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NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

People in Support of Women in Philosophy (PSWIP, formerly Women in Philosophy), is a student–founded and run organization dedicated to the professional support and development of women and minorities in the Philosophy Department at the New School for Social Research. We meet weekly throughout the academic year to workshop members’ papers for publication and conference presentation. Our group gains its strength and longevity from the shared commitment of members to the greater institutional visibility of women philosophers and the advancement of their work through critical, rigorous discussion in a group of respected peers.

Originally born out of a focus in feminist philosophy, People in Support of Women in Philosophy has evolved into a group defined rather by a feminist commitment to the diversity of philosophical concerns addressed by our members. This year’s journal speaks to precisely the breadth of philosophical thought we critically explore. Each paper was originally submitted for a weekly workshop, and from aesthetics to speech–acts, Arendt to Neoplatonism, our journal this year shows our group’s involvement in an array of philosophical debates.

This year’s, and previous years’, Women in Philosophy Annual Journal of Papers can be found online, at www.newschool.edu/nssr/wip. Furthermore, for more information about the group and our members’ work, contact wip@newschool.edu. Our group would like to thank the Department of Philosophy at the New School for Social Research for their continued support.

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EVIL IN THE *DIVISION OF NATURE*

Juniper Alcorn

In the *Periphyseon: Division of Nature*,¹ Eriugena describes a totalizing picture of the relationship of God and man. Eriugena undertakes the Neoplatonic project of describing the procession away from God via the division of unity, and the subsequent Return of man to God through purification and unification. These movements are common to both Eriugena's metaphysics and his allegorical reading of scripture. However, his preliminary books describing the division of nature become complicated by his articulation of the character and role of evil in the allegory of God's creation and man's eventual Return. Certain salient characteristics of Eriugena's conception of evil allow him to argue that God creates only good: because evil is no-thing,² it is neither substantial nor created. Evil results rather from the irrational movement of the soul. As described at the end of Book V, evil is also considered necessary so that the good may be recognized and that a hierarchy of souls may be retained in the eventual Return of all to God. This problem of evil's non-created necessity provides a guiding thread in this paper.

For Eriugena, flesh is both the cause and effect of the fall of man from grace.³ Accordingly, we must understand man's intermediate role between the sensible and the metaphysical. Man must use his faculties not only to understand and purify the sensible and thus apprehend the world beyond the flesh, but also to return to God. Furthermore, although evil is rendered as no-thing and insubstantial, its necessity in the Return provides a point from which evil can be said to exceed its non-existence in Eriugena's account. In his discussion of Paradise and the Allegory of the Fall, he describes evil as something that can be cloaked in good,⁴ so as to deceive the one seeking God and the true good. As such, correct sensible and aesthetic judgments of the world are necessary for correct moral judgment.

By tracing the role of appearance and phantasy throughout Eriugena's text, I aim to make an argument that any moral judgment of evil is contingent on an understanding of evil as existing sensibly and, therefore, externally to the soul, before and after the Return. That is to

say, evil exists as more than a movement of the soul, evidenced in Eriugena's own account. Hence, my thesis will extract the hidden contours of Eriugena's account of evil along the following two lines: firstly, the aesthetics implied by Eriugena propose a kind of looking and judgment of external appearances that is based on his elaboration of evil in conjunction with beauty and ugliness. Secondly, to maintain the necessity of evil in the Return, Eriugena clearly separates evil from the irrational movement of the soul and considers evil as participating in sensible difference. Both of these points show that Eriugena's argument for evil as a no-thing loses metaphysical ground by his own elaboration.

To clarify the complex notions of sensibility and difference surrounding the necessary role of evil and its contradictory definitions, I proceed through a discussion of the three motions of the soul, with particular attention to the third motion, which involves the interaction with the sensible world. I then explicate the nature of evil before articulating its relationship to aesthetic, sensible judgments of things. The problem of the sensibility of evil will reach its conclusion in a discussion of the Return and of God's judgment of evil. I conclude by offering some suggestions for an extension of this argument within Eriugena's work.

The Role of Phantasies in the Three Motions of the Soul

For Eriugena, human nature dualistically encounters the world. Man uses both his faculties of sense perception and metaphysical rationality to participate in and judge the world. This "dual nature" is essential to understanding the dynamics of the aesthetic interaction present within man's encounter with evil in the world. By explaining the structure of the soul and particularly the role of sense, I will ultimately argue here that while the soul is meant to contemplate and produce pure metaphysical knowledge of God, sense has a complicated dependence on the external, material world. This simultaneously contradicts the dialectical motion of sense, intended to mediate the first two motions of the soul, and begins to show how Eriugena relies on the external world for a concept of multiplicity, and of difference—concepts which will re-appear in his definition of evil, addressed in later sections.

Eriugena writes, “there are three universal motions of the soul, of which the first is of the mind, the second of the reason, the third of sense” (572C). These motions of the soul are the way in which one defines and pursues truth. The first two are “simple” and have particular objects: they are simple insofar as they surpass the soul itself in contemplation of God. The object in both motions is God, but the first negates any possibility of knowledge of God while the second affirmatively defines God (based on the first motion’s ignorance) (572D-573B).

The first motion of the soul is “mind.” The mind “cannot find [God] in any essence or substance or in anything which can be uttered or understood” because God surpasses all human understanding (572D).⁵ However, via the second motion, the soul qua reason nonetheless comes to define God “as Cause of all” (573A).

The second universal motion of the soul is “reason,” comprised of phantasies that are the soul’s images of things in the world. As such, phantasies link the sensible to the metaphysical soul. Man forms and calls on these immaterial images in his intermediary interactions with the world and with God. Two different kinds of phantasies are provided. First is that “born...of sensible nature in the instruments of the senses and...properly called the image expressed in the senses” (573C). As an image held in the mind after interaction with material objects in the world, this phantasy is attached to the body, and “although it is in the sense, is not sensible of itself” (573C). In effect, such phantasy is produced by the material objects one seeks to observe. It is sensible insofar as it is provided by sense perception, but it has no sensibility of itself as phantasy. The second type of phantasy is “that which is formed next out of this image, and it is this phantasy which properly bears the customary name of exterior sense” (573C). This type of phantasy is connected to the soul, rather than the body, and is an extension, or “exteriorizing,” of the first form of phantasy in that it becomes sensible of itself “and receives the first,” allowing for the molding action of the soul.

The third motion of the soul is “sense.” In this interaction with two types of phantasy, sense mediates between the external world and the first two motions of the soul that define and find God as ultimate truth. Sense ideally “abandons the phantasies of sensible things and clearly

understands the reasons stripped bare of all corporeal imagery and in their own simplicity,” such that it can then transmit

the reasons of visible things freed from every phantasy back to the first motion through the intermediate motion as the simple operation of something which is also (itself) simple, that is to say (it transmits them as) universal reasons by a universal operation. (573D)

This motion of the soul takes in sense information and re-forms a conceptual phantasy in the soul. As such, the mind reveals the evidence of God as an ineffable cause by removing the sensible qualities of the thing. As a result, the materiality of the thing dissolves for the sake of the image in the aesthetic sense, rendering the motion as a faculty of the soul, not of the body, thereby bridging the composite nature of sense with the simple constitution of the soul.

By contrast, the movement of soul into sense presents a composite faculty, which “comes into contact with that which is outside her [the soul] by certain signs and re-forms within herself the reasons of visible things” (573A). Because of the intermediary role of sense between the outside world and God,

its first knowledge of the reasons of sensible things does not come from (the things) themselves. For first (the soul) receives the phantasies of the things themselves through the exterior sense...then, getting through them to the reasons of the things of which they are the phantasies, she moulds them [I mean the reasons] and shapes them into conformity with herself. (573B)

What sense achieves, then, is not an apophatic or cataphatic (positive or negative) knowledge of God, but an apprehension of the reason of *things*. Sense interacts with the two kinds of phantasies (discussed below) with the goal of condensing information into a metaphysical and rational knowledge of nature, beyond exteriority or sensibility of the thing at hand. Hence, despite its place as the dialectical motion of the soul, its ultimate production is knowledge pertaining to the material world of things. This is achieved by consideration of the thing-in-itself, a concept

for which the fivefold exterior sense is necessary to render it a phantasy: an image immaterial in itself.

More must be said about Eriugena's terminology of materiality. He clarifies his understanding of material in Book I through an elaboration of the relationship between body and *ousia* (οὐσία), or essence.

Every body which is composed of matter and form, since it can be dissolved, is corruptible; but mortal body is composed of matter and form; therefore it is corruptible. [Again] every οὐσία is simple and admits no composition of matter and form, since it is an indivisible unity. (489C–D)

Bodies, then, have a dual nature of essence/material, a division that is stressed here as necessary to a proper understanding (489B–C). Material is corruptible, but as Eriugena argues elsewhere, inherently good in itself, because God creates it. Essence, which is a part of “every creature, whether corporeal or incorporeal,” is imminently incorruptible (490A). Finally, it is stressed that this division of essence and matter must apply “generally of every body” (490C). Thus I will adopt the language of materiality to indicate that which is material and corruptible, in terms of things and objects, and corporeal when specifically in reference to the human body.

Even in the first kind of phantasy, which is associated with the body, Eriugena reduces his reliance on the material by stressing that while this phantasy is strictly created by the senses of the body, it is not an internalization of the thing observed, nor is it fully a recognition of the thing observed. It is a recasting of the thing into an image based on sense perception. In the second kind of phantasy, via the abilities of mind and reason, the primary phantasy is again recast, in order to ascertain what is the nature of the thing at a higher level, devoid of material referent. Given that God creates all and that the essence of any thing is proceeding from God, in a way the third motion of the soul lends itself to as simple a description as the first two motions: its ultimate goal is to transcend physical, material evidence, and aesthetic judgment of the characteristics of a thing, in order to find the underlying truth of the thing. This truth, following the arguments concerning creation and essence in Book I, is the same as a truth of God in all things.

The dual nature of man—corruptible body and incorruptible soul—helps explain the dual function of sense, which produces multiplicity in the world out of man’s a priori ability to know all other creatures.⁶ Thus, as the third motion of the soul, sense perception presents man with multiplicity and difference. Sense, in its composite nature, must transform the multiplicity gained by sense perception into a simple and ineffable concept. Reason, which apprehends the unity of God, is in opposition to a sense that “separates that unity by means of differences” (577D). Thus the twofold consideration of phantasy in sense, which as described above interacts with things in order to unify, also works in a descending manner in such a way that while the soul “retains...a unity...through sense, she understands as multiple and under a multiform mode [in] the effects of the causes” (578D). This movement is bidirectional: moving toward God by synthesizing these multiplicities of sense perception; moving outward into the world to generate sensibility and perception. It is important to note here that this bidirectional motion of sense is the only motion of the soul that encounters multiplicity and is the only motion of the soul that interacts with the sensible. Although Eriugena argues for the sublimation of the sensible into phantasy, there is no motion of the soul that can create multiplicity without sensibility. Thus, the third motion of the soul inhabits tenuous ground between the sensible and the non-sensible, between difference and unity.

The role of these three motions of the soul in unity, however, is in a similarly tenuous position. The three motions of the soul work towards an understanding of the transcendent unity of God, yet also

the human mind begets from itself as a kind of offspring of itself the knowledge of itself by which it knows itself, and the knowledge of itself is equal to itself because it knows itself as a whole, in the likeness of God the Father Who begets from Himself His Son Who is His Wisdom. (603B)

Thus, the human mind creates its own knowledge of itself, yet this knowledge, in understanding itself as parallel to the structure of God as Father, creator, and essence, is equal to the mind itself. Unification of the mind’s knowledge of itself parallels the structure of God, providing one

mode of the return to God, which is based on an understanding of the unity of the trinity and its ineffability.

Although sense apprehends multiplicity, phantasy is stripped of sensible perception so as to bind this knowing to the soul's knowledge of the truth and of God. Difference in the material world is reduced by sense to the essential truth behind things, revealing a greater truth about God. However, though the goal of the unification of the motions of the soul may be a return to God, I argue that the third composite motion of the soul, namely sense, is dependent not simply on the total structure of the soul but also on the sensible world. This conception of the third movement of the soul has important consequences for understanding Eriugena's description of evil and the judgment of evil.

Evil, Paradise, and Perception

In Book IV, Eriugena considers evil in relation to Paradise and the Garden of Eden. It is important to remember that God, as creator of all things and present in all things, is the only thing that can be called good in and of itself. Everything created by God participates in God, and so by extension, everything is good: God creates no evil.

For Eriugena, then, evil does not truly exist. Instead, evil is simply a turning away from God, for any thing that is "deprived of Him or contrary to Him or related to Him or absent from Him" is never completely opposed to God in essence (458D). In fact, "nothing is opposed" to God (459C) because anything created is necessarily good and in a relationship to God. As an irrational movement of the soul, evil is a no-thing. This is not to be understood in the apophatic sense that God is "nothing" in that he surpasses thing-ness, rather, evil has no essence, no presence. No purely evil thing can exist because wickedness wills destruction and God wills creation (511A–B). Indeed,

there is no evil which is found to exist substantially in nature, nor proceeds from a fixed and natural cause, for considered in itself it is absolutely nothing but the irrational and perverse and imperfect motion of the rational nature. (826A)

Hence, in this section I will work from this strong definition of evil in contrast to its instantiation of Eriugena's allegorical reading of evil in the Garden of Eden. By following his specific examples of evil, we will see that evil gains an association with the material through what I consider to be a relationship of aesthetic judgment. This problematization of evil and the material will be shown to work itself out through the motions of the soul as explicated above, in their utilization in Paradise.

The story of the Garden of Eden, taken allegorically by Eriugena, is used to explain evil's role and its function in the world:

[T]he term 'knowledge' has the significance of a kind of interaction and concretion of good and evil. It is neither absolutely evil, for it is surrounded by good; nor is it purely good, for evil is concealed within it; but Scripture tells us that the fruit of the forbidden tree which, it says, brings those who taste of it to death, is a mixture of both. (821A–B)

With this account, Eriugena complicates the relation of evil to the sensible. Evil can be hidden in another thing, such that a good thing may wrap around and conceal evil. Eriugena uses the allegory of Paradise to claim that evil necessitates sensibility and materiality. Although sensibility is not fully evil, and evil is not fully substantial, it would appear that the role of evil maintains a characteristic of embodiment such that it can be sensible. But Eriugena's former account of evil as simply the irrational motion of the soul obscures this aspect of sensibility as well as the relationship of evil to sensibility via the third motion of the soul and aesthetic judgment. To clarify this relationship, I will now examine Eriugena's discussion of the Garden of Eden, where things in their sensibility toe the line between truth and allegory.

In the tree of knowledge, "evil [is] disguised under the colour of good which is instilled into the senses of the body and is the direct opposite of the former tree, the $\pi\tilde{\alpha}\nu$ " (824B). Evil, following Eriugena's earlier arguments, has no substance of its own but can be disguised as good. In relation to the earlier quote, evil can be wrapped and concealed by the good. Evil may take on sensible qualities, yet he argues that these sensible qualities are inherently good in and of themselves because of their interaction with the motions of the soul. Eriugena continues,

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For just as in this all good is reflected and all good exists, so in that is the totality of all evil. The one, therefore, is all good which truly subsists, the other every evil which seduces all evil men by its appearance of good. (824B–C)

Here, Eriugena maintains good as that which truly exists but not in opposition to evil, which has no existence but is reflected in the good only by its action of seduction. The seduction of evil places the responsibility for succumbing to evil on the seduced person, rather than on the seducer or the thing being sensed. What is sensed remains good: it is the irrational will that renders it evil. With this account, Eriugena adds another dimension of complexity to the problem of evil.

To remove evil further from the sensible, Eriugena considers evil in relation to the two trees in the Garden of Eden. He contrasts evil with conceptual representations rather than sensibility. His description of the two trees turns quickly into a discussion of the nature of man as sensibility and of woman as a concrete example of externalization. Thus, the allegorical reading that follows Eriugena's usual consideration of appearance—that which requires mind to penetrate the surface to reach the metaphysical relationship with God—is abandoned to a description of the embodied nature of man. It now appears that evil cannot function in isolation from the sensible. On the contrary, it is always reciprocally identified with embodied physical appearance.

The two trees of Paradise are “the All-Tree,” and the “other tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.” The need for two trees is explained via an analogy with human nature: “the visible and the invisible, the exterior and the interior, that which was created in the image of God and that which was added to it on account of sin” (824C). The All-Tree symbolizes the interior, the invisible, and the image of God, whereas the tree of Knowledge symbolizes the visible exterior of man's sensibility.

By representing the exterior and the visible, i.e., the sensible, the second tree of Knowledge becomes the locus in which “falsehood and vain phantasies” reside—and falsehood is the only place in which evil may reside (826B). Evil, which does not “exist substantially in nature” can reside only in sense, which may be mistaken. The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, physically represents the mutability of

sensibility. Knowledge can be “evil painted to resemble good, or evil in the form of good, or, to speak plainly, a false good, or evil hiding under the guise of good, whose fruit is a confused or mixed knowledge” (826B). Whereas the motions of the soul posit certain universal truths as knowledge of God, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil refers to the knowledge of the sensible world. True knowledge of God is had only in the upper, immaterial divisions of human nature. This knowledge is immutable and true. However, Knowledge of Good and Evil operates through sense and in such an operation opens itself to error. Thus there is a complicated interaction between the knowledge that the object makes available and the subsequent judgment of that knowledge upon which rests Eriugena’s argument for the non-existence of evil.

The synthesis of these two conceptions of evil falls short. Knowledge does not distinguish, through the motion of the soul, what is good and what is evil. However, judgment can be confused by a “hidden evil and apparent good which at first seduces the sense in which it lies as a woman is seduced, unable to discern the hidden evil under the appearance of good by which it is disguised” (826B–C). At first glance, this description supports Eriugena’s claim for evil as the turning away of the soul, for the soul is “seduced” and as such its response to an object is active in determining the object. Yet, “in itself evil is a deformity and an abhorrent ugliness which, if the erring sense beheld undisguised, it would not only refuse to follow or take delight in, but would flee from and abhor” (826C). From these lines it becomes clear that evil cannot be usefully predicated without an interaction with the sensible. Evil is never discussed outside of some form of sensible representation, whether apple, woman, or serpent. Even when framed in terms of knowledge, this knowledge is obtained by means of sensible interaction.

Furthermore, evil is identified as abhorrent ugliness, as a deformity. If evil were just a deformity in the good, the question of where this deformity occurs—in the soul and rational judgment, or in the thing itself—would be debatable, but the “ugliness” of evil implies a very specific aesthetic judgment. Evil, in its non-existence, gains presence only by wrapping itself in good, in created materiality. But insofar as materiality is not in and of itself evil, then beautiful or ugly does not fully account for a proper or correct moral judgment of the object. Hence, if

evil did not conceal itself in good, and an aesthetic judgment of the good, movement towards a moral judgment in light of sensibility could not occur: there would ostensibly be neither evil nor any role for evil to play. Evil can function only insofar as it is implicated in and by sensibility.

A judgment of evil, therefore, can only be made in terms of the third motion of the soul, in the rationalization of sense perception—an identical movement to that of aesthetic judgment of beauty or ugliness. Indeed, if beauty can be either good or evil, depending on the rational motion of the soul, then ugliness must be either good or evil, and his statement that “evil is a deformity and an abhorrent ugliness” points to an equivocation of predicates for identifying evil.

This mutability and difference of things, as well as a fluid use of predicating terms, shows that beauty holds no quality in and of itself that affects a thing or the proper interaction with the thing. Evil is therefore a deformity that interacts insubstantially with an object, but in relation to an idea of ugliness, must be a part of the aesthetic appraisal of the object in order for the object to be appropriately judged. While the sensible object is not ultimately taken to be evil in and of itself, its existence as a locus of identifiable difference would necessitate reexamining an aesthetics in terms of the third motion of the soul.

The Return and the Judgment of Evil

Though we have seen that Eriugena strays from his original account of evil as an irrational motion of the soul to a more complex account of evil as a necessity of sensibility, Eriugena accords a more fully developed metaphysical necessity to evil in his description of the final Return to God. Hence in this section, I will explain how the division of the soul, as well as the procession into materiality, necessitates an attenuated notion of evil in the Return by Eriugena’s own account. In wrapping up his dichotomous arguments, Eriugena writes that “the essence, then, of sensible things...will...abide for ever, for it is created unalterably in the Divine Wisdom beyond all space and time and change” (867B). This supports the concept of a duality of the nature of man and of all things as containing a metaphysical essence that exists outside of and beyond sensibility and is not subject to the laws of appearance in the world.

Thus, the Return is a return through the procession of the causes, following the common thread of the essence of things—which is God (Book I). Yet “there is in nature nothing lower than that which is bereft of life, reason and sense: nothing lower than the corruptible body,” and this is the farthest point from which the Return necessarily begins (875B). Thus, the body signifies the farthest point away from God without lapsing into the impossibility of evil or nothingness. In the Return,

the body suffers dissolution and turns back into the four elements of the sensible world...the second...when each shall take his own body out of the common fund of the four elements...the third when the body is changed into soul...the fourth when soul...shall revert to its Primordial Causes...the fifth when that spirit with its Causes is absorbed into God. (876A–B)

The body does not disappear until the four elements, the atoms of the body, return to the soul. What is at stake here is the retention of multiplicity and differentiation within the unification of God in the Return. Eriugena writes, “it is from the unification of the division of man into the two sexes that the Return and unification through all the other divisions will take its start” (893C). Difference is maintained, albeit in a more purified manner.

In the Return, there will remain a differentiated hierarchy of souls that is based on an individual’s actions in life. “All men are placed according to their degree within the precincts of the natural Paradise as though within a temple,” in a way that will purify all souls according to the sins they committed on Earth (982B). No one will be excluded, yet there will be a hierarchy and sensible differentiation among individuals. Eriugena explains, “there is no beauty which is not produced by the contrast of like and unlike...nor would the Good be so praiseworthy if it were not set against the condemnation of evil” (982D). Thus, rather than disappear, evil becomes completely necessary, as sensible difference, in the full Return of humanity to God.

No hierarchy of good is possible without an attendant turning away from good: in other words, evil is necessary to establish gradation. Good is praiseworthy only by comparison with evil. “Would the Creator of

good things and the Ordainer of evil things have permitted evil in the Universe that He created if it conferred no value upon it?” (983A). Without evil, good cannot be recognized either in life or in the spiritual Return that exceeds sensibility. Thus, evil is needed in the Return to retain difference.

In the Return, Eriugena proposes a modified materiality that surpasses flesh, which affects sin in time and space and creation. This modified materiality is sensible insofar as it remains “embodied” through analogy with the bodies of angels (who are unaffected by the Return). The concept of a “spiritual body” that will take the place of the corporeal body is used to explain the form, number, and limits of human souls in the Return (993C–D). These bodies, insofar as they are bodies, do not fully transcend the ethereal. They yield a contradiction in having been made distinct to the One that is God, while still being part of the One.

Eriugena writes, “these bodies are not phantasies, they are real” (993D). Although phantasy is metaphysical, its relationship to the sensible mars its role in the higher divisions of human nature. To be removed from the sins of flesh, these bodies must maintain a discrete identity outside of any sensible qualities. But phantasy, owing to its necessary interaction with the sensible, is not a high enough synthesis of the soul; sense perception must be made unnecessary in the Return. Yet, “real” spiritual bodies, despite having no physical presence, still can be multiple and differentiated: in the Return, evil is maintained to differentiate the resulting hierarchy. This evil is no longer just an irrational movement of the soul, nor even just an interaction between the sensible and the motion of the soul that secures moral judgment, but it is now an essential component of the hierarchical stratification that precedes the ultimate unification with God.

Extension and Conclusion

Evil, then, achieves Eriugena’s goal as the irrational motion of the soul that is the possible outcome of free will. In opposition to this, the turning away from God and division effected from this movement is always already embodied, as I have argued, and furthermore cannot be considered without differentiated individual wills. But how does evil

function within the primordial causes, when difference proceeds without free will or sin? Here, the argument for a persisting essence, and for the unembodied nature of the causes, seems to undermine evil as the force of differentiation—given the unity of essence—or as a necessarily embodied and sensible concept, because the primordial causes are neither immediately material nor immediately one as God.⁷ Yet, in Eriugena’s discussion of the ontological dependence of cause and effect (892C–D) as well as the role of evil in the Return, the allegorical role of evil more dialectically interacts with the theory of primordial causes.

An exploration of the connection between difference and evil in terms of the primordial causes, as well as the relationship between the primordial causes and Eriugena’s interpretation of allegory, demands an examination of aesthetics within Eriugena’s writing. For Eriugena, an aesthetic encounter takes place only on the surface, with the sensibility of objects in the world. The implied structure of Eriugena’s aesthetic judgment requires that objects be considered in relation to the dual—spiritual and corporeal—nature of man. The motions of the soul, in working past the phantasy of appearance to a more transcendent knowledge of truth and of God, approaches a thing in the world with the intention of finding a truth at some depth beyond appearance. Yet the appearance of a thing dialectically interacts with the immaterial aspect of a thing, and in the process of making moral judgments, with the goal of returning toward the good and to God, these two aspects play out in the motions of the soul. It is impossible within Eriugena’s account for an ugly thing to be evil, yet evil is ugly. Beauty is an aspect of God (see *The Divine Names*), but in its materiality and sensibility, it is imperfect and may hide evil. Thus, for Eriugena, appearance and aesthetic judgment seem to occupy a tenuous position in the judgment of good and evil: appearance becomes necessary for sense perception to make proper judgments of the world, yet aesthetics and sensibility occur only as an instance on the way to a spiritually transcendent knowledge of God.

This tension is further complicated by the dissolution of the body in the return to God: the corporeal falls away, but individuated difference is maintained in a hierarchy metaphorically described by positioning in a spatial relationship to God. Even without a metaphorical understanding of God’s space and time, difference is maintained in a concept of “body,”

as a “spiritual body.” Thus, although the corporeal falls away, and the differences and accidents inherent to it disappear, differences inherent to individuals persist by means of moral judgment and degrees of evil in a sensible mode. Evil persists in the Return as a concept necessarily valued by God to make differentiation possible.

However, this persistent character of evil, after the dissolution of flesh and the return of all individuals to God complicates Eriugena’s concept of evil as without substance. Although no category of substance or being is in and of itself essentially evil, evil as a category is not fully dependent on the motion of the soul: when the soul comes to rest in the Return, evil continues as a mode of differentiation. As such, this understanding of the nature of evil provides grounding for an interpretation of evil as having an identity in and of itself, which interacts outside the soul in relation to the sensible and the material. Evil functions as a delimitation of sensibility, whether corporeal (in the procession) or spiritual (in the Return).

Evil in the procession depends on the dual nature of man, and the irrational movement of the soul that creates evil, by Eriugena’s account, is located in the third motion or the sensible: the motion of the soul that interacts with the world and creates an intermediate synthesis of perception. This irrational movement of sense can occur only in response to sense perception. Thus, in the Return, evil persists, but insofar as it is not indicative of a persistent irrational motion, it is indicative of a necessary relationship to sensibility through either the memory of flesh or of sin. Alternatively, evil is the maintained difference of souls via metaphors of the body and of its limitations. Evil becomes intertwined with sensibility, and as such, sensibility becomes an aspect of moral judgment through the sense of the soul or through aesthetic means.

Eriugena’s aesthetics do not fully address the issue of moral judgment. Furthermore, ugliness is considered only insofar as evil deforms a thing, but following Eriugena’s logic, ugliness could not be in and of itself evil. Evil is thus insubstantial in its own right; there is no categorically evil substance, yet evil is categorical in its effects. Evil persists not simply through an irrational motion of the soul that looks away from God and creates difference and multiplicity, but also by maintaining a distinction among identities through means of appearance

and difference. Evil's effects become categorical by affecting appearance and difference on a level of the sensible as well as the metaphorical in the return to God.

In conclusion, though my reading of evil does not necessarily grant a substantial identity to evil, it does problematize Eriugena's account of evil as a solely uncreated, metaphysical irrationality. In terms of an aesthetic and moral judgment of the corporeal, evil's reciprocal relationship with the body after the Fall necessitates an aesthetic judgment of a thing to gain a moral judgment. There is a dialectical interaction of material and essence, as in the relationship of the dual nature of man, wherein the substance of the object and the good or evil nature ascribed to it interact first with each other and then with the motion of the soul. The only motion of the soul with an ability to move irrationally is sense, because that motion could misinterpret the physical world so as not to find God as the simple and ineffable truth of all things. Evil is not merely a misinterpretation of the soul, but also immanently bound in the sensibility of an object. As a result, evil comes to bear on the perception and judgment of an object, yielding corporeal differentiation and embodied multiplicity.

NOTES

¹ Eriugena, *Periphyseon (The Division of Nature)*, trans. I.P. Sheldon Williams (Dunbarton Oaks: Cahiers d'études médiévales, 1987).

² Here, "no-thing" is to indicate evil's non-thing-ness, different from God as "nothing," which is to indicate, rather, God as metaphysically beyond all things so as to be completely pure. This will be addressed at greater length below.

³ See Book IV, 755C–756A.

⁴ See 821A and 824C, quoted below.

⁵ All quoted text appears formatted as in the original, including any brackets and italicization.

⁶ Eriugena writes, "man is introduced last among the things that are, to be a kind of natural link everywhere mediating between the extremes through their proper parts, and reducing to a unity in himself things which in nature are widely disparate" (530C). This unity expresses, in conjunction with an

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understanding of the motions of the soul, the way in which man's dual nature accounts for creation beneath him and ineffable rationality above him.

⁷See Book I.

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THIS LIFE AND THE NEXT:

The Relationship Between Redemption and the Work of Art in the Philosophy of Walter Benjamin

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In Walter Benjamin's philosophy, history as progress is an illusion and the reality is that history has been on a path of deterioration since man's expulsion from Eden. Works of art appear as ruins in the fallen historical world. They are remnants of man's prelapsarian state of grace. These ruins are not to be discarded or disregarded, however, for the truth and possibility they hold within them give us insight into the realm of redeemed life and a chance of ending oppression. If we use the work of art as an instrument of remembrance, can we be redeemed in this life and the next?

Two distinct conceptions of time occupy a central place in Benjamin's writings: historical time and Messianic time. Messianic time will commence with the arrival of the Messiah; historical time is the time of man, that is, as measured in this lifetime. In accordance with these two times, we can see two different kinds of redemption in Benjamin's work: theological redemption, which will coincide with Messianic time, and political-historical redemption, which occurs in historical time. In both times, however, redemption is made possible by remembrance. Remembering gives us hope for the future and discourages us from repeating mistakes of the past. One medium of remembrance is a work of art.

Redemptive possibilities inhere in both the production and the reception of a work of art. The path to theological redemption is revealed through redemptive critique of a work of art, whereas political-historical redemption is realized with redemptive action, which is concerned with the content and the means of production of a work of art. Redemptive critique is immanent criticism of a work of art aimed at revealing the work's truth content, while redemptive action utilizes a work of art as a

medium to achieve the concrete goals of the kind of redemption possible in this lifetime.

Benjamin claims in “Categories of Aesthetics” that a work of art is not created by man but sprung from chaos.¹ Although a work of art is not creation, it can have creation as its theme, and, more importantly, it can become creation by becoming what Benjamin calls *utopian perception*. Utopian perception can be either messianic or revolutionary, depending on which kind of redemption one aims at achieving. In Benjamin’s early work, utopian perception is our insight into theological redemption and our glimpse of the messianic realm. A work of art enables utopian perception through redemptive critique.

Redemptive Critique

According to Benjamin, there is a method and there are guidelines to follow within redemptive critique. One must avoid judging a work based on external standards, its genre, or biographical information.² There are no specific criteria nor is there a particular value system that the critic can use to evaluate a work of art.³ Everything needed to critique a work of art can be found within the work. Staying within the bounds of the work and critiquing it based on its internal structure and appearance is what Benjamin calls *immanent criticism*. He writes,

For the value of the work depends solely on whether it makes its immanent critique possible or not. If this is possible---if there is present in the work a reflection that can unfold itself, absolutize itself, and resolve itself in the medium of art---then it is a work of art.⁴

If a work cannot be criticized in this manner, Benjamin argues that it is not a work of art.

In “Goethe’s Elective Affinities,” Benjamin makes a distinction between critique and commentary. Critique attends to the truth content of a work, while commentary deals with its material content.⁵ The truth content of a work of art is at first unperceived while the material content immediately presents itself to the receiver. The two, however, cannot be entirely separated. According to Benjamin, they are entangled by a

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literary law that states that the more significant a work is, the more seamlessly the material content and the truth content are woven together.⁶ Because of this enmeshment, the first task of the interpreter is commentary.

Since the truth content is tied to the material content, we reach the truth content of a work by engaging with the material content in a way that rescues the material content from its historical particularity, thus producing philosophical truth from a work of art.⁷ In this way, what the material content does not reveal because of its specificity, the critic unveils by transforming the everyday language of the work's material content into the eidetically charged language of philosophy. As Richard Wolin writes,

[t]he distinction between 'material content' and 'truth content' concerns the paradoxical fact that works of art are objects that originate in a determinate, fleeting moment in time but transcend that limited, historical point of origin in order to reveal something suprahistorical: an image of truth.⁸

The truth content, while always present in a work, is obscured by the material content. With criticism, the philosophical truth within a work appears. In criticism, the truth content *presents* itself.

As we have seen, critique redeems a work of art by producing philosophical truth from a work's historical material content, which is ephemeral. As Wolin further writes,

[t]he act of redemptive critique is therefore a work of *remembrance*: it is a process of preserving the truth content or Idea of a work from the ever-threatening forces of social amnesia to which humanity has over the ages become inured.⁹

Without criticism, a work remains shackled to its historicity, becomes mere semblance, and is no longer a work of art. Critique preserves the truth content, allowing for a work to serve as a reminder of redeemed life and, further, saves the truth in a work of art from falling into historical oblivion.

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Utopian perception is what a work of art becomes when it is redeemed through criticism. A work is no longer sprung from chaos. Rather, it *is* creation. Benjamin writes,

[t]o the degree that a work breaks through the realm of art and becomes utopian perception, it is creation---meaning that it is subject to moral categories in relation not just to human beings in the act of conception, but to man's existence in the sphere of perception.¹⁰

Not only is a work of art subject to moral categories, but as Benjamin contends, the conception of a work of art and its reception are also subject to those constraints and expectations. This means that the artist who is responsible for its inception is not the only obligated party. Those who receive a work of art have a responsibility *as well as* the work itself. A work of art's responsibility is to be redemptive by preserving the truth it holds, while the moral responsibility of the receiver is to bring to light that truth content and preserve the work of art through criticism. Every great artwork has truth content within it, but the burden of discovery is with the receiver. And since a created object "is defined by the fact that its life...has a share in the intention of redemption," a work of art, as creation, has a share in the intention of redemption along with man.¹¹ A work of art, however, does not intend on a kind of salvation available in the next life, but intends on being redeemed in this life, that is, saved from the wreckage of time.

In order for a work of art to become utopian perception and thus, creation, it must go through the process of criticism and be redeemed. However, the process of criticism, as a work of art itself, is never complete. If through criticism man immortalizes a work of art, the process of immortalization (i.e., criticism) must be repeated again and again in order for the work to achieve immortality. The redemptive criticism that must be repeatedly performed by creation *is* what immortalizes the work of art. Each generation that receives the work of art has the responsibility of criticism. Redemptive criticism redeems the work of art by revealing the truth content that allows us a glimpse of redeemed life.

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Ultimately, the image of redeemed life shows us that our true redemption will come only with our death and the end of historical time. As Benjamin writes in the “Theologico-Political Fragment,”

[o]nly the Messiah himself consummates all history, in the sense that he alone redeems, completes, creates its relation to the Messianic. For this reason nothing historical can relate itself on its own account to anything Messianic.¹²

As only the Messiah can redeem history, and nothing historical can relate itself to the Messianic, there is no chance that actions and events in the historical world can expedite the coming of the Messianic era. Yet, Benjamin writes in the same fragment, “just as a force can, through acting, increase another that is acting in the opposite direction, so the order of the profane assists, through being profane, the coming of the Messianic Kingdom.”¹³ While the profane may by virtue of its profanity assist in the coming of the Messianic era, there is no guide as to what can be done to hasten its coming. It does not seem that man can precipitate the arrival of the Messianic era through any particular action, for how would we know what actions to take in historical time to achieve such a result? Since our actions have an unknown outcome with respect to the Messianic, does this mean all action is equal with regard to redemption? When Benjamin became interested in historical materialism, he developed an answer to this question, an answer that speaks to the possibility of a different kind of redemption. This redemption also comes with remembrance, but it is a redemption that man can bring about in historical time.

Redemptive Action

For the later Benjamin, action is important regardless of whether or not it has any effect on the coming of the Messianic era. Since we cannot predict the effects our actions may have on theological redemption, our actions must originate from our own convictions. Despite our inability to purposively induce the Messianic era, we must act and act *ethically*. By our action, we can achieve a kind of redemption in this lifetime. It is not salvation from this life, but the salvation of the oppressed in the present

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and throughout the history of man. In his essay “On the Concept of History,” Benjamin speaks of the Messianic power that every generation has. If redemptive critique is our way of saving works of art that afford us a glimpse of the Messianic realm, Benjamin now conceives of a second way to redemption: redemptive action.

Redemptive action takes the form of a remembrance and emancipation of the oppressed.¹⁴ It is here that the redemptive abilities of a work of art come into effect with regard to this life. Benjamin believes that a work of art has the ability to redeem in its production, in its form, and in its content. He expresses this idea most poignantly in his essay “The Author as Producer.”¹⁵

Benjamin begins this essay by appealing to the case of the poet, whose right to exist as a poet has been challenged since the days of Plato. He writes, “Probably it is only seldom posed in this *form*, but it is more or less familiar to you all as the question of the autonomy of the poet, of his freedom to write whatever he pleases.”¹⁶ Benjamin believes that the current social situation compels one to make a choice as to where one’s allegiance lies.¹⁷ Bourgeois entertainment does not acknowledge that there is a decision to be made. He argues, however, that the advanced writer will acknowledge her choice and will choose to write in support of the proletariat. This decision ends the autonomy of the writer and her writing is henceforth to be used to service the needs of the class war. By choosing to write about class struggle and the plight of the proletariat, the author saves the voices of the oppressed from drowning in the undertow of time. “Such writing is commonly called *tendentious*.”¹⁸

With respect to tendentious writing, Benjamin takes a position in the debate over what is more important: the literary quality of a work or the correct political tendency of the work. Benjamin contends that while quality is more important, literary quality and correct political tendency come together in what he calls “literary tendency.” He writes,

I would like to show you that the tendency of a literary work can be politically correct only if it is also literarily correct. That is to say, the politically correct tendency includes a literary tendency. And I would add straightaway: the literary tendency, which is implicitly or explicitly contained in every correct political tendency of a work, alone constitutes the

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quality of that work. The correct political tendency of a work thus includes its literary quality *because* it includes its literary tendency.¹⁹

Benjamin is stating that the quality of the work depends on the correct political tendency because the correct political tendency will have a literary tendency, which directly determines the quality of the work. The literary tendency is necessary for a work to be politically correct. As this is the case, it is essential to know the correct literary tendency.

According to Benjamin literary tendency rests on the kind of technique the work exhibits. He writes,

If, therefore, we stated earlier that the correct political tendency of a work includes its literary quality, because it includes its literary tendency, we can now formulate this more precisely by saying that this *literary tendency can consist either in progress or in regression of literary technique.*²⁰

Since technique is concerned not just with what the work says but with *how* the work says it, instead of simply representing a political tendency, the literary itself *becomes* political. With this in mind, it matters less the position the work takes up with regards *to* the means of production, than the position the literary occupies *in* the means of production. Literary technique pertains to “the function the work has within the literary relations of production of its time.”²¹

A work of art can either have a progressive technique or a regressive technique. If a work of art uses the most advanced artistic techniques it is progressive. Otherwise, it is regressive. The most progressive techniques are ones that alter the forms of literature. When speaking of Brecht’s idea of functional transformation (*Umfunktionalierung*) Benjamin writes, “He was the first to make of intellectuals the far-reaching demand not to supply the apparatus of production without, to the utmost extent possible, changing it in accordance with socialism.”²² It is the responsibility of the author to change the medium and change it in a way that will serve the proletariat.

The correct political tendency is not enough to assure that a work has an organizing function. A political tendency, if it is correct, will show

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the author's solidarity with the proletariat not just in attitude but as a producer.²³ An author must direct, instruct, and teach. "What matters, therefore, is the exemplary character of production, which is able, first, to induce other producers to produce, and, second, to put an improved apparatus at their disposal."²⁴ Leading others to produce and to change the conditions of production to the point where it is easier for others to produce is the process of literarization. In literarization, consumers are turned into producers, the specialization required for literary production is abolished, and the conditions of living are expressed.²⁵

What is most essential for writers who have decided to work in solidarity with the proletariat is that they reflect on their position in the *process of production*.²⁶ The bourgeois writer must betray her class by reprogramming the literary machine, as opposed to giving it the oil to continue running. By reflecting on her role in the production of literature, the author can see how to change the conditions of production so that the proletariat voice is given a podium. The author cannot simply stand beside the proletariat ideologically in the class struggle. She must transform the process of production to empower the proletariat, not as a benefactor but as a fellow fighter. Redemptive action, either through memorializing the oppressed or through giving the oppressed the means to be heard, may not be salvation from this life, but it is a step toward ending oppression.

Conclusion

In Benjamin we see two kinds of redemption: the Messianic redemption that comes with the end of historical time and the revolutionary redemption that can take place *in* historical time. We get a glimpse of the Messianic era via works of art, but only through the method of redemptive, or immanent, critique. While there is no way to know what actions will accelerate the arrival of the Messianic era, Benjamin believes the artist can work toward accomplishing a kind of salvation in historical time, namely, the end of oppression. Toward this end the artist can have an impact by choosing to memorialize and record the struggles of the proletariat and by giving *her* the means to voice her struggles. While these actions cannot assure our eternal salvation, they can bring about redemption in this lifetime.

NOTES

¹ Walter Benjamin, "Categories of Aesthetics," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Vol. 1, 1913-1926*. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004), 220-222.

² Walter Benjamin, "Goethe's Elective Affinities," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Vol. 1, 1913-1926*. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004), 297-360.

³ Walter Benjamin, "The Concept of Criticism" in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Vol. 1, 1913-1926*. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004), 116-200

⁴ *Ibid.*, 159-160.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 297.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁷ Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 87.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁰ Benjamin, *Selected Writings*. 222.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 220.

¹² Walter Benjamin. *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*. Prague: Schocken, 1986. Pg. 312

¹³ *Ibid.*, 312.

¹⁴ Michael Lowry. *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's On the Concept of History*. New York: Verso, 2005, 79

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin. "The Author as Producer," in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproducibility and other writings on media*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2008) 79-95.

¹⁶ *Work of Art*, 79.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 81 (emphasis added).

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 85.

²³ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

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²⁵ Walter Benjamin, "A Critique of the Publishing Industry," in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproducibility and other writings on media*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2008) 355-359.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

INSULTING ILLOCUTIONS:

Why Insults Have Illocutionary Force

Lisa McKeown

‘Never insult anyone by accident.’
—Robert A. Heinlein

We’ve all felt the burn of an insult at some point. That insults can hurt is not in question. But what it is that we are upset *about* is slightly less clear. The overwhelming consensus when it comes to insults is that they are effective because of their content, or because they cause hurt feelings. What J.L. Austin, among others, wants to deny, however, is that insults possess what is known as “illocutionary force”—or a kind of force enacted in saying the words. Instead, I want to suggest that insults cannot simply be reduced to their content or their effects, and that there is a kind of act, though admittedly implicit rather than explicit, that can only be categorized as illocutionary.

In a series of lectures called *How To Do Things With Words*, J.L. Austin investigates a previously unexamined aspect of language, namely its performative quality. To demonstrate this quality, he introduces his famous example of “I now pronounce you man and wife” from a wedding ceremony. He calls this a “performative utterance” in order to indicate that the saying of this kind of statement is not mere description but a kind of *action*. When the officiator says “I now pronounce you man and wife,” he or she is not describing a fact, but rather marrying the couple *in saying the words*. Placing bets and making promises are some other examples that he classifies as performatives.

As his lectures proceed, Austin outlines the conditions of performatives. For example, you cannot announce a bet as soon as the race is over, you have to do it at a certain time and place. In other words, there are conventions underlying the success of a performative. Despite the fact that these performatives cannot be subject to truth or falsity, they

can, according to Austin, still be effective or ineffective, or what he terms “felicitous” and “infelicitous,” respectively. He lays out six conditions of felicitous speech acts, hoping, he admits, that we find them intuitively correct. These conditions include:

- (A. 1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,
- (A. 2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.
- (B. 1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly
- (B. 2) and completely.
- (F. 1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further
- (F. 2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently.¹

These conditions are not exhaustive, since they are not all necessary, nor sufficient, for every speech act. They are not sufficient, since even if they are all fulfilled for a marriage ceremony, if someone is participating under duress, then the marriage would not have “uptake.” They are not all necessary, since one can still have a wedding ceremony where things are not *all* done correctly,² so long as *certain* things are done correctly.³

By the end of the lectures, Austin creates a taxonomy of varying types and strengths of performatives. Throughout this categorization process, however, he encounters various problems or ambiguities. The initial examples that he gives are quite clear cases of language that do exactly what he says, as in “I now pronounce you man and wife,” or “I name this ship the Queen Victoria.” These performatives are explicit: they do exactly what they say that they are doing.

But not all performatives are explicit. You can reprimand someone or condemn them, for example, without the explicit “I condemn you” or “I reprimand you.” Insults present yet a different kind of problem, since making this kind of act explicit would actually deflate the force of it:

To say ‘you were cowardly’ may be to reprimand you or to insult you: and I can make my performance explicit by saying ‘I reprimand you’ but I cannot do so by saying ‘I insult you’---the reasons for this do not matter here. All that does matter is that a special variety of non-play can arise if someone does say ‘I insult you’: for while insulting is a conventional procedure, and indeed primarily a verbal one, so that in a way we cannot help understanding the procedure that someone who says ‘I insult you’ is purporting to invoke, yet we are bound to non-play him, not merely because the convention is not accepted, but because we vaguely feel the presence of some bar; the nature of which is not immediately clear, against *its ever being accepted*.⁴

Insulting is conventional; however, he notes that making it explicit, that is, saying “I insult you,” is not effective, and as such insults cannot be performatives. But is this correct? It might be the case, as Austin says, that insults cannot be *explicit* performatives. But if it is the case, does that also mean that insults are not performatives at all?

Here it might be useful to bring in a further distinction. Essentially, Austin distinguishes among three different aspects of language: the locutionary, the illocutionary and the perlocutionary. The locutionary aspect of language is roughly equivalent to what he calls “the traditional sense” of meaning; in other words, it refers to its sense and reference. The illocutionary aspect of language is the *force* or action the words have in their utterance, such as marrying or promising, asserting or questioning, etc. Finally, the perlocutionary aspect of language is what we bring about or achieve as a result or *consequence* of saying something, such as convincing or deterring. We promise *in* the words we say, but someone is convinced *as a result of* what we say.⁵

Separating the illocutionary force from perlocutionary effects of language can sometimes be tricky. For example, illocutions may be tied to certain effects, but these effects are of a different kind than the

perlocutionary effects of language. First, illocutions are not felicitous unless a certain effect is achieved, by which he seems to mean that one brings about the *understanding* of the meaning and force of the locution by way of engaging in a convention that we all recognize. By extension, this also involves securing the *uptake* of the speech act—when a child or a ship is named, we take it up and call them by that name. (Note that the *subsequent* usage of the name is the perlocutionary effect, whereas the illocutionary effect is that we understand and accept that we should *proceed* in that way in the first place.) Third, illocutionary acts can invite *responses*, such as orders that require compliance. The response is a consequence of the order, but it is not necessary for the order to be said to have been given.

So what happens when someone says “I insult you”? Is Austin right that this sort of statement could never work? He even gives an example, in a footnote, of a case where it does: “I am told that in the hey-day of student dueling in Germany it was the custom for members of one club to march past members of a rival club, each drawn up in file, and then for each to say to his chosen opponent as he passed, quite politely, ‘Beleidigung’, which means ‘I insult you’.”⁶

Austin’s claim is that insults lack the illocutionary aspect of a performative, which is evident when we see that an insult cannot be made explicit. But is it a condition of an illocution that it must be able to be made explicit in this way? The problem, presumably, is that even if such a convention existed in English, it could be possible for someone to say “I insult you” and for the person not to feel (or be) insulted. So we do not have control over whether our insult will be effective. But all speech acts have felicity conditions, that is, conditions that must be fulfilled for the speech act to have force or effect. If I go up to a ship and say “I hereby name you the Queen Victoria,” this would obviously not work unless I had the proper authority and context.

Keeping in mind the distinction between illocution and perlocution, many have argued that insults may be acts, but they are not *illocutionary* acts. Mats Furberg writes that “an insult is an action in words and yet not a performative.”⁷ Admittedly, towards the end of his lecture series, Austin notes that most, if not all, language contains within it an implicit action, even if that action is as simple or seemingly neutral as “stating.”

Yet, here, Furberg is assuming that illocutions need to be able to be explicit, and we are reminded of Austin's initial example of how making insults explicit in fact deflates the act before it has even begun.⁸

Reinforcing this position, in "Insulting Problems in a Second Language," Bruce Fraser writes that "the act of insulting [is] certainly a type of speech act, but not an illocutionary one."⁹ The implication here is that if insults are not illocutions, they must be perlocutions, or at least intimately tied to perlocutionary effects. Certainly when we think about insults, the perlocutionary effect does come to the foreground (as does the locutionary aspect). We are hurt (perlocution) because of the content (locution) of what someone says.

But is this to say that there is no illocutionary force present in an insult? Part of what Austin sees when he notes that beginning an insult with "I insult you in saying..." is that insults are not reducible to intention. But must all illocutionary force be tied to intention in this way? I want to turn to a closer look at the nature of insults in order to try to suggest that insults do, in fact, have an illocutionary force.

What I take to be Austin's main problem with making insults explicit is that I do not seem to have complete control over whether or not I *do* in fact insult you (i.e., whether or not I hurt your feelings) when I attempt to insult you. In other words, my intention, my words, and my saying the words are not themselves sufficient to insult you. You need to have a certain reaction in order for my insult to be deemed a success. So, to make an insult explicit is to assume uptake when this is not guaranteed. Thus, it would seem that the insults are dependent on certain consequences that would be, by Austin's definition, perlocutionary. That is, your feelings need to be hurt by my words in order to say that an insult has taken effect. Or at least, when they have been hurt, we are aware that an insult has taken effect. But if someone's feelings are not hurt, does that mean that an insult has not happened? I have a strong intuition that we can say that the words themselves actually do something that can be separated from these feelings or consequences.

When the force of insults is discussed or addressed, we focus on the hurt feelings of the victim, or how others might interpret the comment and how they might then perceive the victim of the insult. What is not addressed is *why* victims feel the way that they do, and why we might

want to say, even if they do not feel offended, that they *should*. After all, when I am insulted by something, certainly my feelings are hurt, but this, surely, is not constitutive of the insult itself. My feelings are hurt *in reaction to something*.

We can see from Austin's initial example of the problems of making insults explicit that they are not reducible to either intention or content. Even if I intend to hurt you and make that intention explicit, you may not be offended by what I say, by the insult that I use. If I were to say "I insult you," the intention would be clear, but this would not be enough to actually insult you. (In fact it would probably be grounds to laugh at *me* for not knowing how to properly insult you.) Or, I could simply engage in something less explicit by using a conventional insult such as "you're an ass." Here it is clear what my intention is. But I am not sure that recognizing the convention is enough. If your boss says this to you, the words might have a certain sting. But if those words came as a feeble retort after you had successfully offended someone else, I am not sure they would have much force at all.

Moreover, if you came to me and said that you found something I had said offensive, my usual recourse (especially if your claim comes as a surprise) would be to say something like, "Well, I had not intended to insult you," and then perhaps to continue to explain the reasons for my words. But is my assuring you that I had not intended the insult enough to deflate the force of it entirely? My intuition is that it is not.

A certain kind of content also helps to insult. But what kind of content? This is linked to social convention, but not in the institutional way that Austin starts out claiming is necessary. In China, for example, it is well-known and accepted that questioning someone's honor is incredibly insulting. Honor might be less of a concern in North America, but certainly it is insulting for someone to impugn our reputation in various ways ranging from financial credibility to our general trustworthiness.

But even the truth or the plausibility of the content is not always necessary. Consider another example, from *The Three Amigos*, when Steve Martin's character insults someone, saying: "well you dirt-eating piece of slime, you scum-sucking pig, you son of a motherless goat!"¹⁰ It is pretty obvious that no one would actually believe the propositional content of

that. What seems more important in this case is that it is clearly an insult, and is given by someone *in a position to insult*. And in this case it is effective—the recipient is insulted. Consider, by way of contrast, the scene in Monty Python’s *Holy Grail*, when Arthur approaches the French castle. The same sort of silly propositional content is employed when the French guard proclaims: “your mother was a hamster and your father smelt of elderberries!”¹¹ No one is insulted here, as the effect seems to be one mostly of confusion, and the joke in this scene seems to be that the insults are a poor substitute for actual weaponry (that is to say, actual power). But the guard lacks not only coercive power, but also social power (he is French). He is not in a powerful-enough position to deliver the insult in a degrading way. Instead, the guard himself ends up looking silly.

But what does it mean to be in a position to insult someone? It will not come as a surprise to anyone that there are many different ways to insult someone. One thing I do take all insults to be doing is to disparage or to denigrate someone’s social status or character in some way. Yet what is it “to degrade” or “to deprecate”? Can just anyone do this to us, or, at the very least, might there be a correlation between the force of the insult and the person who is doing the insulting? Fraser underlines this exact problem when he writes that,

[w]hat is not always clear in such cases is what did the insulting and, why, in any one particular instance, an insult should be felt while, in another instance, the very same action evokes little reaction.¹²

It seems to me that there are necessary contextual conditions that need to be in place for an insult to “take.” Clearly the locutionary aspect, i.e., the content, is important (even if the truth-content is sometimes irrelevant). But there seems to be another element that gets overlooked, namely, that depending on the context and the authority that the person insulting us has within that context, the insult will have a kind of force that is not reducible to our feelings. For in order to even worry about what the person insulting me says, I must first have to have acknowledged their status and position. That they hold such a position is a condition of the

insult. This force is not reducible to the content, the intention, or my hurt feelings. It is itself an act, not just content and a consequence.

Not only is it basically impossible, as Austin claimed, to make insults explicit, it is absolutely possible to insult someone by accident. Insults, in other words, are not always transparent to us in either intention or convention. Consider the following example: recently, an advertising agency deployed thirteen volunteers from a homeless shelter as wireless hot spots during a technology conference. “The aim was to avoid overwhelming the cellular networks in the area. The agency paid each participant \$20 a day, and they were also able to keep whatever customers donated in exchange for the wireless service.”¹³ The volunteers were also required to wear T-shirts that stated their name and function, for instance: “I’m Clarence, a 4-G hot spot.”

This act is insulting. But the point is not whether these homeless volunteers *felt* insulted by being made to wear these shirts and wear transmitters, the safety of which is dubious. Let us assume, though, for the sake of argument, that none of them felt insulted and thus did not experience any of the perlocutionary effects (feelings) that are typically generated by insults. Let us also assume that the internet company did not intend to insult the homeless volunteers. It is fairly reasonable to assume this, I think, if only because the company would not want to attract bad press. Rather, let us assume that they approached it as a symbiotic scenario.

It is nevertheless significant that regardless of feelings, we—and any third party—*can recognize the act as an insult*. They are being underpaid (less than minimum wage) to provide a service, while wearing a T-shirt that states their name and that they are “a 4-G hot spot” (versus, say, declaring that they are a person carrying one), but also because *in* wearing such a T-shirt, and *in* performing this task for which they are underpaid, they themselves are *being objectified*. In other words, voluntary as it may be on their part, the action itself is degrading in a way that is articulated and put into play by the words on the T-shirt. It is degrading because they are being used as means, rather than ends, regardless of their willing participation in such treatment. Their very position in society is being exploited, not improved, by this advertising agency.

Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show*, responding to a comment made on *Today*, in which someone likens this situation to someone wearing a sandwich board to advertise for a sandwich shop, quips, “You’re missing the point here...the T-shirts say ‘I *am* a hot spot’ whereas if you’re reading a sandwich board, it does not read ‘I *am a sandwich board!*’” Stewart draws our attention here to the fact that the words on the T-shirt are contributing to the illocution of the insult. They are being defined as computer equipment rather than as employees.

Whether or not this generates actual hurt feelings, it seems that we could, and should, take this to be insulting. Note here that this act is not even conventional, since it is something that no one has tried before. The insult was possible, I think, because of the background social structure that was being both exploited and brought to the foreground. Insults are acts, and they are acts that go beyond anyone’s intentions and feelings. They are actions that are tied to the social fabric itself.

Austin claims that illocutions need to be conventional, because he thinks we need to have a context and a setting that allow for the possibility and recognition of a specific act. But towards the end of his lectures, he himself begins to admit that illocutionary force permeates most, if not all, of language. At the beginning of his lectures, he outlines the necessary and sufficient conditions of successful or “felicitous” performatives. Though these conditions have an institutional slant to them, they include convention, the authority of the key players, the completeness of the act, and the understanding and emotionally appropriate reactions of the players. But if illocutions permeate all of language, then these conditions could apply less formally to things like insults. They are more difficult to pin down, however, because the nature of an effective insult will depend so heavily on the particular circumstances and the players involved. They involve a reliance on the content, but the kind of content that is necessary varies widely. They also involve obvious perlocutionary aspects, like hurt feelings. But what goes unnoticed is that there are also certain social conditions that need to be in place, conditions that allow for someone, usually in a position of social authority, to insult us. Just like you need someone with official authority to marry a couple, you also need someone with a kind of social authority to insult. When that authority is in play, the words will have sting. But

the hurt feelings are a reaction to more than just content, they are also a reaction to the act of denigration or disparagement, an act that happens *in* the words themselves.

NOTES

¹ J.L. Austin. *How To Do Things With Words*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 14-15.

² I was at a wedding ceremony where during the ‘Do you take this woman to be your wife’ the vicar got the name of the groom wrong.

³ I was at a marriage ceremony for a friend of mine where the priest got the bride’s name wrong, without realizing. The ceremony continued and was accepted as legitimate. Something similar happens at a couple of the wedding ceremonies in Richard Curtis’s *Four Weddings and a Funeral*.

⁴ Austin, 30–31, my emphasis.

⁵ *Ibid*, 121.

⁶ *Ibid*, footnote, 31–32.

⁷ Mats Furberg, Review, *Synthese*, 42, no. 3 (Nov., 1979), 469.

⁸ Something similar seems to happen with jokes. If I were to tell a joke by stating: “I am joking when I say X,” this might actually deflate the force of the joke. But that is a topic for another paper.

⁹ Bruce Fraser, “Insulting Problems in a Second Language,” *TESOL Quarterly*, 15, no. 4 (Dec. 1981), 435.

¹⁰ IndianaParkWars, *Insult #60: Son of a motherless goat!*, video, 0:08, April 8, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ijByAkNZ3lA>

¹¹ BeethovenLives, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail -The French Taunting*, video, 2:38, August 29th, 2006: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9V7zbWNznbs>

¹² Fraser, 435–436, my emphasis.

¹³ Jenna Wortham. “Use of Homeless as Internet Hot Spots Backfires on Marketer.” *New York Times*. March 12th, 2012. Available: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/13/technology/homeless-as-wi-fi-transmitters-creates-a-stir-in-austin.html>

ENDURING FRAGMENTS

What Benjamin's Collector Can Illuminate in an Encounter with the Perplexities of Hannah Arendt

Erin Schell

In what follows, I will use the model of Walter Benjamin's collector as grounds for my investigation into how the transmission of culture operates within the tensions between Hannah Arendt's actor and spectator. By juxtaposing Arendt's categorically defined models with the model of the collector, as well as weaving "interference" from fragments of Benjamin's historical materialism, I hope to illuminate the relationship both authors have to culture as it is transposed between past and future.

After a brief examination of how time and history operate in both Arendt and Benjamin, I will discuss Benjamin's collector as he encounters the objective world, speculating on how he might navigate through the tensions inherent in Arendt's definitions of actor and spectator. This will first involve an examination into how works of art and cultural objects attain permanence through Arendt's interdependent categories of action and work in *The Human Condition*.¹ Could Benjamin's collector be able to operate within Arendt's conceptions of action that propels the transmission of culture to the future? I then intend to turn to Arendt's *The Life of the Mind*,² where the spectator—by remaining outside the singular viewpoint of the actor—seems to exist in a comparably superior position of non-participation, able to observe the entirety of plurality in action, judging to ascertain meaning. At first glance, the model of the judging spectator—the poet or historian—seems more aligned to Benjamin's collector than the actor. The activities of both models involve taste, judgment, and a withdrawal from the world of appearances. How could a collection—a subjectively curatorial context—illuminate Arendt's conceptions of remembrance and storytelling as they endure in a plurality? To explore this question further I want to first outline the context within which these models operate, outlined by both authors: the circumstances of modernity.

1. The Broken Thread of Tradition

Throughout the work of Hannah Arendt, distinctions are drawn and perplexities are presented within a constellation of ideas that situate the reader's understanding within the world of appearances. Modernity's irrevocable break with tradition, its subsequent loss of authority, leaves the present moment in a continuum with a shattered past. One is born a stranger and introduced to a society of mass process, a stream of ends and means that engulfs the spontaneous, the unique, the revolutionary.³ Economic concerns have blurred with the political realm, and the rise of the social has left the individual a mere statistic of mass behaviorism, expected to conform to the demands of economic necessity. Upon a foundation of Cartesian doubt, technological development has made it possible for man not only to act upon nature, but also to act into it, leaving the individual alienated from both the world and the earth. For Arendt, this twofold "loss of the world" has rendered the uniquely particular person, event, or object—engulfed in the factual functional process of the "pseudo-divinity named History"⁴—meaningless.⁵ Modernity's radical world alienation "has left behind it a society of men who, without a common world which would at once relate and separate them, either live in desperate lonely separation or are pressed together into a mass."⁶ Yet the irrevocable break with the thread of tradition contains

the great chance to look upon the past with eyes undistracted by any tradition, with a directness which has disappeared from Occidental reading and hearing ever since the Roman civilization submitted to the authority of Greek thought.⁷

It is the responsibility of the individual to actively reconstitute the meaning of past particulars outside the guideposts of any tradition. Arendt describes this activation of the individual through the metaphor of Kafka's parable of the fighter deflecting both past and future, creating a gap or a rupture of time that is known as the present. It is in this gap that Arendt's own writing has originated, in an effort to "infect us with

perplexities” so that we too might be courageous enough to “think without a banister.”⁸

The indictment of the modern age and necessitarian argument also runs throughout the work of Walter Benjamin, and his influence on Arendt’s work is palpable. Both see historical progress or decline as two sides of historical necessity,⁹ in Benjamin’s view, submerging the particular in a stream of determinist causalities that constitute historical process, limiting the potentials inherent in the freedom of spontaneous experience.

Progress has its seat not in the continuity of elapsing time but rather in its interferences—where the truly new first makes itself felt for the first time, as sober as the dawn.¹⁰

Benjamin’s “thought fragments” mirror Arendt’s use of past particulars woven to construct a contemporaneous narrative for the reader to peer through. By bringing these fragments of meaning—extraordinary examples of past events, objects, or people—into the present, they can be freed from their previous historical contexts. This is not an antiquarian pursuit: in a fragment’s contrast with other examples, one is able to illuminate critical situations of the present and potentially offset seemingly fatalistic futures. To “reclaim our dignity”¹¹ as humankind, we partake in activities of remembrance to construct new narrative identities, or stories, from our discernment and reappropriation of these extraordinary fragments. Fundamentally for both authors, the unique potential of the individual is the particular that needs to be recovered and realized. It is particular individuals that form the basis of plurality through subjective thinking, actions, and judgments of experience. For Arendt, the individual can move between the spheres of action and thought, both as the unified external persona of the actor in the world of appearances, and as an internal duality realized in the silent dialogue of the spectator’s solitary thoughts. By moving through spheres of interaction and reflection, the individual recurrently constructs meaning through new experiences, as the cultural contexts they are encapsulated in are propelled by the plurality into the future.

For Benjamin, the collector emerges as the individual embodiment of his historical materialism, discerning fragments from the ruins of history. Benjamin's condemnation of historicism is based in part on its transmission of a narrative empathetic to "the victors."¹² When the historicist looks to the past as a whole it is viewed as a progression of "empty homogenous time."¹³ The historical materialism he is advocating is something akin to a collective cultural memory:

to bring about the consolidation of experience with history, which is original for every present, is the task of historical materialism. It is directed towards a consciousness of the present which explodes the continuum of history.¹⁴

The past for Benjamin is a secret present in the context of culture. By recognizing past particulars—words, events, objects—we discover a form of affecting the past, achieved by resurrecting fragments in the present, bringing them back to life in our time. In his own words:

The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again...For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.¹⁵

2. Action and Possession

In *The Human Condition*, plurality and freedom are the necessary conditions for action, i.e. speech and deeds, the "second birth" that inserts unique man into the community of equally unique men, initiating unpredictable chains of action and reaction into the recorded narrative of human history. Action as the fulfillment of freedom is consequently rooted in *natality*, in the fact that each birth—and from the perspective of the historian, each generation—represents a beginning and potential introduction of novelty into the world. Action, though it is distinguished by having a definite beginning, never has a predictable end. The free space of polity must be perpetually recreated by action. It can exist only when the actors come together to debate and persuade one another as equals over matters of the public. These matters of the public include—

for the purposes of our collector and this paper—the cultural identity of the public space. Since action only exists in a continuum of the present, the space vanishes when the activities of the participants end. The disadvantage of action, therefore, is in its remarkable fragility, as it is subject to the corrosive effects of time and constantly faces the prospect of oblivion. The tangibility of action depends entirely upon human plurality, upon the constant presence of others who can see and hear and therefore testify to its existence. This testimony demonstrates Arendt's concept of *remembrance*, or the initial stage of reflection that puts the recurrent debates of the present back into contextual relation with what preceded them. Beyond this immaterial remembrance, the speech and deeds of action depend upon their reification into the world of the objective, as distinguished in Arendt's category of work.

It is within the built objective world of *homo faber* that we first begin to see men develop from a homogenous species—as in the category of *animal laborans*—into individuated beings, allowing for a common system of objects to exist as delineation between the bodies of the multitude. It is within the world of objects that the ability of man to relate independently to other individual, as well as to himself, initially takes place, and where I think we can find the origin of subjectivity within the species of man, necessary for Arendt's political condition of plurality. This occurs within the act of reification, or the process of fabricating one's internal thoughts into the external world. Fabrication's definite beginning and predictable end is unlike Arendt's category of action, which has a beginning but no end, and the category of labor, which is a never-ending cycle where neither beginning nor end can be clearly distinguished. The durability of the forms of *homo faber* are demonstrative of Arendt's distinction of *immortality*, or those works that can *endure* through the generations. Yet the process of reification contains the potential of *homo faber* to “overreach himself” beyond the realm of cobbler or carpenter into the realm of the artist, poet, musician, author or historian, whose “records, documents, and monuments”¹⁶ can transcend mere use-value into the “useless” objects of culture. These forms of remembrance are necessary for a tangible record of past events to be resurrected in the debates of the present actors and subsequently vanquished or transmitted for the polity of future generations. This is not to say that Arendt is concerned with

elevating the role of the artist. On the contrary, neither Benjamin nor Arendt is particularly interested in the personal feelings or expressions of the artist. Arendt writes:

No doubt what is at stake here is much more than the psychological state of the artists; it is the objective status of the cultural world, which insofar as it contains tangible things—books and paintings, statues, buildings, and music—comprehends, and gives testimony to, the entire recorded past of countries, nations and ultimately mankind. As such, the only nonsocial and authentic criterion for judging these specifically cultural things is their relative permanence and even eventual immortality. Only what will last through the centuries can ultimately claim to be a cultural object.¹⁷

Thought—the source for works of art and culture—contains neither end nor aim outside itself, and is not caught in the necessitarian or utilitarian circle of ends and means, and therefore appears “useless.” However, this uselessness is the very quality that elevates the work of art to the highest achievement of *homo faber*, for its uselessness implies a durability that can actually achieve permanence through the ages. The origin of the work of art is in the mind’s eye of *homo faber*. It is the reification of thought that “releases into the world a passionate intensity from its imprisonment within the self.”¹⁸ This reification of the intangible thought to the tangible art work is viewed by Arendt as miraculous, similar to the concepts of *arche* or the *natality* that appear in the initiatives of action:

In the case of art works, reification is more than mere transformation; it is transfiguration, a veritable metamorphosis in which it is as though the course of nature which wills that all fire burn to ashes is reverted and even dust can burst into flames.¹⁹

Why then is the free debate seen in Arendt’s ideal of polity necessary for the fabrication of cultural works? It is because this reification of thought comes with a price. The thought embodied in the artifact cannot be remembered by its own accord:

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This reification and materialization, without which no thought can become a tangible thing, is always paid for, and that the price is life itself: it is always the “dead letter” in which the “living spirit” must survive, a deadness from *which it can be rescued only when the dead letter comes again into contact with a life willing to resurrect it, although this resurrection of the dead shares with all living things that it, too, will die again.*²⁰

Benjamin’s collector is a parallel model here to the one who “rescues” and “resurrects” in Arendt. But there is also a contrast. For Benjamin, the collector represents the heir to the object, for whom private acquisition and singular possession is integral to the transmissibility of the “living spirit”—or crystallized thought—in tangible form.²¹ Arendt, on the other hand, insists upon cultural works being accessible to the public, as they are the worldly basis of debate and persuasion in the realm of action: “the common element connecting art and politics is that they both are phenomena of the public world.”²² The distinctions that categorically separate actor and artist are reconciled by the products of both realms. Art objects share with the products of action—words and deeds—the need of some public space where they can appear and be seen, and can

...fulfill their own being, which is appearance, only in a world which is common to all; in the concealment of private life and private possession, art objects cannot attain their own inherent validity, they must, on the contrary, be protected against the possessiveness of individuals...culture indicates that the public realm, which is rendered politically secured by men of action, offers its space of display to those things whose essence it is to appear and be beautiful...culture indicates that art and politics, their conflicts and tensions notwithstanding, are interrelated and even mutually dependent.²³

For Arendt the recurrence of debate and its intersubjective conclusions are necessary to determine what works, or “dead letters,” will be resurrected and remembered, and the realm of action also decides what gets transmitted to the future and what becomes lost in the life and death

of generations. This transmission of the object to the future is what consequently informs the thought of *homo faber's* thinking in the present, appearing as an example in the artist's imagination that consequently determines what will be reified and born into the future. This will in turn presuppose the subjective plurality of individuals, perpetuating future debates based on this objective foundation, keeping inquiry alive to inform the reification of future thoughts, the plurality actively propelling culture into the future.

Unlike Arendt, the remembrance of the cultural particular for Benjamin is activated primarily in the individual collection. Though the object may be found in the world of appearances, once "the thrill of acquisition passes over them [the objects],"²⁴ they are removed from the public space and withdrawn to the private collection. For Benjamin, the collector's interest in an object includes the events, owners and histories that make up the biography of the object. For the collector, the object is rescued from the anonymity of the past and introduced into the present through contact with the other objects in the collection. Benjamin's collection then contains a temporal duality: it contains the private "chaos of memories" from the past that is contained in each fragmentary object, and the present curatorial context that is in the "order of its catalogue."²⁵ This reappropriation of the object in its current collection has in turn given it new meaning, a new life to its biography for transmission to the future. Benjamin therefore ends up advocating for private possession over Arendt's demand for public display: "Even though public collections may be less objectionable socially and more useful academically than private collections, the objects get their due only in the latter."²⁶ Benjamin's collector considers himself a lone heir, one responsible for the transmissibility of the collection to the future, and the kind of care involved in the possession of the object trumps the displays of the museum or public archive. To be sure, Arendt's public space for the debate of egalitarian actors regarding culture's transmission to the future is not a frequent sight of the modern age. On the other hand, Benjamin's romantic notion of the collector could be construed as bourgeois fetishism in reaction to the despairs of modernity. But there is more to the collector than the private hoarding of precious cultural objects. In his

essay on Eduard Fuchs, Benjamin describes the “exhibitionism of a great collector”:

What could be more in accord with this conception than a collector whose pride and expansiveness lead him to bring reproductions of his collection onto the market for the sole reason of being able to appear in public with his collections...Not only the conscientiousness of a man who sees himself as a preserver of treasures but also the exhibitionism of a great collector prompted Fuchs into publishing almost exclusively unpublished illustrative material in each of his works. This material was almost completely drawn from his own collections.²⁷

Benjamin’s collector, as historical materialist, acts as sole possessor of the objects and he alone secures transmission to the future unaided by Arendt’s conception of polity. The objects of the collection rejoin the public again only at the discretion of the collector, and in the case of Fuchs, their appearance is in the form of reproductions.²⁸

We have just seen how in the earlier work of *The Human Condition*, the category of action is the highest distinction of the *vita activa*, the actor most revered. Here, the individual requires a public space secured by action in order to debate and determine the transmission of the objective world to the future. We then contrasted Arendt’s ideal structure of cultural transmission with the collector’s individual possession of objects. It seems as though Benjamin’s collector has no relation to Arendt’s need for public debate to secure the transmission of culture to the future—all present meaning and endurance of the objects is based solely on the judgments of the individual collector, so much so that Benjamin determines personal inheritance as the best method to ensure culture’s transmission through time.²⁹ In Arendt’s later work, *The Life of the Mind*, the activity of thinking—the Socratic *two-in-one* of the soundless dialogue—and the emergence of the spectator are found. How do the particulars of the collection—‘frozen thought things’—ripped from the past and resurrected in the present, illuminate this two-in-one dialogue of the individual? How could a collection—a subjectively curatorial context—illuminate Arendt’s conceptions of remembrance and

storytelling as they endure in a plurality? Finally, what does Arendt's reappropriation of Kafka's parable of the fighter in the gap between past and future highlight for us in the collector's judgment of material culture?

3. The Two-in-One of the Collector

In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt again situates us back in the world of appearances:

to appear always means to seem to others, and this seeming varies according to standpoint and the perspective of the spectators...Seeming corresponds to the fact that every appearance, its identity notwithstanding, is perceived by a plurality of spectators.³⁰

Seeming is perceived by a plurality of spectators, those who stand outside the debates of action and are capable of viewing the entirety of the proceedings. Because the present moment is perpetually fleeting, the spectator ascertains meaning from the polity only after the appearance of particulars has taken place; i.e. in *remembrance*:

Without spectators the world would be imperfect; the participant, absorbed as he is in particular things and pressed by urgent business, cannot see how all the particular things in the world and every particular deed in the realm of human affairs fit together and produce a harmony, which itself is not given to sense perception, and this invisible in the visible would remain forever unknown if there were no spectator to look out for it, admire it, straighten out the stories and put them into words. To state this in conceptual language: The meaning of what actually happens and appears while it is happening is revealed when it has disappeared; remembrance, by which you make present to your mind what actually is absent and past, reveals the meaning in the form of a story.³¹

For Arendt, "thinking always implies remembrance"; a "stop-and-think."³² In order for the spectator to think, he cannot be actively engaged in the sense experience of observation. The world of appearance

must be translated into words: representations necessary for the internal dialogue of the thought process. Words are required for the understanding of the spectator, to familiarize the mind with the world of appearance, to bridge the gap between the internal world of the mind and the external world of appearance: “the sheer naming of things, the creation of words, is the human way of appropriating and, as it were, disalienating the world into which, after all, each of us is born as newcomer and stranger.”³³ Because mental activities are invisible, dealing with representations—‘after-thoughts’ of appearance—speech is necessary to make the life of the mind manifest in the world of appearance. Simultaneously, language enables us to think by “freezing” our previous sense experience into concepts.³⁴

In Arendt’s discussion of Kant, imagination is presented as the condition for remembrance, the faculty of having present in the mind what is absent to the senses.³⁵ Imagination also provides an “image for a concept” called a *schema*. Arendt quotes Kant: “the schema...is a product...of pure *a priori* imagination...through which images themselves first become possible.”³⁶ She explains:

If I did not have the faculty for “schematizing”, I could not have images...What makes particulars *communicable* is (a) that in perceiving a particular we have in the back of our minds...a “schema” whose “shape” is characteristic of many such particulars *and* (b) that this schematic shape is in the back of the minds of many different people.³⁷

In “schematizing,” one is able to derive a universal from the particular image, Arendt’s notion of reflective judgment as taken from Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. The schema, for example, is the representational basis for what Arendt calls an “enlarged mentality”: the ability of the mind to think as if thinking from the perspective of another.

The examples lead and guide us, and the judgment thus acquires ‘exemplary validity’. The example is the particular that contains in itself, or is supposed to contain, a concept or general rule...The judgment has exemplary validity to the extent that the example is *rightly chosen*.³⁸

Arendt, like Benjamin, looks to the past repeatedly for examples to illuminate the present. To illuminate our understanding of the thinking activity, Arendt chooses Socrates as her example *par excellence*.³⁹ Socrates, not knowing any answers, engaged with the plurality to see if his perplexities affected others, rather than coming up with solutions in isolation to prove his own superiority. Arendt discusses Socrates in terms of the similes he applied to himself. As gadfly, he aroused other citizens from their slumber to think, to be fully alive.⁴⁰ Socrates as midwife served to purge others of their “opinions,” those “unexamined prejudgments which prevent thinking by suggesting that we know where we not only don’t know, but cannot know.”⁴¹ Lastly, Socrates as the electric ray, seemingly “paralyzes where the gadfly arouses. Yet what cannot look like paralysis from the outside and the ordinary course of human affairs is *felt* as the highest state of being alive.”⁴² All of the metaphorical language used in the description of the model of Socrates is used to materialize and communicate Arendt’s discussion of the internal and invisible, the counterpart to the world of appearances that is thinking. Socrates uses the metaphor of the wind to discuss this invisibility, and it is this same wind of thought whose nature it is “to undo, *unfreeze*, as it were, what language, the medium of thinking, has frozen into thoughts.”⁴³ Works of art and cultural objects are examples of the reification of thought, which arrive to us from the past. Thinking consequently unfreezes these examples in the present and transposes them to the future. Not thinking teaches the individual to hold onto whatever paradigm he happens to find himself in, whatever rules, roles, or identity the historical tide prescribes. The activity of thinking therefore has a “destructive, undermining effect on all established criteria, values, measurements for good and evil.”⁴⁴ This is not to say there are practical applications to this mode of thinking: it is utterly useless in discovering truth or providing protocols for man to live by. Socrates has nothing to teach, and much like Arendt, he offers no prescriptions. If you are fully awake and alive in Socratic or Arendtian terms, you will find that you “have nothing in your hand but perplexities, and the most we can do with them is share them with each other.”⁴⁵ Yet, a life without thought would be utterly meaningless: “the meaning of what Socrates was doing lay in the activity

itself...To think and be fully alive are the same, and this implies that thinking must always begin afresh.”⁴⁶

For Arendt, everything that exists in a plurality does not exist in its singular identity, but also in its difference with others. To be conscious of myself requires a duality, a difference inserted into the oneness of my appearing identity: “this curious thing that I am needs no plurality to establish difference; it carries the difference within itself when it says ‘I am I.’”⁴⁷ Arendt uses the metaphor of the *Hippias Major* to describe the Socratic *two-in-one*, the silent dialogue between me and myself—consciousness and conscience—that is inherent in the activity of thinking. Unlike Hippias, who remains alone in the singular when he returns home, Socrates is awaited by “a very obnoxious fellow” who is always cross-examining him upon his return.⁴⁸ This obnoxious fellow can also be regarded as conscience, the self-awareness of our consciousness, and this duality can only occur in solitude. This *two-in-one* is inherent in the thinking activities of Arendt’s spectator, who withdraws from the world of appearances to reflect upon memories of the objective world in the imagination. The world of appearances is crucial to the spectator since

...the thinking ego does not think something but about something, and this act is dialectical: it proceeds in the form of a silent dialogue...As the metaphor bridges the gap between the world of appearances and the mental activities going on within it, so the Socratic two-in-one heals the solitariness of thought; its inherent duality points to the infinite plurality which is the law of the earth.⁴⁹

Though containing an inherent plurality in the duality of the individual, the spectator requires the presence of the objective world of appearances, not only to exist as delineation between others of the plurality, but as demarcation between the dialogue of me and myself. Benjamin’s collector, in his discernment and accrue of objects, retreats from the world of appearances to the solitude of the collection. With the addition of the newly acquired object to the collection, the collector has produced a twofold duality: the *two-in-one* inherent in the cultural object or work of art—the frozen thought-thing brought to life by the mind of the collector—as well as the difference perpetually created between the

collected object and the plurality of other objects in the collection. Because a collection involves an accrument of objects, its meaning—when taken as a whole—is always changing:

wherever there is a plurality—of living beings, of things of Ideas—there is difference and this difference does not arise from the outside but is inherent in every entity in the form of duality, from which comes unity as unification ... To take a mere thing out of its context with other things and to look on it only in its “relation” to itself, that is, in its identity, reveals no difference, no otherness; along with its relation to something it is not, it loses its reality and acquires a curious kind of eeriness. In that way, it often appears in works of art...But these art works are thought-things, and what gives them their meaning—as though they were not just themselves but for themselves—is precisely the transformation they have undergone when thinking took possession of them...what is being transferred here is the experience of the thinking ego to things themselves. For nothing can be itself and at the same time for itself but the two-in-one that Socrates discovered as the essence of thought.⁵⁰

The juxtaposition of objects within Benjamin’s curatorial context forms a living constellation of thought-things in the present. The “dead letter” of the object in which the “living spirit” survives is not only rescued in its acquisition by the collector, its meaning and identity becomes transformed in its permutation with the plurality of “otherness” in the collection. This occurs not only because of the duality inherent in the object, but because of the two-in-one inherent in the collector that perpetually changes the meaning of the object in the originality of the present moment and context. The collection exists in the present based on past judgments of the collector. The meaning of the additional object is transformed in its present relation to the collection; simultaneously the perspective of the collector is transformed as the collection takes shape and comes to life in a constellation. This dialectical relationship between collector and collection is what determines the “living spirit” that is transmitted to the future. Since the collection is *alive* with remembrances, we can compare Benjamin’s collector to Arendt’s example of Socrates:

the collection serves as the difference inserted into the oneness of his appearing identity of collector. The collection exists as the materialization of his conscience as a collector: it is what waits for him at home when retreating from the world of appearances. Like the conscience, it then “keeps in check” his judgments of other objects, by representing *what it is not* in contrast with the present world of appearances, determining aesthetic ‘norms’ in its relation to the objective world:

To thinking belongs the movement as well as the arrest of thoughts. When thinking reaches a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions, the dialectical image appears. This image is a caesura in the movement of thought. Its locus is of course not arbitrary. In short it is to be found wherever the tension between dialectical oppositions is greatest. The dialectical image is, accordingly, the very object constructed in the materialist presentation of history. It is identical with the historical object; it justifies its being blasted out of the continuum of the historical process.⁵¹

Benjamin thinks the past is never irrevocably lost to us, but is perpetually renegotiated by how it is understood. Every present moment contains its own unique past. In other words: our past is not the past of the future, for it is always transforming itself as the result of our interaction with it. For Benjamin, the “dialectical image” is contained in the present moment that encapsulates a past, a pre-history, which in turn is transposed to the future.

To compare this idea of the dialectical image with Arendt’s conception of “the gap”—the *nunc stans* she describes as the present moment—the tensions are very similar. In her description of Kafka’s parable, man is perpetually inserted into the stream of time, creating the difference between past and future.⁵² Arendt’s concept of these two temporal modalities is that they are aimed at the individual originating from the infinite. The insertion of man between past and future deflects the infinity of both forces, perpetually creating the present in a constant renegotiation of time’s impact. In the activity of thought, man exists in this “in-between” and what is referred to as the present is “a life-long

fight against the dead weight of the past, driving him forward with hope, and the fear of a future (whose only certainty is death), driving him backward toward the ‘quiet of the past’ with nostalgia for and remembrance of the only reality he can be sure of.”⁵³ The fighter in between these modalities creates his own present anew out of the two forces, and by actively fighting, gives birth to “the diagonal” of non-time. The individual is at the center of the clash between past and future, thought and experience. The work of art or cultural object is the frozen reification of this occurrence:

Each new generation, every new human being, as he becomes conscious of being inserted between an infinite past and an infinite future, must discover and ploddingly pave anew the path of thought. And it is after all possible, and seems to me likely, that the strange survival of great works, their relative permanence throughout thousands of years, is due to their having been born in the small, inconspicuous track of non-time which their authors’ thought had beaten between an infinite past and an infinite future by accepting past and future as directed, aimed, as it were, at themselves—as their predecessors and successors, their past and their future—thus establishing a present for themselves, a kind of timeless time in which men are able to create timeless works with which to transcend their own finiteness.⁵⁴

Since the individual is Janus-faced as both actor and spectator, he is alternately securing the conditions for, and reflection of, his own experience. The actor faces the future that he seeks to secure, while the spectator faces the past that he seeks to resurrect. In both Arendt and Benjamin, the individual affects a pause in the unending stream of history in the present moment, “reclaiming our dignity” from the fragments of the past that were irrevocably severed from tradition: “if judgment is our faculty for dealing with the past, the historian is the inquiring man who *by relating it* sits in judgment over it.”⁵⁵ Arendt may as well have been talking about Benjamin, either as the historical materialist who regards it as his task to “brush history against the grain,”⁵⁶ or as the collector, whose collection is “the redemption of things which is to

complement the redemption of man.”⁵⁷ The metaphor Arendt does famously ascribe to Benjamin is the pearl diver who descends to the depths of the sea to “pry loose the rich and the strange, the pearls and the coral,”⁵⁸ who is aware that the process of decay is at the same time a process of crystallization, and that some things suffer a “sea-change” waiting only for the pearl diver who will bring them up to the world of the living as his “thought fragments.” Modernity’s “loss of the world” left Benjamin to discover new ways of encountering our past. In this he became “a master when he discovered that the transmissibility of the past had been replaced by its citability and that in place of its authority there had arisen a strange power to settle down, piecemeal, in the present, and to deprive it of ‘peace of mind,’ the mindless peace of complacency.”⁵⁹ In acknowledging history’s importance but “denying its right to being the ultimate judge,”⁶⁰ we can look backwards from the present moment to collect the fragments of a shattered past that we are irrevocably no longer able to hold in allegiance. In so doing—as both Arendt and Benjamin have just demonstrated—we can build a home for ourselves in a world that has been lost to us.

NOTES

¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

² Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Volume I. (New York: Harcourt, 1978).

³ Arendt argues that this is due to the way

history is usually conceived, as process or stream or development, that everything comprehended by it can change into anything else, that distinctions become meaningless because they become obsolete, submerged, as it were, by the historical stream, the moment they have appeared.

Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 101.

⁴ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Volume I, 216.

⁵For example:

“The particular incident, the observable fact or single occurrence of nature, or the reported deed and event of history, have ceased to make sense without a universal process in which they are supposedly embedded; yet the moment man approaches this process in order to

escape the haphazard character of the particular, in order to find meaning—order and necessity—his effort is rebutted by the answer from all sides: Any order, any necessity, any meaning you wish to impose, will do. This is the clearest possible demonstration that under these conditions there is neither necessity nor meaning.” Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 88.

⁶ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 89.

⁷ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 28.

⁸ Hannah Arendt, “Basic Moral Propositions.” Lecture course at the University of Chicago, (1966). Arendt Papers, Library of Congress.

⁹ As Benjamin powerfully puts it: “Overcoming the concept of “progress” and overcoming the concept of “period of decline” are two sides of one and the same thing.” Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project (N document)* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 460.

¹⁰ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 474.

¹¹ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Volume I, 216.

¹² “And all rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them. Hence, empathy with the victor invariably benefits the rulers.” Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations (Theses on the Philosophy of History)* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 256.

¹³ He argues that, on the contrary, “history is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*].” Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 261.

¹⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Eduard Fuchs: Collector and Historian (New German Critique, No. 5)* (Spring, 1975), 29.

¹⁵ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 255.

¹⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 95.

¹⁷ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 199.

¹⁸ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 168.

¹⁹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 168.

²⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 169, emphasis added.

²¹ This is explicit in Benjamin’s own words: “for a collector’s attitude toward his possessions stems from an owner’s feeling of responsibility toward his property. Thus it is, in the highest sense, the attitude of an heir, and the most distinguished trait of a collection will always be its transmissibility.” Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 66.

²² Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 215.

²³ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 215.

²⁴ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 60.

²⁵ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 60.

²⁶ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 67.

²⁷ Benjamin, *Eduard Fuchs: Collector and Historian*, 47.

²⁸ The implication of artistic reproduction is an issue Benjamin discusses—that is for another paper.

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²⁹ Hence he concludes: “actually, inheritance is the soundest way of acquiring a collection. For a collector’s attitude toward his possessions stems from an owner’s feeling of responsibility towards his property.” Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 66.

³⁰ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Volume I, 21.

³¹ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Volume I, 103.

³² Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Volume I, 78.

³³ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Volume I, 100.

³⁴ “Language, by lending itself to metaphorical usage, enables us to think, that is, to have traffic with non-sensory matters, because it permits a carrying-over, *metapherein*, of our sense experiences. There are not two worlds because metaphor unites them.”

Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Volume I, 110.

³⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 83.

³⁶ Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 83.

³⁷ Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 83.

³⁸ Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 84, emphasis added.

³⁹ This is due to fact that Socrates

“[i]n his person unified two apparently contradictory passions, for thinking and acting—not in the sense of being eager to apply his thoughts or to establish theoretical standards for action but in the much more relevant sense of being equally at home in both spheres and able to move from one sphere to the other with the greatest apparent ease, very much as we ourselves constantly move back and forth between experiences in the world of appearances and the need for reflecting on them.” Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Volume I, 166–7.

⁴⁰ As Socratic gadfly, Arendt elaborates:

“Thinking accompanies life and is itself the de-materialized quintessence of being alive; and since life is a process, its quintessence can only lie in the actual thinking process and not in any solid results or specific thoughts. A life without thinking is quite possible; it then fails to develop its own essence—it is not merely meaningless; it is not fully alive. Unthinking men are like sleepwalkers.” Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Volume I, 191.

⁴¹ Hannah Arendt, *Thinking and Moral Considerations* (*Social Research*, Volume 38, 1971), 23.

⁴² Arendt, *Thinking and Moral Considerations*, 23.

⁴³ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Volume I, 174.

⁴⁴ Arendt, *Thinking and Moral Considerations*, 24.

⁴⁵ Arendt, *Thinking and Moral Considerations*, 26.

⁴⁶ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Volume I, 178.

⁴⁷ Arendt, *Thinking and Moral Considerations*, 32.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Volume I, 187.

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- ⁵⁰ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* Volume I, 184.
⁵¹ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 475.
⁵² Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Volume I, 202.
⁵³ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Volume I, 205.
⁵⁴ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Volume I, 210.
⁵⁵ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Volume I, 216.
⁵⁶ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 257.
⁵⁷ Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, 1983), 197.
⁵⁸ Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 205.
⁵⁹ Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 193.
⁶⁰ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Volume I, 216.