated into stories that we have ourselves composed. That a text has a multiplicity of possible readings follows from the equivocity of the senses of the words of which the text is composed; but the range of equivocity is narrowed by the intention of the author, which the reader’s mastery of equivocity enables him or her to determine. Otherwise put, the multiplicity of readings is itself determined and regulated by a primary intention, without which no story can be told. Whereas stories can mean more than we intend, they cannot mean less; and if the minimal or regulative intention is indiscernible, then the story is incoherent, which is to say that it is no story at all. Finally, if one denies intentions altogether to the text, or rejects them as irrelevant to the task of interpretation, this is a covert way of replacing the author’s intentions with those of the reader, or in other words it is to replace reading by writing. In this case there is no reading, and so there can be no verifiable way of referring to texts. There is then no writing but only scribbling, to which corresponds the chatter of meaningless interpretation.

II

What is it about our lives that causes us to weave together texts, whether these be subsequently identified as philosophy or literature? The answer I have suggested is as old as Plato, but I do not propose to defend it by textual exegesis of the orthodox or philological type. There is no point in reading a Platonic dialogue if it is not a true story (as opposed to a set of true propositions). Nor could we determine the truth of a Platonic story simply by reading or analyzing it. The reading must occur within the context of an ongoing inspection of the process of story-telling. It is in this
process that we are presently engaged. I am telling a story about story-telling, but there is no danger of a vicious circle here, because this is how we learn what it is to tell a story, namely, by the activity itself. There are no rules or principles independent of the activity from which its nature is deducible. There are no a priori stories.

I begin with an expansion of my preliminary remark about intentionality. This is a much-discussed topic but we cannot avoid going over some familiar ground. Our goal is not originality but truth. The first point I want to make is simple and in a way obvious even though not easy to state. The difference between random or chaotic flux and identifiable change is that the latter is defined by a terminus. This point has nothing to do with metaphysical or theological doctrines of teleology; it bears upon the structure of intelligibility. A terminus is intrinsic to, and is the organizing principle of, the structurally constitutive elements of the change it defines. Termini are things, persons, events, relations, and so on: identifiable and reidentifiable elements of experience that serve as nodal points in stories. In a traditional vocabulary, we may call them subjects and predicates or substances and properties. As Aristotle might say, they are "this somethings" of "such and such a kind."

A change is identifiable to an observer at some stage in its development, a stage that may or may not be predictable in advance and which varies from observer to observer. Persons with different experiences and educations may recognize at different moments the identity of a process: the blooming of a rose or the gestures of a mime. Often an observer is unable to identify precisely the terminus of the change, as, for example, that a certain bloom is a hibiscus. But the identification of the process as a flower suffices for the terminus to be further specified in the varying contexts, scientific, aesthetic, and so on, of everyday life. We may look up the flower in an illustrated textbook or ask a specialist to identify it. And what is true of things is also true of events, as in the case of the mime's gestures. It may seem that one could speak directly of things and events rather than introducing the vocabulary of termini. But I wish to avoid basing my argument on the assumption that there are things or static substances independent of processes and multiple hermeneutical perspectives. A terminus is the fulfillment of a process in the sense just defined: we act with and speak about them. And thus we interpret them.

Each person is of course free to construct private variations on the public identities of things and events in the communal world of everyday life. But this freedom is not entirely spontaneous; it is grounded in the identities or termini themselves. And when we speak about a process rather than a terminus, we treat the process as a

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terminus. If we could not identify changes, there would be no improvisations, because to improvise is to say something new or unexpected about something that has already been, or could have been, identified in a customary manner. A story about a rose may differ sharply from the tale told by the horticulturist, but it is intelligible to an audience only because the rose has a public identity, one that is the same for all members of the audience and that serves as the basis for specialized identifications. This identity is the terminus of the change constituted for every normal speaker of English as a flower and, for many of these, as a rose. One could say by a metaphorical extension of traditional terminology that the process of the change in question intends the rose as its shaping terminus. (In doing so, of course, I do not mean to imply that the process is self-conscious.)

Once again, traditional language is appropriate here, provided that one does not take umbrage at the ontological implications of substance terminology. Just as a conscious state is a state of a certain sort, and a thought is a thought of a more or less determinate content, so too a change is of the kind identified by its terminus (or that we identify by identifying the terminus). I have already referred to the Socratic maxim, common to both Plato and Aristotle, and intrinsic to our discursive intelligence, that to be is to be something of such-and-such a kind. Though I accept this account for everyday life without smuggling the Platonist thesis back into the story, for the simple and obvious reason that change is of something. Formless changes play no role in our experience. Whether the forms that undergo change are ontologically separate will depend upon what we mean by "separate." Certainly the process known as a rose is, qua process, separate from the experienced rose. It really makes no sense to say that we are experiencing (nothing but) processes, when everyone knows that we are experiencing processes of such-and-such a kind. But the kind simply is not reducible to the process; we do not experience blurs. It is not my particular intention here to defend Platonism, but I do want to point out that there is an interpretation of the so-called doctrine of Platonic Ideas that is compatible with process-philosophy or the principle of comprehensive change. Changes have looks, and this allows them to look like other looks. But the Idea is the look.

By analogous reasoning, I think we can easily see that it is impossible to make sense of our experience, or even to have any, unless we refer to the "nature" of a look or terminus. First we must distinguish between two senses of "nature." In the first sense, it refers to the order of properties that make the look what it is. In the second sense, it is distinguished from "art" or "convention" and refers to what shows itself or comes into existence independently of human work. Even if we liter-

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rather than formal structure. The anti-Platonist thesis cannot account for everyday life without smuggling the Platonist thesis back into the story, for the simple and obvious reason that change is of something. Formless changes play no role in our experience. Whether the forms that undergo change are ontologically separate will depend upon what we mean by "separate." Certainly the process known as a rose is, qua process, separate from the experienced rose. It really makes no sense to say that we are experiencing (nothing but) processes, when everyone knows that we are experiencing processes of such-and-such a kind. But the kind simply is not reducible to the process; we do not experience blurs. It is not my particular intention here to defend Platonism, but I do want to point out that there is an interpretation of the so-called doctrine of Platonic Ideas that is compatible with process-philosophy or the principle of comprehensive change. Changes have looks, and this allows them to look like other looks. But the Idea is the look.

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ally make every element in our experience, what we make must have a nature, just as, even if everything in the world is a process or change, these processes or changes have looks. If I make a pear, it is not also a refrigerator. This is the technical sense in which we employ the term “nature,” and its validity is independent of the second sense of the term.

Nevertheless, a few words on the second sense are not out of place. What does it mean to say “I make the pear by perceiving it”? I might very well interpret the pear in a way that depends not only upon its identity but also upon my imagination or special scientific interests. But this interpretation depends upon the presence of a pear to my apprehension. I can imagine a pear, but this in turn amounts to the “representation” in thought of something that previously presented itself to me directly. To a Kantian, the form of the cognized pear is a result of the functions of the transcendental ego; but this is a philosophical doctrine about ordinary experience, not an account immanent to ordinary experience itself. In our analysis of ordinary experience, we are looking for evidence that will enable us to decide whether to accept or to reject doctrines like Kantianism.

Interestingly enough, Kant’s arguments on this point have nothing to do with pears or any other empirical object (although he speaks once or twice of dogs and trees by way of illustrating his account of perception). Indeed, if one criticizes Kant on the basis of how we actually perceive pears, he will soon be attacked by outraged champions of the sage of Königsberg for having descended from the transcendental to the ontic or even empirical level. I have written extensively on this point in several other places, and do not wish to repeat my entire argument here. But I must say that a transcendental explanation of perception that cannot explain how we perceive pears, dogs, or trees is not terribly impressive. I leave the matter open for a later analysis of transcendental accounts of perception. Here we need to say only that there are not and cannot be transcendental accounts within ordinary experience. And whatever may be true of synthetic a priori propositions (if there are any), causal connections, or the concept of necessity, there is nothing in everyday perception to sustain the thesis that we make pears by perceiving them.

All theoretical accounts of perception, scientific or transcendental, start with the everyday perception of pears, dogs, and trees. They must justify themselves by the properties of ordinary perception and the problems that these properties raise. I am not now contending that there are no problems associated with ordinary perception, but rather that it is rooted in termini of processes, some of which we make and some of which we do not make but discover. The ordinary distinction between nature and art can be easily illustrated. A seed develops under the proper natural conditions into a flower. But a gardener can modify the result of germination by taking various steps, and a geneticist can make still more radical changes in the result of germination. The modifications imposed by the gardener and the geneticist onto the natural process of germination do not themselves make the seed, nor in a fundamental sense do they make the flower. In order for the modified flower to bloom, there must have been a seed to be modified. If the geneticist does not make the seed but finds it in the soil, then he is modifying nature but not replacing or creating it.

Is it possible for the geneticist to make the seed? I have no idea, but I am sure
that if he could, he would have to employ natural materials at some early stage in order to produce it. In general, the identification of nature is altogether less problematic than in the example just given. We know what we do not make because making is intentional. One cannot make a seed simply by looking at the ground in order to admire the landscape or just to see what is there. I understand that sometimes our actions result unexpectedly or spontaneously in the production of something, but this is not making. In order to make something, we require a pattern or blueprint or what we call an idea of what we intend to make, as well as materials, instruments, training, and so on. To make is to employ all of these in such a way that, by directing our intelligence and skills toward the pattern or idea and the material, we can bring them together in a way that is a terminus of a process, a terminus that did not previously exist.

The terminus of a natural change, whether with respect to a particular instance or to nature as a whole, does not satisfy human intentionality merely by allowing things or processes to fulfill themselves. Nature compels us to provide additional discursively constructed termini beyond those which it produces by its own activity. There is then a disjunction within the continuity of nature, of which human being is the locus. Though humanity depends upon, and individual human beings exemplify, the integrity of natural change, something more is required. This requirement manifests itself in both deeds and speeches, but primarily in speeches. In order to survive, human beings must cultivate the soil, alter the course of streams and rivers, make clothing and build shelters, and thereby modify natural change by the productive arts. But deeds are not sufficient; the human animal is compelled by nature to talk, and, in particular, to tell stories. As I am arguing, we cannot exist as human beings without telling, or attempting to tell, the whole story.

Most of our speeches are addressed to local ends, for example, to the acquisition of the necessities of existence; some few address generalized versions of these local ends, such as the need for survival. A still smaller — but nevertheless significant — number of speeches go beyond this, and are intended as justifications or evaluations of life as a totality. Such speeches attempt to tell the whole story, not in its every detail, but with sufficient detail to make the overall pattern evident. These stories are directed by termini not furnished by nature in the second of the two senses just distinguished. This is the main reason why students of nature so frequently regard the stories as empty or excessively vague. And yet, one cannot criticize stories of this sort for vagueness without implicitly telling another such story: the story of what we may call the scientific world-view. The scientific world-view is not verified by the results of natural science; on the contrary, it is the former that directs us toward the pursuit of the latter by persuading us of the ultimate value of scientific truth. The difference between the story and the positive results of science is rooted in the fact that nature does not tell us how to live. On the contrary, we tell nature how we wish to live. Where nature seems to demur, we can devote ourselves to changing her through the mastery of scientific technique.

Within nature, termini are intrinsic to the processes of change. In the case of human action, termini are produced or projected, not spontaneously or *ex nihilo*, but in response to a natural appetite, either in itself or as modified by custom and imagination, and so as naturally intended but not naturally furnished. To take an example, a cosmological myth is neither the direct fulfillment of a natural change,
nor does it stand to the cosmos as an image to an original. The myth is intended to provide a supplementary or discursive completeness to the cosmos, a completeness that the cosmos, to the extent that it exists independently of human speech, does not itself require. The requirement comes from us, or from what Socrates calls our Eros. I should say here that the origin of Eros is somewhat ambiguous; although Eros is a function of the human soul, it comes from above and raises us up by taking possession of us. This is why Socrates calls it a god or a daimon. For our present purposes, it will suffice to say that Eros mediates between human desire and divine completeness. It is therefore an essential ingredient, even when it is not explicitly mentioned, in every attempt to tell the whole story.

Eros, one could say, is the artist who produces the variety of speeches elicited by our contemplation of the cosmos. This variety includes such types as myth, poetry, religion, science, and philosophy. Each element in the variety is subject to its own sub-variations and improvisations. One speech elicits another. *Homo sapiens*, the talking animal, is also *homo faber*, who is in the process of constructing himself as the hero in a cosmological drama. Such a drama is true if it displays the speech-telling nature as a whole. Philosophy is that form of speech whose stories are, or intend to be, self-reflexive or self-explanatory. That is, they intend not merely to display, but to bring to full articulateness, the speech-telling nature as a whole. This was the claim made on behalf of his own speeches by Hegel, whose *Science of Logic* claims to provide the complete structure of the Concept, the speech of speeches.

Hegel is to my knowledge the only philosopher who ever attempted to furnish a fully explicit demonstration of his wisdom, and so to prove that the philosophical life is not merely the highest by nature, but that it culminates in the accessibility of wisdom and even, by way of participation, in divinity. This account would be defective if it could be shown to fail to explain adequately one fundamental mode or another of human discourse. It is worth pausing to ask how one could falsify or verify Hegel’s claim to have told the whole story. It is easy to suggest that the claim is outrageous and that new speeches are constantly being elicited by historical development, or more specifically that Hegel failed to anticipate certain fundamental developments in, say, science. But a neo-Hegelian might very well defend Hegel by moving to a higher level of generality. One could contend, in other words, that Hegel’s account of totality must be understood at a sufficiently high level of generality as not to be affected by the discovery of additional planets in the solar system, or by quantum mechanics, or by empirical events in world history.

The problem in understanding Hegel is that it is not clear what it is that he is attempting to explain. If we put to one side his popular lectures on the history of philosophy, religion, art, and the philosophy of history, and restrict our attention to

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the major works, in particular the *Logic*, then one could reasonably argue that Hegel is not describing the concrete events in history or the particular discoveries in science, and so on, but rather the general process by which all types of change organize themselves into intelligible structures — thanks to the development and interplay of categories and their moments — an interplay that furnishes the common "pulse-beat" (Hegel's own phrase) of thinking and being, and so overcomes the separation between them. Let us assume that this is a correct interpretation of Hegel. Is there in fact a pulse-beat in thinking and being that is independent of the speeches told by Hegel to invoke its actuality? If there is not, then Hegel would seem to have produced the pulse-beat by the particular story he tells. But if there is, then it must also be independent of the stories told by anti-Hegelians, for otherwise it would have no existence or nature of its own, and we would never be in a position to verify or falsify ostensible descriptions of it. And in this case, how could we ever describe it? For every description would be a story about the pulse-beat, and as such, subject to criticism by competing stories. There is no objective or "purely scientific" way of arriving at the thematic content of philosophical stories, and if there were, then of course philosophy would be superfluous.

The strongest case to be made on Hegel's behalf is that he does produce the pulse-beat by describing it correctly, because his story is itself the last stage in its self-manifestation. It is not Hegel's personal story but the voice of the Absolute as incarnated in his discourse. This is as far as I need to go in describing Hegel's peculiar attempt to tell the whole story. It is instructive as a kind of substitute for science that suffers from attempting to be too scientific. Differently stated, Hegel asks us to disregard our ordinary view that works of art, historical events, political actions, and the like are all susceptible of differing interpretations. A story about the whole will succeed to the extent that it is able to take into account the valid claim of late-modern hermeneutical doctrines about the multiplicity of perspectives, a claim, incidentally, that is implicit in the nature of the Platonic dialogue.

Please note that to say that the world is intelligible in various ways is very far from saying that the world is unintelligible. Furthermore, the same problem is discernible at the heart of all interpretations, however diverse the one from the other. We are attempting to make sense of the totality of our experience, to reconcile the interpretations and perspectives with one another, to rise to a level of generality sufficiently great that what we see there illuminates the existence and nature of all perspectives: on this point Hegel was undoubtedly right.
perspectives: on this point Hegel was undoubtedly right. But it is at the beginning rather than at the end of this process that we tell the same story. It is our ordinary experience that provides us with the common basis for subsequent diversity in our explanations of the totality of human existence. The more subtle and the deeper our accounts, the more they diverge. I would never say that there is no standpoint from which one cannot see the rank-ordering of these divergent accounts. My point is rather that there is no way in which to persuade those who do not see as we do that our vision is the best. Those who think otherwise have committed the error of identifying thought with speech. But even if everyone could understand the comprehensive and wholly true speech about the whole, one would still have to see the whole; one would have to see what the speech intends to say, what it means. And this vision is no longer a matter of speech; it is not a meta-discourse, a totally inappropriate notion that leads to an infinite regress or to mere chatter, and so, ironically, to a different kind of silence.

Every perspective, in order to do its work, must be determinate and intelligible. But the difference in each perspective, that which defines it as this perspective and none of the others, is the produced or fictional element contributed by the artistic root of human nature in response to the work of the root of discovery. In a very general sense, at the level of what I am calling “ordinary experience” or “everyday life,” all human beings see the same world and thus share the same perspective. Unfortunately, our attempts to grasp this communal perspective in conceptual speech result in the functioning of the productive element of cognition, and so in the steady replacement of the communal perspective by individual variations. I am attempting to articulate ordinary experience, not as the last stage in the process of telling the whole story, or in a vain effort to duplicate Hegelian science, but rather in order to make clear the first step in philosophy. And I do this, not because I believe that everyone will see the truth of my analysis, but because I regard it as in principle possible to achieve agreement sufficient to establish the self-founding of philosophy, and hence to rescue it from charges that it is dead, or that it never did and never could exist, or that we have finished with it and now dwell in a post-philosophical epoch. I have no pretensions of being able to tell the whole story; but I do wish to attempt to explain why we are forced to tell the whole story. And perhaps that in itself is the whole story.  

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