

PETER SLOTERDIJK

**THE ART OF
PHILOSOPHY**



WISDOM AS A PRACTICE

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PETER SLOTERDIJK

TRANSLATED BY KAREN MARGOLIS

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For “reason is the god in us” [some poets say] and “Mortal life contains a portion of some god.” We ought, therefore, either to pursue philosophy or to say farewell to life and depart hence.

ARISTOTLE, quoted in Ingemar Düring, *Aristotle’s Protrepticus: An Attempt at Reconstruction*

From both, however, from those who have returned from a state of suspended animation and from Moses, who returned, one can learn a great deal, but the decisive thing cannot be discovered from them, for they have not discovered [it]. If they had, ... they would not have come back at all.

FRANZ KAFKA, “On Suspended Animation”

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The original title of this book is *Scheintod im Denken* (Suspended Animation in Thought). Inspired by Kafka, it refers to the experience of near-death and the role of mental absence and neutral observation in the history of philosophy. The title of the English edition, *The Art of Philosophy: Wisdom as a Practice*, reflects the author's contribution to the present debate on the conditions of scholarship. He argues that, analogous to training for athletic achievement, scholars can actively engage in academic science as a noble exercise involving constant practice to improve knowledge and attain wisdom.

Karen Margolis
Berlin, Germany

INTRODUCTION

THEORY AS A FORM OF THE LIFE OF PRACTICE

The Greek philosopher Epicurus is reputed to have said that a person doing public speaking should bear in mind that a short speech amounts to the same as a long one. Sometimes I quote this remark at the beginning of a lecture to explain to the audience, which is usually slightly alarmed, that on this occasion it must be prepared for the long version that can replace the short one without losing anything. This is the case today. To give you a glimpse of what to expect in the coming hour, I would like to do what rhapsodists of bygone epochs are said to have done on occasion before they began their recitation. As far as possible, I shall tell you in advance what to expect, point by point, and will let you know what you are going to hear in as much detail as current plans permit. This will relieve unnecessary tension from the start and, knowing the present lecturer's intentions with regard to the beginning, middle, and end, you will be free to follow his performance in perfect serenity.

I have subdivided my ideas into four sections, which shows, by the way, that I am not addressing you as a member of the theological fraternity. Theologians, as you know, arrange their thoughts preferably into three chapters because they like transposing themselves into God's interiority, where the triad sets the tone, or sometimes into seven sections, if they are lifting their voice in imitation of the creator, or ten, if they are trying to match the author of the Decalogue tablets. This evening, however, I shall try my luck with the classical philosophical quaternity, which is based on the assumption that to tell the truth one must be able to count up to four.

I shall begin talking in general about academic science as the act of practicing anthropotechnology by outlining the subject in factual and historical terms. To do so, I will go back to two founding figures of philosophical thought: Edmund Husserl, who represents a modern rebirth of philosophy as a precise theory, and Socrates, whose appearance almost 2,500 years ago marked the beginning of the ancient quest for truth and

wisdom, creating the phenomenon called “philosophy” that is still causing controversy today.

In the second part, staying on the propaedeutic level rather than tackling the subject directly, I shall discuss the multiple contingency of the person fit for *epoché*. This expression may seem obscure, but please be patient until I have the opportunity to explain it. For the moment, all I will say is that it involves a proposal for interpreting the phenomenon of *bios theoretikós*, the reflective life, in its many variations, a phenomenon that is so improbable in the evolutionary sense and so weighty in empirical terms. Its appearance has morally unsettled and cognitively advanced human communities for over two and a half millennia. This is reason enough to explore the conditions of the possibility of theoretical behavior.

In the third section, I shall go to the heart of today’s topic and look at the formation or self-generation of the disinterested person. This requires discussing the theory of the epistemic suspended animation of savants, a theory known since antiquity. Given the time limitations, I shall do this briefly. My aim is to show why the idea that the thinking person has to be a kind of dead person on holiday is inseparable from the ancient European culture of rationality, particularly classical, Platonic-inspired philosophy. We will have the opportunity to examine Socrates’s notorious proposition that true lovers of wisdom are concerned with being as dead as possible in their lifetime; because if we are to believe idealism, only the dead enjoy the privilege of looking at the truths of the afterlife “autoptically,” as if face to face. Naturally, we do not mean the dead according to undertakers, but the philosophically dead who cast off their bodies and apparently become pure intellects or impersonal thinking souls. In this context, Socrates was suggesting that the condition of being dead that benefits theory can be learned in some way. Consequently, what we call method is not merely the scientific path to things but also the approach to a state of near-death, a cognition-enhancing condition. Plato was already aware of a precursor to death, though not the “own death” that Heidegger claimed for his theory of resolute authentic existence in *Being and Time* (1927). Instead, it is a run-up to the kind of death that creates anonymity, overpowering everything private and individual, the death that will pay for admittance to great theory afterward. Incidentally, this means that the once-lauded *ars moriendi*, the art of dying that the Stoics of antiquity and some mystical theologians of the late Middle Ages regarded as a supreme ethical discipline, does not

imply that heroism became part of the sphere of contemplative life as much as we might assume. Rather, it is a key chapter of epistemology. Given the Platonic assumption that the eternal and immortal can only be recognized by their like, the quest for our own personal capacity to perceive this is of the utmost importance. Its success defines the possibility of true theory as the ancients understood it. If we failed to activate such a capacity for perceiving the everlasting in our lifetime, we would give up hope of valid, lasting knowledge. If we possess this kind of capacity, however, we should try to ensure that we use it as early as possible. This would be equivalent to trying to die “in advance,” not so as to be dead for longer but to reveal our latent capacity for immortality while remaining trapped in our mortal shell. We have to examine the metaphysical foundations of ancient European rationalism in the context of such peculiar, gloomy questions, and we will see that in this case the word “metaphysical” means something like “epistemo-thanatological.”

In the fourth and final part of this lecture, I shall discuss the assassination attempt on the traditional type of *homo theoreticus* perpetrated by modern epistemologists together with naturalist philosophers, ideologues, and agitated spirits of all shades. The process is tantamount to killing an apparently dead person. My concluding remarks will deal with the interpretation of this paradoxical drama: we do not know whether it represents a murder or a reanimation. At that point, I raise the issue of an ambivalence immanent in the modern culture of rationality since it was decoupled from its lengthy phase of metaphysical stimulus. On the one hand, we welcome the renewed secularization of desecularized knowledge as a gain for civilization and a political opportunity, and we endorse the return of contemplative persons to the circle of normal living beings. However, we have probably not thought enough about the implications of our current epistemological beliefs being based on a crime that cannot be easily classified, the killing of the person in a state of suspended animation. This killing is the reason why persons from theory, whether named Albert Einstein, Max Weber, Claude Lévi-Strauss, or Niklas Luhmann, come to seem like next-door neighbors again.

I am aware that this kind of thinking takes me into territory seldom entered at the moment and explored even less often. Who is questioning at all nowadays why the care and preservation of illustrious, apparently dead persons was just as important to ancient European theory culture as the cult

of saints was to the medieval Church? Just as we are a long way from drawing all the conclusions from the phrase “God is dead,” we are very far from understanding every implication of the phrase “The pure observer is dead.” The secularization of cognitive processes evidently requires more time than most positivists in the nineteenth century, nuclear physicists in the twentieth, or neuroscientists in the twenty-first century could foresee. The killing of the sacred monster, which is how the cognitive person was regarded until recently, was only the beginning; the results are still not clear. Moreover, since a fairly large number of killers banded together to do the deed—I shall enumerate ten altogether—with a wide range of motives and a great variety of tools, it is practically impossible to allocate the precise share of blame to each individual assailant.

The crime involves what must be called an angelicide and concerns a case that has never been officially pursued because neither public prosecutors nor epistemologists admit the existence of angels. They do not regard them as a class of murderable subjects and do not follow up on clues to possible crimes against them. The casuistics of angel murder is complicated to begin with because there is no *corpus delicti* to present as evidence. Although there are plenty of motives and suspected murderers, there is no corpse that could resemble an angel. On the contrary, where angels practicing theory are liquidated, real, all-too-real, men and women are left behind in lecture rooms, laboratories, libraries, and never-ending faculty meetings. Indeed, if these victims of de-angelization had anything to complain about, it would be that they had been transposed from lofty unreality back to profane existence. Not all subjects of reanimation welcome their full return to life; I actually suspect some contemporary theorists of regretting being hauled back from the beautiful deathlike state of disinterestedness to the arena of cognitive realpolitik. Here, too, I beg your patience until I have developed my argument enough to be able to concretize what I can just hint at present.

One other preliminary remark seems necessary. Since everything that follows can only be properly understood and correctly classified if we are serious about the term “practice” in all its implications (including as exercise or training), I have to make a comment in advance about this category of human practice. It has been neglected by theoretical modernism, if not wantonly pushed aside and scorned. In my recent book *You Must Change Your Life! On Anthropotechnology*, which has attracted a

surge of constructive commentary since its publication, I attempted to restore the high status of practice.¹ This is long overdue, given its importance in the ethos of advanced civilizations, and has been denied so far because of systematic gaps in the vocabulary of modern philosophy and blind spots in the field of view of the dominant sociological theories of action. In *You Must Change Your Life!* I show in some detail how the traditional approach to classifying human action, that is, the familiar distinction between the *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* that initially related only to monks, was linked with the effect of making the dimension of practice as such invisible, if not actually inconceivable. As soon as we accept the ingrained difference between “active” and “contemplative” as if it were an exclusive and total alternative, we lose sight of a substantial complex of human behavior that is neither merely active nor merely contemplative. I call this the life of practice.

By nature, this is a mixed domain: it seems contemplative without relinquishing characteristics of activity and active without losing the contemplative perspective. Practice, or exercise, is the oldest form of self-referential training with the most momentous consequences. Its results do not influence external circumstances or objects, as in the labor or production process; they develop the practicing person himself and get him “into shape” as the subject-that-can. The result of practicing is shown in the current “condition,” that is, in the practicing person’s state of capability. Depending on the context, this is defined as constitution, virtue, virtuosity, competence, excellence, or fitness. The subject, seen as the protagonist of his training sequence, secures and potentiates his skills by putting himself through his typical exercises. Exercises at the same level of difficulty should be evaluated as maintenance exercises, while increasingly difficult ones should be regarded as developmental exercises. Classical *askesis*, as Greek athletes defined their training (providing the early Christian monks who called themselves “athletes of Christ” with a pattern that persisted through the ages), was always hybrid. The moment we force exercising into distinguishing between theory and practice or the active and contemplative life, we lose sight of its intrinsic value. The same applies to the distinctions in action theory introduced by contemporary authors, for example, in comparing communicative and instrumental action or even work and interaction. This structuring of the practical field also makes the dimension of the practicing life invisible.

My book tries to give an impression of the extent, weight, and variety of forms of the life of practice. I quote Nietzsche's evocative remark that, seen from the universe, the planet earth of the metaphysical age must appear almost like the "ascetic star." On this star, the struggle of the discontented nation of the ascetic priests against their inner nature is "one of the most widespread and enduring facts there are."² The time has come to cast off life-stultifying asceticism and acquire once again the positive arts of affirmation that have been obsolete for too long.

Nietzsche's intervention had a largely paradoxical effect. Modern social philosophers, critical theorists, and ubiquitous social psychologists understand as little as ever about all the work of the earth's inhabitants "on themselves," their asceticism, their training, and their efforts to get into shape (whether the trend is positive or negative), because they are still blinkered in relation to this phenomenon. The life of practice fares no better in Hannah Arendt's widely read book *Vita Activa*. It is not mentioned: a curious result for an investigation that promises to explain "the human condition."³ The citizens of modern life have long since known better; they are not influenced by the acquired blindness of theoreticians. They have opened the sluiceways to officially ignored training practices, and the ascetic improvements that Nietzsche postulated under various names—continuing education, training, fitness, sport, dietetics, self-design, therapy, meditation—have become the dominant modus vivendi in the positive achievement subcultures of the West. Moreover, all the signs now indicate that the ancient great practicing powers in East Asia, that is, China and India (following the Japanese model), have completed the transformation to globally oriented forms of training. They have launched a new, aggressive achievement regime that will soon probably outdo anything accomplished by the jaded Europeans.

In focusing on the practicing aspect of human existence, I am taking account of a fact that is apparently trivial but whose effects are unpredictably far-reaching: the fact that everything people do and can do is achieved more or less well and done better or worse. Adepts and players are constantly involved in a spontaneous better-or-worse ranking of their skills and actions. I define these kinds of distinctions as an expression of the vertical tension inherent in human existence. The technical definition of practice I have posited opens up a first approach to the phenomenon of involuntary verticality. In every performance of practicing, an action is

carried out in such a way that its present execution co-conditions its later execution. We could say that all life is acrobatics, although we perceive only the smallest part of our vital expressions as what they really are: the results of practice and elements of a *modus vivendi* that happens on the high wire of improbability.

In *You Must Change Your Life!* I began by focusing on the ancient systems of practice related to the emergence of radical ethics in the period that Karl Jaspers called the “axial age.” This is the civilizatory caesura marked by the imperial (and empire-critical) creation of the worldview of the first millennium BC. In my opinion, the training cultures of antiquity were primarily systems of ethical self-transformation. Their function was to align mankind to a cosmic constitution or a divine canon. They quite often prescribed excessive physical and mental asceticism. In the modern age in Europe, there was a tendency to group these systems together under the misleading heading of “religions” without considering that “religion” was a Romano-Christian term transposed to these phenomena (and neutralized into a cultural-anthropological category in the Enlightenment). The term can hardly do justice to the Indian, Chinese, Iranian, Jewish, and ancient European philosophical systems of leading one’s life.⁴ We shall not return in the following to the distinction between ethical practice complexes and “religious” practices of subjection to superior powers on the one hand, and ritual forms of collective cultivation of illusions on the other. For the moment, the only question that concerns us is whether we can broaden our insight into the structures of the implicit and explicit life of practice revealed in ancient ethics to the area of theoretical behavior. If I were not sure of an affirmative answer, I would have to break off my investigation at this point.

Incidentally, I refer to an analogous extension of the practice zone in my book *You Must Change Your Life!* when I propose reformulating the discipline of art history as a history of artistic or virtuoso asceticism. Just as the history of science usually presumes that the scientists who do their disciplines already exist, the history of art has assumed since time immemorial that artists are the natural protagonists of the business that produces works of art, and that these players have always existed as well. What would happen if we rotated the conceptual stage ninety degrees in both cases? What if we observed artists in their efforts to become artists in the first place? We could then see every phenomenon on this field more or

less from a side view and, alongside the familiar history of art as a history of completed works, we could obtain a history of the training that made it possible to do art and the asceticism that shaped artists. With an analogous maneuver, alongside the usual history of science as a history of problems, discourse, and results, we could likewise trace the development of the practices and exercises that enabled scholarship, and thus narrate a history of self-conquest that allows people who have used pretheoretical “normal language” so far to enter the confederation of theoretical thought. This type of distancing characterizes the task of the historical study of asceticism.

I have shown which changes in perspective this could lead to in a commentary on the book *Bild und Kult* by my colleague at Karlsruhe, Hans Belting.⁵ I think it makes sense to read this superb history of the image “before art” as a history of the asceticism that created pictures. If we assume, as Belting has plausibly suggested, that the tradition of European pictorial culture began with the icon painting of the Hellenized Christian cult, from the start we encounter a form of image-making practice in which art and asceticism represent a perfect unity. The icon painter works with endless repetition all his life, executing a single basic repertoire of a very few motifs in the belief that he is nothing more than the instrument of a supernatural image-light that pours into the work through his hand, always with the basic assumption that the authentic original picture could project itself into the visual world even without human mediation, although this occurs extremely seldom. A direct outpouring of this kind would be a divine photographic slide that descended directly from heaven above the painter. As for pictures painted by human hand, they are good only insofar as they selflessly come to resemble the unpainted original images. Christ was such a slide, three-dimensional and capable of suffering; his image on Veronica’s veil was also a slide, but projected in two dimensions and without suffering. Starting from pictorial exercises on “religious” icons, we can describe the history of European art as an enormous accumulation of exercises in skill, of formal excellence and technical asceticism that culminated in the famous highest forms. This process set the stage for the steady expansion of artistic methods, as well as for inflated ideas about the importance of the artist. The self-referentiality of artistic excellence increased inexorably until the watershed at the beginning of the modern age that led to the decline of consciousness about practice in the visual arts.

THEORY AND ASCETICISM, MODERN AND ANCIENT

The discussion this evening will not tackle the complexities of the life of practice in the arts of the modern era nor in the athletic and religious asceticism of antiquity and the Middle Ages. Our topic is science as practice, or alternatively, science as anthropotechnology, although the latter term only features here to the extent that it means people using practice to develop themselves. I will leave aside speculation about possible eugenic and genetic manipulation as elucidated from Plato to Trotsky with varying degrees of seriousness.¹ In giving the topic this specific title, we are already expressing the idea that practicing a profession dedicated to theory has to be seen somehow as asceticism and, moreover, as a process that helps the agents of scholarship as such to get fit. In this context, scholarship means more than the sum of its results; it is also the embodiment of the mental or logical procedures that help its pupils to make the transition from everyday to theoretical behavior. Incidentally, in what follows I shall proceed by minimizing the difference between science and philosophy and treating the two offshoots of the ancient European culture of rationality side by side as characteristics of the bios theoretikós, without discussing their specific qualities and increasing mutual estrangement.

As far as I know, the history of the processes that remodeled the profane person, who invariably began as a worshiper of his tribe's idols, into a person doing theory has never been written. At most, it can be found between the lines of the prevailing history of ideas. Depending on the topic, we come across it in talking about the conditions for the incorporation of scientific processes, that is, mostly in pedagogical and anthropological asides on methodologies. The close relationship between practice and method is shown in the long series of preparatory studies that ranges from present-day beginner courses to the Greek and pre-Greek paths to the initial foundations of theory.

Admittedly, we tend to overlook such phenomena as long as we continue to believe in the history of ideas oriented to “basic problems” or “results.” We fail to see its significance as long as we ignore the fact that all “ideas,” theorems, and discourses would dissolve like writing on water if they were not embedded in the ongoing processes of repetitive life that guarantee, among other things, epistemic characteristics and discursive routines. These include, first of all, prior to any science yet closely influencing it, the reading and writing practiced by persons who do theory, which is why high culture and the culture of writing are almost synonymous expressions.

To give an idea of the breadth of the historical time span in which we can observe the phenomena under consideration in our cultural context, I would like to present two testimonies here, a relatively recent one from the beginning of the twentieth century that indicates the height of development until very recently, and a time-honored one that takes us back to the moment when Plato established the Athenian academy, accomplishing the foundation of philosophy and the philosophical sciences.

Let me begin our excursion today with a little-known document that offers the opportunity to present our problem in almost crystalline clarity. I shall cite some excerpts from a letter Edmund Husserl drafted to the poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who lived in Rodaun near Vienna. The letter is dated January 12, 1907. At this time, Husserl had been tenured public professor of philosophy at Göttingen University since 1906 and was a key figure of the phenomenological movement that had existed since 1900. As we shall see shortly, he wrote this philosophical epistle in the hope of involving Hofmannsthal, who was fifteen years younger, in his theoretical project. To put it more cautiously, Husserl wanted to associate Hofmannsthal with his project from a distance, not in concrete collaboration but to demonstrate an ethereal complicity between contemporaries who shared the rather unusual preference for a strictly contemplative attitude to the world.

In approaching Hofmannsthal, Husserl took what seemed like a tempting opportunity to make common intellectual cause with the celebrated poet of late Habsburg modernism and, amid the general surroundings of triumphant cohorts of pragmatists and naturalists, to champion the idea of relating to life’s events as “pure observers.” The philosopher’s letter was preceded by his meeting in person with the addressee a month earlier. On a reading tour of Germany, Hofmannsthal had given a lecture, “The Poet and Our Time,”

in Göttingen and had visited Husserl. The poet, then age thirty-two, treated his Göttingen audience to a kind of creative confession, stylizing the poet's self as a universal witness, indeed, as a living archive of being and as the focal point of collection for the world.

Dec. 12, 1907

He is here, and it is nobody's business to bother about his presence. He is here and changes position silently and is all eyes and ears.... He is the onlooker—no, the hidden comrade, the silent brother of all things.... He suffers from everything and in suffering he enjoys everything.... For people and things and thoughts and dreams are all the same to him.... He can't ignore anything.... It is as if his eyes were lidless.... Everything must and will congregate within him.... It is he who connects the elements of time within himself. The present is within him, or nowhere.²

These words on the existence of the poetic observer were sufficiently evocative to resonate in the philosopher's mind even a month later, demonstrating his agreement. The tone and content of Husserl's letter leave no room for doubt. He felt stimulated to equate the poet's apparently selfless passivity in collecting impressions around him with the transpersonal activity of his own philosophy in observing and explaining. He had been convinced for some time of the possibility that contemplative behavior could be liberated from the position of being a once-weekly, second-class, indolent activity to which it had lapsed due to the triumphal progress of psychologisms, sociologisms, and naturalisms. What Husserl developed in the following years under the banner of "phenomenological method" is an aggregation of arguments for the thesis that the time was ripe for a philosophy that would rise to become a strict science. Or one could even say, for a defense of exact contemplation that developed into a counterattack thanks to its methodological modernization. Husserl's vision was nothing less than the transformation of intuition into precision work and the dissolution of the distinction between the working days and holidays of reason. Let me quote at some length from this moving record of an attempt at professional communication:

Most esteemed Herr von Hofmannsthal!

You told me how a steadily growing flood of correspondence has complicated your life. But I feel the urge to thank you because you have made me very happy with a precious gift. Now you have to take the consequences of that foul deed and put up with this letter as well. Please be kind enough to excuse me for not having thanked you right away. Out of the blue I had a sudden inspiration about thought syntheses that I had been chasing for a long time. I was kept busy trying to write them down. Your “Short Plays” were close at hand all the time and greatly inspired me, although I didn’t have time to read continuously at length.³

The “inner meanings” that define your art as a pure aesthetic art, or actually not define but raise it to the ideal sphere of pure aesthetic beauty, are particularly interesting for me in terms of aesthetic objectification: that is, not just for my feeling as an art lover but also as a philosopher and “phenomenologist.” The years I spent trying to get a clear sense of fundamental philosophical problems and then finding methods of solving them have brought me the lasting reward of the “phenomenological” method. It requires taking a position to all forms of objectivity that seriously deviates from the natural standpoint, a position closely related to the attitude and behavior to which your art as pure aesthetic art transports us in relation to the depicted objects and the whole world of art.

Perception of a purely aesthetic work of art is achieved by strictly preventing the intellect from taking any existential position and preventing any reaction of feeling and will that presupposes such an existential response. To put it more clearly, the work of art transfers us (and forces us) to the state of pure aesthetic intuition that excludes taking any position. The more of the existential world that echoes here, or is actively introduced, the greater the existential response demanded by the work of art as such (for example, even as a naturalistic sensory illusion: the natural truth of photography), the less aesthetically pure the work is. (This also applies to any kind of “trend.”) The natural mental attitude, that of real life, is totally “existential.” The things that stand before us in the flesh, the things that are the subject of topical and scholarly talk, are what we posit as realities, and acts of the mind and of will are based on this positing of existence: joy, that this is; sadness, that something is not; wish, that it could be; and so on. (= existential mood response). This is the antithesis of the attitude of pure aesthetic perception and its corresponding state of mind. But it applies no less to the purely phenomenological frame of mind, the only attitude for

solving philosophical problems, because the phenomenological method also demands strictly cutting off all existential responses.... In this way, all science and all reality (including that of one's own ego) become mere "phenomenon."

Only one thing remains: ... to clarify the meaning that is immanent ... by pure looking (in pure contemplative analysis and abstraction) ... never and nowhere transgressing the simple phenomenon....

[For the artist], the world becomes a phenomenon by his observation of it; its existence is a matter of indifference to him, just as it is to the philosopher [in the critique of reason].⁴

It suffices to highlight certain phrases in this significant but bizarre document. Even after a time gap of over a hundred years, the convoluted naivety of Husserl's proposal for an alliance still gives it a tragi-comic tone. Hans Blumenberg, despite his admiration for the philosopher, could not resist the passing jibe that in Husserl's case radicalism was often close to ridiculousness.⁵ In the factual part of the letter, we are immediately struck by the entirely Platonic idea that life and reflection fall into two strictly separate camps. The two dimensions relate to each other like involvement and abstinence or defilement and cleansing.

It is no coincidence that the word "pure" constitutes the word for pathos in Husserl's vocabulary: it occurs ten times alone in the excerpts cited here, whether as an adjective in phrases such as "purely aesthetic" or an adverb as in "purely aesthetically" or "purely phenomenologically." Striving toward purity is linked to the attempt to create a totally "intuitive" relationship to the conditions of consciousness. Husserl worked all his life to recreate a contemplative *modus vivendi* that he intended to base on an appropriate *modus cogitandi*. His summing up at the age of seventy in 1929 has a touch of pathos: he wrote that he had to do philosophy otherwise he would have been unable to live in this world.

Since Husserl always considered the "natural attitude" to everything in real life to mean "taking a position," which implies being involved in life's problems and being fettered to the galleys of everyday life, the decision on the possibility of intuitive, even "purely intuitive," behavior depends solely on proving that the curse of having-to-take-a-position can be successfully avoided. This means that to be pure, theory should be able at least temporarily to suspend its agent's fixation on real existence, even if it does

not completely dissolve it. Husserl typically appends the word “existential” to the phrase “taking up position.” Not long afterward, Heidegger’s approach from a diametrically opposed perspective would bring that same word, “existential,” into the center of a philosophy that was no longer contemplative. The new “existential” philosophy would not only emphasize the primacy of “concern” but would also show its determination to be swept along by the imperatives of the historical moment, as if existential “thrownness” must inevitably lead to being carried away by the great “event.” Exactly at this point, however, when the revolutionary Sturm-und-Drang author Heidegger pinned the “existentials” to his shield to join the Nazi storm, Husserl focused all his concern once again—one would like to say, for the last time—on “existential positioning.” What he envisaged was securing a windless zone in which thinking, free from the unreasonable demands of existence, could enjoy its interminable work on phenomena.

These points provide an initial approach to the set of problems that leads our investigation. If there were ever a happy occasion to observe theory being done, whether as philosophy or science, from the aspect of its practicing character, we have it here in relation to Husserl’s endeavor to attain a sphere of theoretical purity and pure theory. As we have indicated, this struggle resembled an attempt at complete purification. It was meant to put a stop to life’s tendency toward primal dirt, the inclination to get involved in and take positions on everything to do with life itself. Husserl called this act of stopping at the white line of theory “bracketing” or “switching off” the “natural position.” His endeavors could be described as a struggle for the possibility of the absence of struggle, a struggle fought to achieve a para-existential or extra-existential neutrality. Thanks to this, consciousness should withdraw from its “own” affairs and acquire the initially unlikely habit of circumventing the “things themselves” in a disinterested way.

If science—or, to put it more cautiously, the theoretical “attitude” as such, which can engender a specific science—is to be a matter of practice, then the cardinal exercise (from the Latin *cardo*, the door hinge) would have to be a withdrawal exercise. It would be an exercise in not-taking-up-a-position, an exercise in de-existentialization, an attempt at the art of suspending participation in life in the midst of life. Only through this narrow door could thought enter a sphere of pure observation in which the things of life cease to affect us directly. The observing ego should take the

place previously occupied by the position-taking ego. The following applies to this curious onlooker ego: it does not go to the theater to emerge refined; it goes to the theater refined in advance (we do not know how) to transmit something of its purity to everything it sets eyes on there. If this kind of watching can be achieved by patient exercising, one's personal existence would appear as a graphic illustration in a textbook on possible life forms. In fact, "pure" thought should be nothing but investigation of the illustrations we find if we look at an open page in the book of consciousness, and act all the while as if we have forgotten that the only consciousness one has direct access to is one's own. This peculiarity, however, should no longer play a role; even the existence that belongs to me should be regarded merely as an individual case of a general connection of essence. My life has become nothing more than an accidental information source, a point on a curve that would interest me only for the functional equation. We should be wary of seeing this attempt to purify as an anachronism. Its modernity glares out from the fact that it entered the scene more or less as the logical sister of photography, even if Husserl, in his letter, condescendingly defines photography as the accomplice of vulgar naturalism. In fact, he is a "photographer" himself in another medium. Phenomenology is the philosophical counterpart to the process of "drawing with light" on sensitive material in the late nineteenth century that ushered the production of images into the technological age. It translates the first modern media art into the mental sphere by practicing a process of transforming sights seen in the surrounding environment and random visible and palpable life substances into fixed inner images devoid of context. In time, this process also appropriates moving pictures, which is obvious because anybody who focuses on the inner worlds of imagination will soon become aware of the permanent filmmaking of consciousness and will conclude that this deserves a special film analysis. It appears as the theory of inner consciousness of time.

The images under discussion here are recorded with a noetic camera. If the films are exposed to light and retrieved from the fixing bath of inner contemplation, the pictures achieve a philosophical status that is meaningful for archives or museums as well. The point of the best of all exercises is to develop the images captured from existence as phenomena. They are archived in the phenomenological collection. It is hardly surprising that the most philosophically interesting archive theories of the past decades,

whether those of Jacques Derrida or Boris Groys, are more or less explicitly inspired by phenomenology. The archive is the collection whose content consists entirely of objects that have been released from the burden of being bound to life. Since more and more “things” can be liberated, decontextualized, and de-animated over time, the archive is in a process of incessant growth. What is expanding here is the zone of “things” released from the imposition of being real. Just as Hegel envisaged the schema of the classical museum, Husserl imagined that of the museum of the modern age.⁶

If life has always meant involvement, phenomenological thinking means practicing noninvolvement: *nota bene*, not the lack of involvement in the external activity that chronically overworked professors have no time for anyway, but in one’s own life where one takes a position. In other words, noninvolvement with one’s own self. The demonstrable results of this, the still life depictions of factors of consciousness, are to be conserved in the permanent exhibition. The best phenomenologist would be the most rigorous archivist. He would be the thinker who had learned most of all that he never really took part in existing. He would demonstrate how to behave so as to displace oneself in the permanent collection.

A few years later, Husserl invented the expression *epoché* for the gesture of distancing oneself from life, or the parts of life governed by direct affiliation to the world theater. Husserl first used the term *epoché* in paragraph 32 of his work *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology* (1913); within his school this widely quoted passage is simply called “Idea 1.” The term *epoché* merits our attention for several reasons. First, it is relevant to the present topic because for exercise techniques it provides an unmistakable specification for the basic operation that enables theory in the sense referred to earlier. It stands for “stepping back” from all forms of existential involvement. It denotes resolute dissociation from ideas arising directly from existence; it demands the bracketing of existential positioning; it allows the phenomenalization of things, the “idealizing” process of investing the content of consciousness with meaning, and thereby furnishes the preconditions for patient description of the ways in which “phenomena” are present in the noetic sphere.

Second, the expression *epoché* is exciting on account of its origin, because Husserl borrowed it from the vocabulary of the Greek skeptics. As we know, this is how they defined the attitude he recommended of

abstaining from judgment, or more precisely, the art of hovering between the doctrines of the established schools to avoid talking about the fictions of traders at the market and the fantastic tales of sailors in bars. It is worth noting that in some respects the skepsis of antiquity represents a precursor to the modern culture of coolness. It offered intellectuals and the semi-educated in the Greek and Roman cities an easily imitable attitude of liberal irony toward the providers of serious philosophical systems such as those propounded by the Platonists, Peripatetics, Stoics, and Epicureans. In this context, *epoché* corresponds to the behavior of the customer who strolls through the market without buying anything.

Skepsis returned in a twofold version at the dawn of the modern age: the first time independently as the essay school, in which an open attitude to results is cultivated as an intellectual virtue, and secondly in a servant function, acting as an intimate adversary of the pursuit of the latest established knowledge, a role in which it is supposed to serve as training partner for system-building intellectuals in their projects of cognitive absolutism. Systematists have known for ages that if you cannot deal with skepticism, you cannot deal with anything, but that if you also fail to fulfill the obligatory doubt quota (*de omnibus est dubitandum*), you will never be able to celebrate your system's roofing ceremony.

Husserl belongs to the group of quasi-homeopathic philosophers in the modern age—headed by Descartes and Hegel—who integrated methodical and existential doubt into the heart of their procedures to generate the maximum certainty after overcoming the most extreme uncertainty. In this way, the suffering caused by being unable to decide between essential alternatives prepares for total decisiveness, or at least its appearance. Husserl went beyond the ancient skeptics because he did not want merely to hover between the theories of the main philosophical tendencies: that was his reason for moving away from Dilthey, the founder of the neoskeptic “philosophy of life.” Husserl also wanted to outdo the primitive absolutist Descartes, because he was not satisfied with the equal certainty of the phrases “I think,” “I am,” “being (I) exists,” and “God exists.” He had decided to suspend even the vital evidence that gave him his own “I-am feeling,” the “dogmatic” whispering of personal existence, the whole complex of ego-bound affinities and interests. He had resolved to completely withdraw to the inner citadel, or, to put it less stoically and in

more updated, technical terms: to the inner laboratory where mental photographs provide precise, tangible pictorial presences.

Finally, the term *epoché* is revealing because it shows how the timeliness of thought or the timing of the moment of judgment penetrate philosophical consciousness. As we know, sensitivity to time, together with reflexivity, is one of the main features of cognitive modernity. This is why we always ask in which order things were thought, and how they are articulated now, at the current peak of the sequence. From the time we became convinced that one conviction (or paradigm) follows on from another, and that there will probably not be a lasting and final one, we have used the prefix “post-” more frequently and precipitately.

Consequently, the term “epoch” is mostly used today in the sense of history, and not as it is defined in skepticism or phenomenology. It is a term from the historical sciences as they have become established since the eighteenth century. That was the end of the era that accepted Lucretius’s formula: *Eadem sunt omnia semper* (Everything is always the same).⁷ Since we started understanding the world as an entity affected by history, the term “epoch” has spread like wildfire because it stands for the idea that “evolution” includes several distinct “world conditions,” to use Fichte’s and Hegel’s expression. The modern world is defenseless against the plausibility of this argument. If we talk of antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the modern age, or distinguish the bourgeois from the feudal world, or the age of handwritten manuscripts from the age of book printing, we are using popular ideas about major upheavals in global or regional conditions or technologies that changed the meaning of the world. In other words, in the historical sense *epoché* means nothing but a watershed that creates distance, which has the effect that later events can no longer be seen as the direct continuation of preceding ones. Between the time spans called “epochs” are severance events that people call breaks, leaps, transformations, revolutions, or catastrophes, depending on the context. People who claim to be abreast of the times have to date themselves and their local cultural community by the last decisive watershed. In this sense, we are condemned to actuality. We think in revolutions.

For Husserl’s linguistic world, this use of the term “epoch” had a meaning that was not incidental: the philosopher distinguishes states of the life of consciousness as they appear before and after the phenomenological break. His method is intended to be epoch-making in itself by leading

philosophy out of its naive era and bringing it into the age of reflection. In this respect, it is related to Fichte's ideas on the philosophy of history. The method contains an element of philosophical putschism that disempowers the "natural attitude." According to this, the vulgar ontologists who share Marx's assertion that being determines consciousness have to be taught a lesson. Consciousness keeps existence at a distance by responding now and then to its constant attempts to get noticed without overaccommodating to the attention seeker.

In retrospect, I would like to point out without a hint of disparagement that Husserl was mistaken in addressing Hugo von Hofmannsthal in his awkward if well-meaning quest for an alliance partner from the arts sphere. The poet could only have been a kindred soul or an ally of any kind if he had been the true descendant of the Platonizing aesthetics of the age of Goethe and classicism that Husserl presumed him to be (without reading his work to check). This could almost imply that philosophers are people who would rather make apodictic assumptions than read the details. In reality, Hofmannsthal's aesthetic projects at that time, including the *Short Plays* that lay on Husserl's desk, had long reflected the great crisis of the arts that heralded radical modernism. Hofmannsthal's essay on poetry theory, *A Letter* (published in the fall of 1902 and known to literary specialists as the "Chandos Letter"), shone out like a beacon. It articulated the depths of despair about expression, the doubt about being whole and about whether the world could be in order, a despair that Husserl himself had never known, not even in his deepest depressions. Hofmannsthal referred in his Göttingen speech to his acute but defenseless awareness that resulted in him collecting anything and everything. Yet, even these remarks indicate little more than the semblance of an affinity with the ideas of the philosopher wrestling with the mathematization of contemplation and the boundary of an area of exact intuitions.

To be sure, we are struck by a superficial similarity as long as the two authors paradoxically speak positively of "indifference." As Husserl puts it, for the artist, "the world becomes a phenomenon by his observation of it; its existence is a matter of indifference to him" (see p. 16). In von Hofmannsthal's words, "For people and things and thoughts and dreams are all the same to him" (see p. 13–14). Yet, the semblance of kinship is illusory, both in form and substance. There is a deep chasm between the methodological indifference of Husserl, who describes phenomena, and the

impressionistic indifference of the poetic collector of world material. Inspired by Mallarmé, Hofmannsthal had realized that a word in a poem had little in common with the same word used as the “carrier of a life-purpose.” Aesthetic reduction follows its own laws: on its terrain, signs have to be arranged exclusively with other signs, not with the things and facts of life. Hugo von Hofmannsthal never achieved what Husserl called phenomenological reduction; he had no idea about philosophical *epoché*, and his abstention from judgment was not methodically motivated at all because he did not bracket his existential consciousness. On the contrary, he unleashed it to the point of pan-impressionism with luxurious and masochistic features. What appears at first glance as an exercise in pure aesthetic observation is debauchery in states of hybrid passivity. This is a kind of vitality that collects omnivorously and does penance for everything. Its closest typological relations are not found in the philosophical sphere but in the symbolism of the French premodernists—in Baudelaire’s prose poetry, for example. We should mention above all the famous play *Les foules* from the anthology *Spleen de Paris*, posthumously published in 1869, in which Baudelaire, with his haphazard addiction to images, extols his aimless wanderings in the surging crowds of the big city as a “holy prostitution of the soul.”

Husserl would have been shocked to discover that his guest’s noble, melancholy para-idealism did not hide any Platonic demons but the late Habsburg variation of a mysticism of nonresistance. True, this also aimed to conquer the whole world, but no longer through imperial syntheses, but rather with dark intuitions in which everything was interwoven with everything else. The aim of the poet’s total prostitution of concentration was the evolution of the last world theater (*theatrum mundi topos*).

Hugo von Hofmannsthal died of a stroke in July 1929 on the way to the burial of his son Franz, who had killed himself with a pistol. Hugo was buried in a Franciscan monk’s habit. A letter Husserl wrote in 1934 at the age of seventy-five shows that by then the philosopher had given up the quest for alliance, dependence, and solidarity. “I have reached total philosophical solitude,” he wrote resignedly. He said that he could only exist and dared only to exist “in the *tranquillitas animi*,” as “a pure functionary of the absolute.”⁸ He was old enough to have seen how all around him, the life of taking a position took its revenge on contemplative theory. When he died in 1938, he had already witnessed the beginning of

the European spirit's descent into hell and could not avoid acknowledging the magnitude of the German contribution to this.

Already in the mid-1920s, Husserl had watched the trains pass by—full of volunteers of existence, time, and situations—traveling via Freiburg, Moscow, and Paris to a final political destination. Wherever the trains stopped, travelers who had given up contemplative theory disembarked. All those people on the move believed in the prime importance of taking a position, of concern, interest, partisanship, and struggle. They gave their faith a name that adheres to the thought of the twentieth century like a shining blemish: commitment. As early as 1927, the French polemicist Julien Benda, referring to the philosophy of the modern age as a whole, targeted this defining feature in his sharp diagnosis of the “treason of the intellectuals.”

As he grew older Husserl, too, became convinced that the European culture of reason was ailing from the roots upward. Most of all he lamented the dominant role of pathological objectivism; his description of this objectivism followed intuitions in the direction of early Critical Theory, although he would have regarded its sociologicistic approach as the malady rather than the therapy. Husserl explained the course of the illness and his opinion on how it should be treated in his late meditations on the alienation between science and the “life-world,” published as *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. He spent the last years of his life doing weird medical studies, if we can call them that. After failing in his attempt to raise philosophy to the status of a strict science, he wanted at least to contribute to culture as a kind of doctor. He set out to alleviate the two main deficiencies of European rationality, which he called physicalist objectivism and transcendental subjectivism, well aware how much he had contributed personally to the latter, voluntarily and involuntarily. Perhaps he basically did not believe in two different illnesses, but only in a single one expressed by the breakdown of the culture of reason in both misguided tendencies. The key word of his thought in old age, “life-world,” reveals what he had realized by then: the whole enterprise of theory had to be literally “earthed” again from scratch. It had to overcome its bad abstractness and return to its concrete a priori, its basis in the real, common world. The master had learned that much from his shocking pupil, Heidegger. “Life-world”: suddenly that was the cipher for the inexhaustible bounty of the real. It constituted a “ground” saturated with dependable

normality that a person was free to remain loyal to without abandoning the concerns of philosophy.

Never has a radical intellectual trend ended more modestly. Ultimately, Husserl reminds us of the life-worldly foundation of all thought—today we would use the situative term “embedding”—and in doing so, he indicates that there is a world one should not stand above. The real world is more than just an example of possible worlds. The desire to “transcend” the world is beyond what we should wish for; sensible affiliation to it would be enough. Every sickness of reason is a transgression of the life-world.

The general pathology of reason that could be postulated along the lines of the late Husserl has not been written to this day. It would probably have to contain three main sections: a theory of rational neurosis in the form of a phenomenology of ideologies, phantasms, and deliria (there are several halfway usable passages on this topic that could be revised and updated for inclusion in the final version); a theory of acquired abnormal mental attitudes (as developed, for instance, in the works of the Kiel school of neophenomenology); and a critique of committed reason including a pathology of radicalism. Despite numerous attempts at topics such as “fanaticism,” “totalitarianism,” and “fundamentalism,” so far this critique does not seem to have gotten beyond the notes stage.

Let me now invite you to a big leap that will take us from this first, almost modern example of using practice to develop a stance of contemplative theory to a process rooted in Greek antiquity. There is a group of legendary anecdotes and character descriptions about the philosopher Socrates that all share a highly significant observation. It suggests some kind of extremely peculiar social behavior in thinking, or maybe it would be better to call it peculiar asocial behavior. Witnesses report that Socrates had the habit of “sinking” into thought, as if thinking involved a kind of trance or obsessive daydream. According to Xenophon, Socrates saw this as “concentrating the mind on itself” by breaking off contact with his environment and becoming “deaf to the most insistent address.” Once, during a military camp to which he was called up as part of his duty as an Athenian citizen, he is supposed to have stood still on the spot for twenty-four hours. All the while, he was lost in the inner activity that people around him regarded as ridiculous yet amazing, and perhaps even numinous. Plato enhanced the legend of his teacher’s absences as well, for instance, at the beginning of the *Symposium* when he describes Socrates

arriving late for dinner because he had stopped in the doorway of the neighboring house and concentrated, in one of his famous thinking episodes. When he eventually joined his group of friends in Agathon's house, the young poet invited the latecomer to recline beside him, saying, "so that I may have the benefit of being in contact with that piece of wisdom which came into your mind in that doorway. Obviously you are now in possession of what you were looking for, otherwise you would not have stopped looking." Socrates replied, "It would be a happy state of affairs, Agathon, if wisdom were something that could flow between us through mere contact, from the one who is full to one who is empty, like water flowing along a strand of wool from a full cup to an empty one."⁹

Scenes like this teach us important things about the "nature" of thinking. Although the ancient witnesses did not give any clue about the content of Socrates's immersion in thought, they all respected the savant's condition of "absence" as an inseparable attribute of the business of thinking. The thoughts evidently interact to form such a dense relationship that they commandeer the thinker's consciousness and interrupt his link with the perception of circumstances. This seems to imply that in real thinking, thoughts belong more closely to their fellow thoughts than the thinker to the world around him. Anybody who experiences this in reality is uprooted from his or her everyday relationship to circumstances and totally absorbed in "internal" operations. The discovery of this new type of density is comparable to the original establishment of the "mental" as a space of previously unknown necessity and coherence. No ordinary person admits that if you have said A, you must also say B. Only philosophers feel swept away by the clear imperative that makes a B result from an A, come what may. Thinking creates an artificial autism that isolates the thinker and takes him to a special world of imperatively connected ideas.

The only way the ancient commentators could explain this disturbing phenomenon was in relation to the myth of the soul's dialogue with a demon. Socrates himself used this popular religious fiction to explain his excursions into the other mental state. To borrow Niklas Luhmann's terminology, we should describe this kind of retreat into a person's inner workings as an unobservable observation and draw the analogy to dreams, which, as we know, only the person dreaming can experience. Socrates admitted that his wisdom was "of an inferior sort and, like a dream, of doubtful reality."¹⁰

Seeing a savant during one of his absences means being witness to a special kind of abandon. We do not know what is happening inside him: is he hearing voices or seeing images, is he grappling with a demonic presence or even receiving a ray of divine light? One thing is certain: he is standing still in front of us and is very far away. Anyway, we are inclined to think this is something different from ordinary hanging around. Rather, we assume it is a matter of the thinker keeping calm in response to a roll call that reaches him from a place somewhere else that cannot be clearly defined.

In fact, Socrates was on an interior journey. In some respect, we should see him as an emigrant, as the inventor of a sublime emigration. People who think as the early philosophers thought take a holiday from the common world and migrate to the alternative world that Platonic metaphysics interpreted without further ado as the transcendent world, real life, almost, in fact, the homeland of the better part of our soul.

This experience not only explodes popular worldviews, it also disrupts established social solidarity. Shared concern for “real life” can help to develop a second-order sense of community among thinking people based on common logical experiences and the sworn fellowship of the quest for truth. Traditional family, ethnic, and urban solidarity no longer apply here. As for the social consequences of this intellectual secession, they are manifested in the dramatic discovery that every highly developed society has to deal with the existence of counter societies of thinking persons. For over two and a half millennia, a small but not insignificant part of the population of our hemisphere has always been elsewhere in thought. Academies, schools, monasteries, church buildings, and retreats show how this Elsewhere is articulated in architectural terms. In relation to present-day conditions, it is enough to say that the recent culture of rationality—which has generally been interpreted, not wrongly, as an anti-Platonic experiment—can largely be understood as an enterprise for reincorporating the bearers of knowledge. This is where answers to the following questions are sought: How can we interpret the existence elsewhere of thinking people if we no longer wish to describe it as a logical Ascension or academic emigration? How could communities for intellectual solidarity be created in the future, communities that would not inevitably cause the breach with the primary society? Can modern societies really be transformed into “knowledge societies,” as so often claimed recently,

societies in which the opposition between educated and uneducated people would lose its old acrimony? Or even—as a certain kind of Platonizing extremism still suggests today—should real nations be transformed on the model of truth-seeking communities?¹¹

Hannah Arendt indicated a partial answer in her book *The Life of the Mind*, in a chapter titled “Where Are We When We Think?”¹² The title has a distinctly provocative slant, and outside the context mentioned here, it could seem like a parody. Yet, without ceremony, Arendt stressed the observation that it is impossible to define the place of thinking with information from everyday topology. She also refers to the Socratic absences: if Socrates is immersed in his thoughts and we “see him thinking,” obviously we cannot locate this at the place where we perceive him physically. But where else? It may seem natural to some of our contemporaries to claim that the philosopher’s thoughts are in his brain, the philosopher himself is in the lecture room, the lecture room is in the university, the university is in the city, and so on, right up to the biggest container of all, the universe. From the perspective of existential analysis, there is nothing to be gained from such statements about the “where” of the thinking being. Phrases from physics and everyday topology do not facilitate any positioning of the real being that is thinking. They do not help to answer the question of where Socrates is when he is lost in thought and where his post-Socratic imitators are doing the same thing.

The correct answer is short and to the point: they are in a place Elsewhere that we are unable to give any more detailed information about for the time being. First of all, we have to be satisfied with the expression “Elsewhere”; Hannah Arendt prefers the word “nowhere.” If you are not deterred by the vagueness of this information and follow the ideas through, you will realize that there is a connection between the most general situative statement, “being-in-the-world,” and the more specific statement “being-in-thought.” In the case of “being-in-thought,” we are struck by a specific feature that also applies to “being-in-the-world” as such, but that usually goes unnoticed, the ecstatic characteristic. Ecstasy, as philosophy understands it, is not a phenomenon of light-headedness that interests psychologists or chemists, but the way in which the being represents itself as tenseness in an Elsewhere, whether we describe this tension as a tendency toward “transcending” or as a feature of creative “becoming.” Not without reason, Heidegger emphasized the etymological connections

between the Greek *ekstasis* and the Latin *existentia*: both words highlight a restlessness that results in “obtrusion.” In this context, existing does not mean arising in unambiguous localization but being in a state of tension from here to there and from now to earlier or later. In other words, we could say that anybody who exists is called for at his “place” from elsewhere. The early works of Heidegger include a dark yet completely transparent sentence (if we follow its construction scheme): “*Dasein* means: being held out into the nothing,” a sentence that implies that existence can never be imagined without disturbance by the “Open.”¹³

Perhaps we can agree on the assertion that being-there (*Dasein*) is “multivalently” localized by nature; indeed, above and beyond being-here (*Hiersein*) it has always been charged with a surplus of being-elsewhere (*Anderswosein*). The displacement into thinking makes an aspect of this feature of existence at Elsewhere visible. The thinker follows this when he is brought out of the sphere of public gatherings to be immersed in the milieu of coordinated ideas instead. What he experiences in the other state is not an internal reproduction of the chattering voices at the market, not the charade of associations milling around aimlessly in our heads (interpreted lately as a meme competition for the free analytical capacity of the neocortex).¹⁴ Thinking remains as far removed from the myths of nannies and sailors as from the programs of agitators at the agora. Thinking persons are transposed to a sphere dominated by a single exercise: to clarify the meaning of words, sentences, and sequences of phrases we may speak when we want to say something true. In this respect, in accordance with ancient conventions, thinking means the quest for the true term for a thing. On the Platonic view, this endeavor can only lead to a sustainable result because human speech docks on to another world, the sphere of ideas, or whatever you wish to call the field of stable logical objects. As always in cases of dual affiliation—to the empirical world and to a supra-empirical one—the phenomenon of double subjectivity comes into play: my real ego and a bigger self. Just as St. Paul says, “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me,” the Platonic logician acknowledges, “I think, but no matter how often I think correctly, I am not myself but the idea in me.”¹⁵ This, then, was Plato’s great intuition: the absences of his teacher Socrates should no longer occur in doorways and public places where any passerby could jeer at him lost in reverie. Plato was concerned to provide appropriate accommodation for persons in the precarious state of complete devotion to their thoughts.

The original Academy was dedicated to nothing other than an innovation in spatial creation. It was an unprecedented new institution for accommodating absences that occur on the quest for the still largely unknown connection between ideas and—why not?—the study of the connection between words and things, which, if you really think about it, can only be problematic. The academy is the architectural equivalent of what Husserl apostrophized as *epoché*—a building for shutting out the world and bracketing in concern, an asylum for the mysterious guests that we call ideas and theorems. In today's parlance, we would call it a retreat or a hideaway.

In fact, by founding the Academy in the year 387 BC, Plato was envisaging a practical pattern of life in retreat that he had encountered shortly before on his first Sicilian journey. Near the city of Kroton (now called Croton) in southern Italy, he had come upon a commune of hermits doing theory who were followers of the savant Pythagoras, a man of whom it was not known whether he was still a shaman or had already become a mathematician or was both at once. In the tracks of their master, who had been dead over for a century by then, these singular fellows had turned away from the urban community toward a life dedicated to number theory and vegetarianism. Even if the facts are unreliable and the legendary component is hard to deny, we can infer the new kind of campaigning quality of the Platonic retreat. In practice, Plato transposed the retreat from the city back into the city again and, in doing so, established a political-topological difference that would have a major effect on world history. To borrow Michel Foucault's term, the settlement of the Academy in the city was an issue of a "heterotopia." This term defines an excluded place that fits into the normal or "orthotopic" surroundings of the polis, yet totally obeys its own laws that the city finds incomprehensible, even outlandish. We have to be careful not to regard the academy as a utopia. It is not a structure in Nowhere that people might go searching for in vain like the civilization of Atlantis. It is an entirely concrete place very close to the city, within walking distance of its walls, a real existing Elsewhere that we can enter once we have satisfied the admission requirements, that is, a good grounding in mathematics and the good will to take instruction from persons who are "unconcealing" or "non-deceiving."

This heterotopic, strange construct in a place "elsewhere" has given rise to all institutions distinguished by the "academic difference." Let me

interpolate that this is a good reason to pay homage here to Plato, the inventor of higher education. In keeping with the *genius loci*, this is also the right time and place to honor the enchanting figure of Mechthild von der Pfalz, who played a part in founding Tübingen University in 1477 as well as Freiburg University twenty years previously. It was at Freiburg that Husserl taught from 1916 until he retired in March 1928. Nobody would claim that these bastions of scholarship in southwestern Germany have not fulfilled their mission with regard to shutting out the world and hosting absences.

The strong criterion of life in academic *epoché* is the ethic of peaceableness, which requires that even the fiercest argument between scholars and forcefully stated opinions of specific schools should only ever be conducted in brackets of theoretical peace. From the start, academic life has always included a specific practice of peace that has distant echoes of Husserl's *epoché*, because to this day, academe can only continue to distinguish itself from forums, arenas, parliaments, and editorial offices as the site of logical peace that supports theory for its own sake. Every incursion by movements of unrest in universities such as those seen in several phases in the twentieth century is reprehensible because it counteracts the basic law of academic pacifism. It remains to verify whether the present incursion of economism in schools and universities amounts to generalized trespass. The suspicion has been voiced and the charge drawn up.

The spirit of a concept of peace related to academic irenicism is expressed in Spinoza's definition: *Pax enim non privatio belli sed virtus est quae ex animi fortitudine oritur* (Peace is not the mere absence of war, but a virtue based on strength of mind, that is, involving men's participation).¹⁶

2

“THE OBSERVER HAS COME”

THE CREATION OF PERSONS FIT FOR *EPOCHÉ*

The earlier remarks on the early peculiarities and late complications of theoretical life furnish the preconditions for me to be able to move on to the next part of my reflections. I mentioned earlier that in the second part of this lecture I would talk about the multiple contingency (conditionality) of persons fit for *epoché*, and I promised to do what is necessary to clarify this obscure expression. I ended the first part of this venture by referring to Husserl’s loan of the word *epoché* from Greek skepticism and examining its role in the context of phenomenological procedures. The bulk of the work, however, still lies ahead of us because I shall now go on to explain how the bracketing of concepts arising from life and their replacement by stable logical objects otherwise known as “ideas” can ever be plausible in any way.

We shall now consider what might be described as a genealogical investigation in the Nietzschean sense. As we know, genealogy gives answers to questions about origin. A properly conducted investigation of this kind insists on strict differentiation between good and bad ancestry and thus provides the model of a critical discipline in a normative agenda. The opposition of good and bad corresponds to the opposition of noble and common. Genealogy traditionally belonged to the intellectual armory of people who wanted to establish that their family tree dated back to noble beginnings in olden times. It is also useful, however, for those who want to confirm their suspicion that the rise of a particular “dynasty” has its shady features. It is hardly surprising that the genealogical perspective can have metaphorical applications to some extent. Nietzsche, in particular, honed genealogy into a sharp tool for evaluating cultural traditions.

Applied to the origin of theoretical attitudes in general and the sciences in particular, thinking genealogically means investigating whether these great ideas really came from the good background they never tired of

claiming for themselves. Has the question of origin ever really been sufficiently examined in relation to theory? Is it possible that, once we started scrutinizing the phenomena more closely, we would find suspicious influences and dubious admixtures in the family tree of philosophy?

Of course, we would not bother with such conjectures either in literal or in figurative research on ancestry if we were absolutely sure of own first-class pedigree. Anybody who adopts the genealogical perspective is admitting *eo ipso* the suspicion that, despite its noble appearance, the matter in question has an inborn flaw. In our case the critical question is: could it really be possible that the true beginning of the sciences does not actually reside in astonishment, as the ancients were so fond of claiming, under the assumption that anybody who evoked this reaction, which was regarded as noble, would be safe from further scrutiny?¹ Moreover, is it not conceivable that Aristotle was deliberately trying to confuse by exaggerating when he claimed that all human beings aspired to knowledge “according to their nature,” with “nature” intended to mean the world’s oldest aristocracy, comparable to Nietzsche’s original noble title, “von Ohngefähr” (Lord Chance).² What if the much-lauded theoretical virtues really derive from secret weaknesses? What if they were based on questionable compensation for stubborn defects, or even on the morbid inability to face the facts of life without embellishment and evasion? As for Husserl, who naively declared as an old man that he had felt compelled to philosophize otherwise he would have been unable to live in the world: in admitting this, was he not revealing something that risked reinforcing barely acknowledgeable fears about theory originating from overcompensation for deficiencies?

When I pose the question of provenance in relation to persons fit for *epoché*, there are unmistakable overtones of critical-genealogical interest. Does *homo theoreticus* really come from such a good background as he has assured us from his earliest days? Or is he actually a bastard trying to impress us with fake titles? If he is really a bastard, which admixture would reveal his dubious origin? For genealogists, suspicious inquiries of this kind express the mandatory conviction that in such matters they should never trust any surface impression. The first thing researchers of origins have to learn is to set aside the proud statements of dubious authority that people make about themselves. On the contrary, the researcher’s rule is that as soon as he targets an object for genealogical suspicion, every advertised ideal reveals the state of the person who needs it.

After the preludes by the French moralists, Nietzsche was the first virtuoso of this kind of thinking from the moment he asked the question in his *Genealogy of Morals*: “What do ascetic ideals mean?” His fateful reply is well known: they attest the worst origin that can be attributed to a thing. By “bad,” he means what comes from the twisted, poisoned, and vengeful attitude of inhibited life toward the facts of being. For Nietzsche, nothing is worse, more poisonous, and more twisted than resentment that has attained power, resentment born of disclaimed envy, rebellious inferiority, and the deferred need for revenge of a caste of power-crazy clerics and agitators. With these allusions, Nietzsche unambiguously casts doubt about origin on the whole sphere of influence of conventional Christian values and their political secularization. At the same time, there is nothing more understandable, human, and politically and culturally successful than this very same resentment of the disadvantaged.

Tracking these ideas, we arrive at the most shocking discovery of extended genealogy: the regression to the roots of resentment provides explanations for the bigger half of the world insofar as this is the sphere of influence of moral envy (*Neidmoral*) and its derivatives. The most widely branched family comes from the worst parents. The form of thinking to cope with this phenomenon can only be a kind of psychology that unmask and makes us empathize with all the family members. The good reasons everybody understands are the bad ones that explain the most. The unmasking of resentments does not occur because of pride, as alleged by so many of those involved, who are understandably defensive. It arises from the zest of cultural therapy with which Nietzsche wanted to achieve the epochal reorganization of tendencies that denied the world and life to the affirmative virtues. He wanted to apply this within the whole of Western culture, indeed, to all ailing cultures hungry for transcendence. From this perspective, Albert Schweitzer was right when he singled out Nietzsche as the Western tradition’s next major ethical teacher after Socrates and Jesus.

Anybody inspired by Nietzsche to investigate the genealogy of the theoretical attitude and of scientific access to the world does this with the aim of clarifying whether it is possible to identify offshoots of resentment even in these dimensions. Isn’t science bound in its own way to the fate of “ascetic ideals”? Isn’t it true that all theory is enmeshed in the long slave rebellion masquerading as progress in conquering nature for the benefit of mankind, as claimed by the early Critical Theory inspired by crypto-

Nietzschean ideas? Isn't it the vengeful stirring of the humiliated and insulted that always drives the "will to knowledge"? Or can striving for knowledge evoke more respectable sources than the compulsion to use "intellectual" methods to compensate for primary deficiencies?

This may be the right place for a little proviso: anybody who embarks on investigations of this kind should be wary of the suggestive pathos of his questions. Their foundations are shaky, and nobody knew this better than the author of *The Gay Science*. He was not only the master of suspicion of fake noble coats of arms; he suspected the suspicion itself and confirmed that it derived in turn from obscure parentage. Suspicious thinking is not always a sign of the healthy mistrust that Nietzsche wanted to include in the basic arsenal of every good rationalist, along with sovereign delight in mockery; all too often he, too, reveals glimpses of extremely questionable inherited problems: paranoia on his mother's side, compulsive disparagement on his father's. This is why genealogical thought requires a constant balancing exercise. If you want to evaluate persons, objects, and ideas according to their sources and appellations, you have to be able to operate on this side of suspicion and beyond it.

As we can see, the questions this raises are too serious and complex for a quick answer. In the following, I shall list a number of aspects of discussing the question of origin in relation to the culture of ancient European theory. A brief summary of four approaches to the subject will help in understanding how theory and science developed *more philosophico*, in the philosophical manner, in ancient Hellas. Since these factors were linked with the emergence of corresponding asceticism, attitudes, and routines, our main question is: under which concrete conditions can we imagine the person fit for *epoché* becoming inventive?

Whatever the answers to this question, one circumstance seems obvious. Since the disciplines and fields later called theory, science, and philosophy did not exist in regular, constituted forms at the time of the first theoreticians, the people involved in creating them had to be disposed to them through pretheoretical, prescientific, and prephilosophical moods, affinities, and practices. If practicing *epoché* means training an abstinent attitude that encourages observation, this suggests we should research among the more general conditions for the elements that create such "decoupled" modes of mental behavior. The tendency to drop out of the flow of life and stand on the shore letting the world theater go by may have

been an unspecific dowry of certain peoples, castes, and families throughout time. It could only attain the crystallization point of *bios theoretikós*, however, under very specific, perhaps even unique conditions in a particular culture and at a particular time. Suddenly, it seems, there was a congregation of the premises under which the pull of realization outweighed the improbability—bordering on impossibility—of the phenomenon. Of course, almost from the moment the newcomer emerged in the world, people spread the explanation that he embodied the noblest breeding from ancient times and had the best parentage; in fact, that he was descended from the gods themselves, with the only reservation that gods are incapable of astonishment.

I would like to show in several steps how to reconstruct the creation of *epoché*-fitness among the Greeks of the classical and post-classical age. First, I shall present a psychopolitical argument, then a characterological or psychological one, then a sociological one, and finally an argument from media theory. To explain my first point, I will return to the founding of Plato's Academy, but focusing on the date this time. After returning to Athens from his first journey to Sicily around 387 B.C., Plato, who was then forty years old, bought a site near the wood of Hekádemos, which was to the northwest outside the city gates. There, he built his gardens of philosophy, close to a sports field where the buzz of activity may have convinced him that young people did not think this area was too far from the city. His thoughts went back to a decisive sequence of events in Athens: it was just a decade since the year 399 B.C., when Socrates was put on trial for not believing in the gods and scorning religion (*asébeia*) and for corrupting young people. It was a fateful period for Athens. Between 404 and 403 B.C., a wave of oligarchic reaction swept across the city, leaving a trail of bloodshed that has gone down in history as the Rule of the Thirty. The thirty years' war against Sparta had ended immediately beforehand with the sacking of Athens and a temporary regime of Spartan occupation. Plato was probably born around 428 B.C., and his youth was marked by permanent war, which is why he knew nothing of the successful *bios politikós* in the peaceful democracy. Instead, he had every opportunity to form impressions from speeches made in the agora of the warring polis; their practical results could be seen in constantly recurring battles. Plato's observations on the effects of "freedom of expression" in the belligerent city reveal why he was unable to give a positive verdict on what he later

called the “*doxa*.” Like many of his contemporaries, he regarded the distinction between persuasive statements for the civil population and the clamoring of war parties as having narrowed to almost nothing. Permanent agitation had long since replaced the contest between meaningful positions and authentic, energetic perspectives. The din of slogans had driven out the beautiful pluralism of views evolved from personal life histories. What remained was the kind of militant sedition familiar to us from the endless strife of ideological camps in the modern age.

Given this background, we can diagnose that the institutional establishment of philosophy through the founding of Plato’s school around 387 B.C. was clearly a reaction to the collapse of the Athenian polis model. It drew the conclusion from the crude evidence that democracy had failed as the collective form of the good life. Politics, as shared concern for the community, had ceased to be the highest need of the intellect. Just as Hegel proclaimed the end of art, we could speak here of the end of polis culture, in fact, of the end of the political as such. Philosophy, as Plato endowed it to posterity, is a child of defeat that simultaneously compensates for this defeat by ingeniously attacking it as the best form of defense. Understood at its historical genesis and interpreted according to its undertone, what was henceforth called the “love of wisdom” was the first and purest form of loser romanticism, reinterpreting a defeat as a victory on another field and painting an irreparable loss as a boundless profit.

In the light of this diagnosis, we should take another look at Plato’s edited versions of the narratives of Socrates’s death. The mimicry of the romantic loser already reaches an unsurpassable peak with the lofty performance illustrating the dictum that the thing to do after a philosophical life is to die philosophically. It demonstrates how losers can conjure victory out of defeat at the last minute. The living Socrates may have been the last authentic polis citizen who would not have wanted to live anywhere else except in his city and under its laws, which is why he refused to flee after being declared guilty. Socrates on the threshold of death is the main witness for the postpolitical world.

Once again, it was Nietzsche who was the first to notice these connections. He was mistrustful enough to realize that in describing Socrates’s farewell, Plato had made him say one phrase too many. He pointed to the fateful passage in the *Phaedo* dialogue where the savant gives instructions to his friend Crito: “We ought to offer a cock to

Asclepius. See to it and don't forget!" Commentators point out that the Greeks sacrificed cocks as part of a popular religious ritual performed by people rising from their sickbed after recovering from illness. In this respect, Socrates created a dangerous metaphor in his last proposition. He speaks in all seriousness as if he, who was now departing from life, had good reason to give thanks to the god of healing. He parodies the convalescent's ritual of gratitude at the altar of the god of medicine, in a casual tone, yet with a blasphemous intensity that would provoke unparalleled consequences. In its exaggerated implications, his farewell gesture can only be compared with the parody of the Jewish ritual of the Passover lamb for which Jesus substituted himself as *agnus Dei*, the lamb of God. All that is missing is people paying homage to Socrates, the acquiescent victim of a juridically dubious execution, as the cock of God. By promising Asclepius a thank-you gift, the dying wise man professes that he has to show his gratitude to the heavenly One for healing him of the mother of all sicknesses, the sickness of life.

Nietzsche's interpretation of this was right: Plato, by making his teacher implicitly claim to be recovering from the longest illness, transformed the savant's death into the primal scene of conquest of the world and life in the mode of philosophical existence. To some extent, this Socrates was the first Christian on Greek soil. There is no doubt that with his stylization of Socrates's farewell, Plato helped considerably to give the scene an undertone of craving for ascension to heaven. The willful pupil had understood that only a new interpretation of death would compensate for the catastrophe of political life. For this reason, from the start his works present the new discipline of philosophy as *ars moriendi*. It redefines the death of the wise man as a universal *epoché* through which not only the ruined city would be removed to a distance; in future, social existence as a whole in its accustomed form would be subject to philosophical contempt. This goes as far as bracketing human dependency on physical life and regarding flesh-and-blood existence as mere testing or as paying off a debt of guilt or fate from earlier existences.

The macabre abduction of scholastic philosophy from the natural attitude to life would have had no effect if there had not been a seductive element in Platonism—above and beyond its logical powers and polemical suggestions—that corresponded intimately with the changed world situation. The romantic loser tendency made it particularly attractive to ambitious people,

the gifted, and the disoriented, and this attraction continued, even in later periods. It led to the emergence of a proud defeatism that presented itself as the art of winning by losing. As the followers of philosophy no longer lived and died for the city but strove for a truth and justice above this world, the meaning of being mortal changed radically. The death of the citizen was no longer seen as the great sacrifice individuals were prepared to make for the sake of the common good as long as the city convincingly promised never to forget this deed. After the long war, it began to seem that the death of the citizens was sliding into amorphousness, and from amorphousness into meaninglessness. What could be done when the polis no longer produced a man such as Pericles who knew how to make a graveside speech according to the book? Which order could people cling to when the defeated city was no longer able to note the names of the dead, either because there were too many victims or because civic memory could no longer summon the strength to build effective monuments?

After the polis collapsed into a conglomerate of interest groups that could no longer be united by a common god and felt no obligation to behave credibly, philosophy came on the scene to ascribe a radical new meaning to death. It changed from a potential sacrifice by the citizen for the commonality to an object of romantic speculation, even, at times, to a plaything of metaphysical lasciviousness. Above all, death, seen as the conscious return to the origin, became a task to which individuals could dedicate themselves with ultimate commitment without permitting the intervention of “society,” which was now merely a superficial grouping of people pursuing their individual interests.

This was the opportunity Plato had the presence of mind to grasp: philosophy made itself independent of the perjurious city by establishing a different order of redemptive remembrance. The brilliant individual no longer needed a political afterworld to live on in its memory. Knowledge became the noetic soul’s memory of itself and its transcendent origin. Thought offered itself as the vehicle for returning home to the celestial archive. The individual no longer sought his salvation in a place in posterity’s memory. In the future, salvation would be achieved solely by anamnetic reunification with transcendence, begun in life, completed in death. Incidentally, the suprapolitical culture of commemoration in old Europe will always hover between its Platonic and its Christian version. By virtue of the former, we ourselves remember the divine, and in accordance

with the latter God remembers us, while in Christian Platonism the two commemorative movements fuse together.

Plato was in step with the times in publicly raising the issue of the general change in feeling from the dogged optimism of the Homeric age that continued echoing into the Periclean epoch, to a gentle rejection of the world and of life. The label “metaphysics,” which came later, stood for this turn, which ushered in the era of unhappy consciousness. An analogous change in atmosphere was noted in Indian ascetic culture, but well over a century before. There, too, a mood of “metaphysically” coded refusal of the world and life gradually took hold, starting from the time when the ecstatic positivity of the ancient Upanishads was forced to make way for dark, karmic liberation theologies and their most radical heir, Buddhism.

According to the psychopolitical argument, theoretical life is a fission product released by the decay of the polis. This gave rise to an emancipated spirit relieved of concern for the *politeia*. No longer feeling obliged to serve the polis, it aimed at making the city comply with its own wishes by commenting on it from above. The new art of philosophy needed the urban world only as a background for its excursions into the heights and the distance.³ The situation in the world presented the new philosophers of that time with a kind of global *epoché* without any effort on their part. As political life died out, the life of observation flared up. Having ceased to be a passion and an ultimate horizon, politics now appeared as a “problem.” After the cause itself had become devitalized and had actually disappeared, theory gushed into the vacuum and filled it with conceptual demands that reality could never meet. From then on, philosophers lived in the cities like asylum seekers with foreign passports. The free spirits entered the world stage. Their mere existence is an implicit reproach to reality for not being adequate to the ideals of those who set themselves apart from everyday life to defend higher postulates. The new parapolitical catchword “cosmopolitanism” was already circulating in Plato’s lifetime. It openly proclaimed that thinkers were no longer affiliated to a particular local community, but saw themselves as citizens of the universe. Their catchphrase was: being able to live anywhere. Somebody who can exist anywhere gets involved nowhere. It became fashionable to practice the maximum “exile ability” of the soul.⁴

Nothing is more typical of loser romanticism than the tendency of its actors to proclaim their helplessness in practical matters as a virtue and

their unsuitability for concrete posts and services as proof of responsibility for all the world's problems. The arrival of the philosophizing cosmopolitan of the post-Platonic era brought the type of free-floating intellectual that makes the virtue of detachment out of the necessity of defeat, supplemented by the right to interfere in everything related to people. Romanticism is imaginary sovereignism in postpolitical situations. The spectator shall always be superior now, while the players inevitably look ridiculous. In the interest of the onlooker who has to be enlightened, the demand is raised for power to yield to powerlessness, as demonstrated by Alexander when he let Diogenes tell him to move out of the way of his sun. The new antithesis of power and intellect is controlled from the intellect's side: in the future, power will only be seen as a form of obscured intellect waiting for its illumination.⁵

Some philosophers take up the career of traveling concert speaker, impressing various audiences by improvising on major topics. Others accept the role of royal tutor, like Aristotle, who worked for a while as preceptor for Alexander, the Macedonian prince's son. Not a few take the path to the quiet garden of Epicurus. Almost all of them conclude from the new circumstances that one has to rule one's own life, given that it is no longer possible to participate in governing cities and states. This creates the preconditions for Stoicism's widespread success. Concern for the community has become concern for oneself.

In short, as soon as the polis had lost the power to persuade people to commit to it fully with their highest ambitions and willingness to serve, a cosmopolitan market of theory and ethics arose in which a postpolitical intelligentsia reoriented itself to the ideological needs of the defeated, or one could also say, of private persons. The trend toward empire and monarchy was part of the times. As I have explained elsewhere, we have to understand Platonism to some extent as the political metaphysics of the monarchical age because it teaches us to observe the world from above and below.⁶ In that state of the world, thinking people were interested above all in imperial synthesis and paid homage to emperors, totalities, and Primary Causes.

The fact that the mood of loser romanticism influences philosophy does not rule out individual philosophers proclaiming themselves as the true lawgivers. On the contrary, only those who have lost in political terms can place themselves at the top in the philosophical context. This applies

particularly to Plato, the inventor of the philosophers' kingdom. His writings on the new philosophical order of the community tell us how and why pseudopolitical thought strays into utopianism in postpolitical situations, not excluding the later tyranny of the good. Plato's reflections are thoroughly "political" insofar as his theorems are strategically calculated and always presented with a view to his opponent and rivals; yet, they are even more apolitical because he completely idealizes the polis in which his good ideas would be valid. Aristotle, who is praised for greater realism, hardly scored better on this point. He no longer argued politically, either; he botanized political phenomena. He collected descriptions of state forms as if they were stones, plants, and insects. In his *Ethics*, he developed terms for derealized life forms. Apolitical in the extreme, Aristotle defined the bios theoretikós as *bios xenikos*, the life of the stranger.⁷

Minerva's owl thus began its flight over the scenery of an extinguished democracy. Where citizens once used to debate, visiting professors now work on their dissertations; the whole world is a residential home for visiting scholars. The scholars guarantee personally that they are world citizens, certain that such phrases are always worth a grant, or will at least land them a consultancy contract at a royal court. In late antiquity, philosophy finally collapsed into theology. Free loser romanticism had to make way for the functional imperatives of the monarchic age. Marcus Aurelius and Julian the Apostate represented isolated, inconsequential attempts to achieve a personal unity of imperial and philosophical sovereignty. The other rulers were interested in priests, not philosophers. For 1,500 years, the role of the sovereign was clearly assigned. Monarchs were not interested in pupils but in entourages. Second-string emperors of thought were not required. At that time, the practical value of "intellectuals" was confined to making subordinates from within.

As soon as the European Renaissance brought a new cycle of pioneering thought that emancipated itself from theology step by step, philosophy could return for a calculated second chance. The romantic loser syndrome also inevitably reappeared. Of course, modern philosophy has wider ambitions than its ancient counterpart could dream of. The agenda of the modern age was to include world control outbidding self-control.⁸ The new romanticism of the sovereign intellect would culminate in German Idealism, and its decay products would continue to radiate dangerously for a long time to come. In fact, almost everything that was philosophically

articulated in the nineteenth century and the twentieth, from the Young Hegelians to French Existentialism, from the early Socialists to Critical Theory, grew in the conservatories of a second romantic loser atmosphere. This was recognizable from the relationship between universal pathos and useless impracticality, occasionally complemented by a cavalier attitude toward terrorist violence as a typically modern method of acting on philosophical ideas.

On the other hand, the second democracy brought the need to create a new civil culture of remembrance. The modernists also quickly realized that there could be no binding community without civil *memoria*. Reliance on God's remembrance no longer sufficed. The second democracy once again required the memories of citizens who were supposed to commemorate distinguished fellow citizens. It is they who create the meritocratic ether essential for democratic commonwealths.

In August 1953, Hannah Arendt noted exasperatedly in her philosophical diary: "What would a philosophy of politics have looked like a hundred years before Plato!"⁹ She was expressing an idea of the lack of synchronization between democracy and philosophy. Regarding the tardiness of philosophical thought as a curable infirmity, Arendt devoted herself to the task of formulating contemporaneous theories of the political in which the structures of the *vita activa* in the flourishing polis would be recorded on a level with the extraordinary phenomena, long enough before Plato went off into idealistic retreat and just in time before Aristotle emigrated into the all-embracing passion for collection.

This kind of theory should have brought the true principles of the polis, as Arendt understood them, into central focus: citizens promoting reality by talking to each other (which would be something quite different from public speeches atrophied by clichés from the ethics of discourse); the joys of a liberality that still appreciates the living plural and the inviolable legitimacy of *doxa* (meaning "common belief," from *dokei moi*: "it seems to me"); articulating the human right of each person to his or her own point of view. Yet, even Hannah Arendt, in her paradoxical attempt to furnish the timely theory in retrospect, could not entirely avoid mixing in some romantic extras, adding ingredients from egalitarian common-sense doctrines of British origin and elitist motifs from the American Constitution.¹⁰ Admittedly, to this day it is not clear what a "political philosophy" without utopian earliness or loss-making lateness could look like. It is not even clear

whether such a philosophy could exist since, as we have seen, politics and philosophy are by no means contemporaries, not originally and probably not at any subsequent time, either. If we are talking about ultimate commitment, we have to decide whether political life or theoretical life should take priority.

In the present, philosophy, or whatever calls itself by that name, could only be political by relinquishing a privileged position, but then it would no longer be what its founding gesture intended: the declaration of the sovereignty of theoretical life. A philosophy that gave up its position could no longer be regarded as a “heroic passion.” For this reason, “political philosophy” today is *eo ipso* après-philosophy. It usually appears as topical analysis but can also be expressed as critical meliorism specializing in social grievances to demand their elimination. In general, it subscribes to the post-heroic approach that Richard Rorty reformulated as “democracy [taking] precedence over philosophy.” Such inferior “philosophy” is tolerated by democratic society but not admired. With gentle irony, a self-confident democracy will refuse the request to let philosophy “explain” it. In this context, it is not surprising that Hannah Arendt’s exploration of a “philosophy of politics a hundred years before Plato” turned out to be a project of Graecophile nostalgia rather than a valid theory of the real existing *res publica*. Arendt, aware of this limitation, rejected the appellation “philosopher” for herself and did not want her subject to be described as “political philosophy”; she preferred the term “political theory.”¹¹

The attempt to grasp the genesis of the theoretical attitude does not end with the reference to private people engaged in meditation being released from their concern for the polis, however much the transformation of the citizen into an unburdened spectator of the world theater may remain important for everything else. The second point to make in this connection is that individual psychology can also motivate the emergence of persons fit for *epoché*. Early on—at the latest, with Aristotle—Greek proto-psychologists made the observation that some individuals have a tendency to create a chronic distance between themselves and the world around them. From the start, it was unclear whether a person leading a reclusive contemplative existence is expressing a weakness (inability to join in shared activities) or, instead, the strength of being able to stand aside. The phenomenon of withdrawal is explained by ancient humoral pathology as

the dominance of black bile over the three other bodily fluids (blood, mucus, and choler), which is why this type of person was described as melancholic. Bile is manifested in a diffuse lack of will to participate and a generally pervasive low-level alienation. *Homo theoreticus* seems to suffer from sadness without object: he is not sad about something specific, but marked by feelings of loss without any identifiable reason. For him, it is as if something important were missing in the world. As a result, he will never feel at home—a condition Lamartine invoked in his elegy “Isolement” (Isolation): “Upon the earth in exile why do I remain / As there is nothing more to share between the earth and me.”¹²

Ancient tradition had already ascribed this tendency to a specific type of thinker, Heraclitus of Ephesus, for example, who represented the cliché of the weeping philosopher from time immemorial. In fact, the old adage *Democritus ridens, Heraclitus flens* (Democritus laughs, Heraclitus cries) proves how early people had begun to link the distinctions between schools of thought and philosophical schemes with the contrasts between characteristic humors (in modern parlance, between undertones). The melancholic person’s tears inevitably result in different ideas about the world and life than the sanguine person’s laughter. The classical theory of humors was later overlaid by planetary mythology, which held that melancholic people are those who live under the sign of Saturn, the heavenly body that represented aversion to the world and quiet observation. Aristotle even asserted that all brilliant men had been melancholic. Melancholic persons combined mental acuity and moody sadness into a productive synthesis. People who are naturally detached from the world seem predestined to experience visions and inspiration. They are fairly often people who seem lost in the world, who may have much to give back to their distant environment through a detour via their intense inner life. People who tend toward this behavior move in a circle of self-affirmation. When the melancholic person retreats into his inner self, it is a spontaneous inclination to complete the transition from being existentially on the outside to a methodical process of distancing. He turns the habitual step aside into the step backward that promotes theory. He exercises the bracketing of his concrete conditions of life in natural *epoché*. This gives him in practicing an advantage over attitudes that favor the *bios theoretikós* and the popular dictum *sine ira et studio* (without anger or fondness). He innately possesses the virtue of dispassionateness that sanguine and choleric people can only

achieve against their nature. We seldom realize how much what we call high culture owes to the mournful, productive type of person with the potent combination of melancholia and energetic initiative. In today's terminology, we would tend to locate such character images in the region of schizoid structures. They are typical of people who, in psychoanalytic terms, are "born incomplete." Nothing is more normal for them than being remote from any kind of normality. Their realism is manifested in their tendency to move in the shadow worlds of reverie. By indulging the inclination to encapsulate themselves in webs of moods and conjecture, they sometimes come up with world-shattering revelations.

There is a third motif that can help to explain the emergence of people fit for *epoché*, in this case from a sociological perspective. What is important to note here is a mental change of direction with immense consequences. To use Luhmann's terminology, it concerns the social differentiation of the educational system or, following Bourdieu, the establishment of the educational "field." If we recognize that pedagogy derived from offshoots of sophistry—that is, from the political rhetoric of conflict in the democratic city—it is easy to understand why the emergence of formal contemplation was anything but a contemplative process. Right from the start, theoretical life was embedded in the noisy competition of speakers vying for educational assignments. To understand this competition—which is also the context for Plato's criticism of the sophists, which was not always fair—it helps to remember that the Hellenic institution of double paternity was a precondition for the original *paideia*. This was the custom that decreed that biological fathers had to agree to hand over their sons at a specific age to a "leader of boys" who would take on the task of spiritual father.¹³ Clearly, there is a connection to be made between an important aspect of the production of persons fit for *epoché* and the original institutions for educating boys. In fact, the *paideia* was the pretext for young people in Greece's mushrooming schools to be subjected to completely new kinds of practice in listening. We could almost say that the sense of hearing was trained to pay precise attention to the words of teachers and masters. At the same time, listening was no longer seen merely as the beginning of imitation, but as the first shoots of an insight that would stand on its own one day. This dressage gave rise to the figure of the pupil, without whose appearance it would be impossible to understand the history of the educational traditions of advanced civilizations. A pupil is someone

who succumbs to the yoke of intellectual dependence for the sake of later independence, with the risk of never getting rid of the scholastic subjection again. Who could deny that there is always a lingering touch of the eternal pupil in the greatest masters of our tradition?

When young people practice receptiveness as school pupils, their motor functions are immobilized in a way that will have far-reaching consequences later. This is the beginning of what can be called sedation by sitting at the teacher's feet. This is where the sedentary man emerges in the scholastic sense of the word, a kind of secondary sedentariness that has nothing in common with farmers settling near their fields. To grasp the total peculiarity of this process, we should remember that there has hardly ever been any human type less disposed to being still and receptive than the young Attic man. The young Greek male must have been a polymorphous-athletic-erotic hyperactivity syndrome, 2,500 years before Ritalin. He was the subject to which pedagogics with its keep-still exercises was applied. The effect was even more dramatic in the ancient Indian meditation systems that split off sitting still from all communicative and grammatical functions. This behavioral training will rub off on the whole being of the sedated pupils; indeed, a good part of what we call "culture" is a nonchemical "sedative," as well as an aid to the ability to sit and the result of the sitting relationship to the world. It reached its ultimate peak in the Stoic ideal of *apatheia*. People only had to admit that the cosmos was a school in which they were tested to the limit: then it was not so far to go from keeping calm during lessons to keeping calm in the face of fate.

Incidentally, the institution of "schooldays" for producing people fit for *epoché* also contributed to the time spent in "school" being seen as a release from other business and duties. This explains the frequently noted similarity of meaning between the Greek word for leisure, *scholé*, and the word for an educational institution, *schola*. The risks and side effects of relief from burdens in the entourage of scholastic life have been known since time immemorial. A kind of bohemianization in the school environment was already evident in antiquity. This has survived to the present day, due in a small way to tradition but probably largely because of constant innovation.

Finally, as my fourth and last point on the topic of the emergence of persons fit for *epoché*, I would like to mention a motif from media studies. It has become a truism that the onset of scientific development always has to be understood in relation to its link with the early culture of writing. In

our context, this means that the practicing complex of the early bios theoretikós constantly has to be examined together with the formation of mental attitudes through the new conquest of reality by the written word. The primary mode of “looking” is unmistakably co-conditioned by the European mode of reading. For Europeans, the world and the book began to be mutually analogous early on. This configuration held fast over a period of more than two thousand years and first changed with Renaissance painting, when the world and panel painting revealed a new equivalence. The cartography of the modern age also played its part in abolishing the book-world analogy by elevating globes and maps to being the main media of the pragmatic worldview. The classical analogy has completely disintegrated in the age of monitor screens and keyboards.

By contrast, ancient European access to the experiential world was preformed by grammatical dressage; in fact, in this literacy zone the actual intellectual material offered by the world was formatted according to letter, syllable, line, page, paragraph, and chapter. The result is that from the outset, we, as readers paging through books as if they were situations and comprehending situations as if they were book pages, tend to be aloof observers. In our times, the field and the book page correspond to each other to the same degree that lines of print and furrows are equivalent to each other. Cicero coined the term “culture,” which still holds today, by drawing an analogy between cultivating the soul and farming the fields, and it was obvious to him that literature was the best way to tend the field of the soul.

In both cases, cultivation occurs because of the prospect of growth. It follows that reading is regarded as reaping the fields of knowledge. In this way, *homo legens* is unobtrusively raised to have general skills for *epoché*. Anybody who has learned to look at written scrolls and printed pages is already practicing distance from the written word, which, in turn, keeps its distance from what is spoken and experienced. He operates as a harvest laborer in the sense that he is able to get what he wants from the parcels of text. In the spirit of Heidegger’s dictum that thinking and thanking belong together, so do reading and collecting. The professional reader, the scholar, or the pandit becomes the agent of a novel form of concentration: indeed, he not only collects, he turns himself into a collection, a person filled up with knowledge that moves to and fro between internal and external memories. He survives as *homo humanus* by coming to terms with his

existence as the state of being held out into the space between the inner memory and outer archive. A humanist is a person who can say: I am human, nothing written down is strange to me.

Fortunately, I do not have to continue with this thread because it is already a well-elaborated chapter of the historical narrative of media and culture. It is enough to mention some of the most important works of the past fifty years, such as Harold Innis's *Empire and Communication*, Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media*, Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy*, Jack Goody's *The Consequences of Literacy*, Derrick de Kerkhove's *The Skin of Culture*, Eric A. Havelock's *The Muse Learns to Write*, Alberto Manguel's *A History of Reading*, Jochen Hörisch's *Gott, Geld, Medien*, and last but not least, the wide-ranging works of Jacques Derrida, Friedrich Kittler, and Régis Debray. It would be shortsighted to see all these works merely as studies for the foundations of general literary science. Taken as a whole, they provide nothing less than a historical anthropology of the cognitive subject of practice in the Western world. If we were to summarize these references to the conditions of the possibility of people fit for theory and for *epoché*, it would amount to the phrase: "The observer has come." Through the combined effects of the processes mentioned, theory assumes human form and lives among us. Its synopsis yields a portrait of the theoretician as a young man.

His first distinguishing feature is the serenity of indirect defeatism. Although he belongs to a collective of losers, he experiences defeat as a privilege: we could call this the equanimity of life beyond victory or defeat. He celebrates political failure as existential gain; he relishes the weakness of the community as a personal growth in freedom; he is unyoked from the wagon of practice and can devote himself to the pleasures of the observer's existence, as long as the field of careers outside politics is sufficiently open to make the substitution of cultural aspirations for political ambitions plausible.

Second, he benefits from the differentiation of youth and flourishes in the special climate of the educational provinces. Freed of his duty to the polis, he wins scope for his own individual life project. This gives rise to the idea that there is such a thing as learning without borders, studying without external purpose, a kind of education that works toward its own self-defined goals by marking off the circle of knowable things. Aristotle was the perfect embodiment of the inherent encyclopedic value of knowledge. Thinking is

not an applied art. Its practitioners do not wear themselves down in struggles with the outside world; the bios theoretikós keeps its practitioners young.

Third, in his style of existence the theoretician is allowed to nurture something unknown to ancient cultures: the privilege of melancholy. The suspension of practical sense makes it possible to seem elegantly remote from the world; it creates space for a general atmosphere of mild bad temper. The thinking person enjoys the demonic gift of unfathomable sadness that so often accompanies theoretical talent. This gives rise to the existentialism of the earnest young man who regards life as an oxymoron. He persists in bittersweet exile, brooding on alternative proposals for reshaping existence as a whole. This is where theoretical life branches off into artistic creation and utopian plans. This may be the place to recall Gabriel Tarde's remark that "life is a search for the impossible via the useless."

Fourth, the theoretical person educates himself as a reader in every sense of the word. He does training in the grammatical humanism of the ancient European type; he becomes the person in the collection; he teaches himself daily by practicing what the Greeks called *legein* and *antilegein*, speaking and contradicting, reading and collecting, learning and testing. *Nulla dies sine linea* (No day without a line) may seem to be a motto for draughtsmen, but it holds equally for readers and writers. To borrow a title from Ivan Illich: *homo theoreticus* is a harvest laborer "in the vineyard of the text." He knows the intellect is breathing in the collection. He enters its service as an assistant for collecting perceptions.

Looking back at the genealogical questions raised earlier, we find an ambivalent picture. Noble and non-noble ancestries are intricately involved in the formation of real existing theoretical life in a complex way that is very difficult to untangle. This should explain why the last two factors in the creation of *epoché* skills should be evaluated neutrally in genealogical terms, because when it comes to examining origins the differences within the scholastic subsystem and the distribution of reading and writing skills appear neither good nor bad. They belong to the techniques for living in advanced civilizations, and there can be no objection to them in normal genealogy unless somebody wants to revive the dormant antagonism between the spirit that quickens and the letter that kills*—but as far as I can see, even orthodox Christians feel little enthusiasm for that.

As soon as we evaluate the first two factors, we are entering on the path of ambiguity. First of all, the release of the bios theoretikós after the collapse of the polis cannot be understood without an extra touch of antipolitical resentment. After all, the ancient flight into the better world of contemplation proves nothing else than that the theory subjects survived the defeat of their community unharmed on another terrain. They managed to compensate for losing their prospects of playing an important role in the polis by claiming prestige in suprapolitical areas. This change of field may include elements of revenge against the disappointment of reality and is unmistakably imbued with resentment against the ephemeral, whether in relation to the lost glory of the polis or the unstable nature of human destiny in general.

Yet, the flight into theory cannot be completely reduced to the arrogant business of settling scores. From the early days of its creation, the bios theoretikós opened up an area of persons important in their own right. When people in bourgeois times spoke of “nobility of the spirit,” it was not merely pretentious talk by social climbers. It would be a suspect expression only if people wanted to recognize solely the offspring of oligarchs and noble warriors as true aristocrats. The institutional establishment of theory—and later of the arts world—meant that the aristocratic zone expanded, reaching beyond the primitive field of dynastic, political, and athletic opportunities for excellence. From then on, theory also had a totally autonomous upper level, occupied by those who convince with better arguments, wider perspectives, and more flamboyant interpretations. Properly conducted, theoretical life offers only weak opportunities for the attempt to disparage by genealogical suspicion. The life of theory could only be exposed as a figurative expression of envy if it succeeded in tracing its transcendent attraction entirely back to escapism. Given the waywardness of the world of ideas, a definitive exposure of theory that presents it as “nothing but” compensation for something else, something better and unattainable, cannot succeed, just as it would be impossible to “expose” the number pi as the ideological construct of a ruling class.

This leaves only the psychological hypothesis for the final genealogical exposure of the bios theoretikós. It would be plausible if the occasional connection between contemplation and melancholy could be extended to a proof of a general neurotic contingency of thought. Yet, no attempt to interpret the “need for philosophy” pathogenetically as arising from the

unhappy consciousness of the disgruntled collective and vengeful individuals has ever reached the level of general validity. However much referring to existential dissonance in the conditions of access to theory may score points as an argument *ad personam* (here we could mention the young Hegel's depressions and Max Weber's emotional tensions, Wittgenstein's moodiness and the chronic rages of a fair number of contemporary academic philosophers), it cannot be used to cast suspicion on the sphere as a whole. Experience tells us that this sphere is inhabited by people of every imaginable kind of character, not excluding those whose nature is unscathed. If critical genealogy intended to draw overall conclusions from the many dubious individual cases (including the poisoning of entire schools of thought and the maliciousness of networks of coneurotics), it would be guilty of jumping to conclusions, which would in turn evoke resentment on its own side.

To sum up, it is hardly surprising that the making of people fit for *epoché* is intertwined with the destinies of their own culture. The institutionalization of the school system, rhetorical arts, sciences, and scholars' republics created conditions for the life of theoretical practice to gain its recruits in the succeeding generations. They would hardly have filled in the application forms if they did not believe they were making a positive choice for an honorable way of life. They soon realized that not a few offspring from bad backgrounds were hanging around in there. All in all, the genealogical test achieved a result that the followers of the bios theoretikós were supposed to be able to live with. We cannot agree with Aristotle's claim that "by nature" all of mankind aspires to knowledge (because the philosopher votes unilaterally for recognition as a reason for joy in the transcendental faculty of sight and willfully ignores the facts demonstrating the enormous neophobia of the human species). Nevertheless, there are enough motives for those who aspire to knowledge for local or cultural reasons to consider their *modus vivendi* as sufficiently respectable.

‡ 2 Corinthians 3:6–8 ("For the letter kills but the spirit quickens.")—Translator's note.

THEORY AND SUSPENDED ANIMATION AND ITS METAMORPHOSES

Following these explanations, I can tackle the task of discussing the creation, or rather the self-formation, of the disinterested person. In my introduction, I noted that from the perspective of the history of ideas, it has appeared as a complex of theories on epistemic suspended animation. The initial theoretical asceticism consists in the philosopher's efforts to shut off, where possible, the aspects of his own being that obstruct theory. Since the roots of the obstruction of theory go deep down into "empirical" existence as such, the exclusion has to start deep down as well. According to the testimony of the classical philosophers, it is analogous to trying to achieve a state of being dead in one's lifetime.

In my previous remarks (see p. 42), I recalled Nietzsche's objection to Socrates's farewell speech: "We ought to offer a cock to Asclepius." Now is the time to explain certain aspects of this statement. In fact, Nietzsche had no need to put words into the mouth of his adversary Socrates. The dying savant was quite explicit when explaining to friends around him in the Athenian dungeon why he was calm, even serene, in the face of his imminent death. At this point, the motif of purification comes into play. As we have seen in Husserl's case, in the thought of the twentieth century this was still assigned an important role, albeit one with different nuances. Talking to his friends, Socrates justified his provocative willingness to die with the following statement: "The one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death. Now if it is true, it would be strange indeed if they were eager for this all their lives and then resent it when what they have wanted and practiced for a long time comes upon them."¹

The expression "being dead" (*Totsein*) suggests undergoing a welcome purification process:

And does purification not turn out to be ... to separate the soul as far as possible from the body and accustom it to gather itself and collect itself out of the body and to dwell by itself as far as it can both now and in the future, freed, as it were, from the bonds of the body? ... And that freedom and separation of the soul from the body is called death? ... And this release and separation from the body is the preoccupation of the philosophers ...

Therefore ... it would be ridiculous for a man to train himself in life to live in a state as close to death as possible, and then to resent it when it comes.²

Socrates refers to the disturbing, not to say cognition-obstructing, function of bodily existence as a motivation for the desire for purification: “our hunt for that which has being” could never reach its goal as long as the soul remains burdened by the evil of being trapped in the body. For “the body fills us with wants, desires, fears, all sorts of illusions and much nonsense so that, as it is said, in truth and in fact, no thought of any kind ever comes to us from the body.”³

Cognition without disembodiment would therefore be unthinkable: “Then he will do this most perfectly who approaches the object with thought alone, without associating any sight with his thought, or dragging in any sense perception, but who, using pure thought alone, tries to track down each reality pure and by itself, freeing himself as far as possible from eyes and ears, and in a word, from the whole body, because the body confuses the soul and does not allow it to acquire truth and wisdom whenever it is associated with it.”⁴

Here, Socrates commits himself with astonishing bias to a strictly intellectualist concept of knowledge. “Sensual” intuition, to use the conventional expression, would not contribute anything to this except disturbances, distractions, and distortions. It will remain Plato’s secret why he described a figure like Socrates making such confessions in the face of death. There is no other aspect in the traditional image of this wise man that makes this kind of exaggeration credible. While all the evidence says that Socrates could be characterized in today’s terms as an ethicist who spent his life tackling questions about the right kind of life with his fellow citizens, in this passage he suddenly appears as the advocate of a rigid mathematical ideal who has nothing better to do than apply the standards of geometry and arithmetic to the universe of discussable things, physical as well as moral. It

seems almost as if only hours before his execution, the condemned man in the Athenian prison changed from being a skeptical seeker of justice into a narrow-minded physicist who, what is more, obeyed a dogmatic metaphysician. The physicist persona perceived everything on the model of fixed bodies that could be isolated to reduce them to the primary qualities of shape, number, size, position, stillness, and movement, while all the information provided by the “senses” about the nature of objects and circumstances, and particularly all emotional factors such as feelings, impressions, moods, and atmospheres, had to be pushed aside as troublesome delusions. The metaphysician dominating the physicist realized overnight that nothing was more certain than that the thinking soul existed separately from the sensible body and, after being separated from it, is destined to a different existence, and its prospects of success would be all the better if it had taken care to loosen the bonds to its physical bearer in good time. This results in the demand that the person of theory should live to come as close as possible to being dead. Only the person who has died off in advance from his “self,” his body, and his surroundings, the well-camouflaged person in suspended animation, would be able to bracket his physical motions and all the “position-taking” of his physical subjectivity and, still living in his body, obtain tenable perceptions as if he were already released to disinterested contemplation “on the other side.” In this context, contemplation means intuiting primary geometric figures (for example, polyhedra) and meditating on transcendent significates (for example, the idea of justice).

We can judge Plato’s coup as we like, as a brilliant, loyal continuation of theories that had remained latent in Socrates’s thought, or as intrusive fiction above an abyss of disloyalty and hysteria in which the pupil puts words into the teacher’s mouth. It is impossible to deny that the Platonic stylization of the calm life preceding and flowing into the beautiful death envisaged in theory would create monstrous consequences. In this case, we mean monstrous in the sense of breeding monsters and having a historic impact, both of which could apply to the effects created by the passage from *Phaedo* we have just cited. If we can summarize the course of European history up to the threshold of the twentieth century as a procession of imaginary people in suspended animation who were devoted to the life of theory in its various forms, monastic and lay, professorial and civil, ethical and aesthetic, this demonstrates the immense suggestive power of the

Platonic theory that it is possible to anticipate the state in which the thinking soul is “disinterested,” “deadened,” and “detached.”

Is it necessary to emphasize the disastrous effects on the history of the Western culture of rationality caused by the way knowledge has been made artificial through the reductionist idealism of the ancient Academy? The decisions of the Greeks predestined the logos of the West to become an emotional impoverishment of all world relations, and this disaster has overshadowed scientific and philosophical thought to the present day. Meanwhile, forms of a richer (if less “operative”) world knowledge survive in narrative literature, poetry, the arts, everyday speech, proverbs, myths, and generally held concepts of “religions.” One of the ironies of our intellectual civilization is that for some time now—at least since the death of Hegel—it has had to devote a large part of its energy to correcting the processes of bias, artificialization, abbreviation, distortion, extravagance, and delusion that it generated itself as a result of its initial blunders. In the same way as we speak of iatrogenous illnesses, we can talk of scientogenous or even philosophogenous misjudgments, and there are signs that philosophical thought, in the better sense of the word, occurs today almost only in places where philosophy as a subject and school regime is left to rest like a cured illness.

At this point, I would like to emphasize that I have focused on Plato’s metaphysics of the soul particularly for didactic or illustrative reasons. It stems from myths and mystical ideas that raise death to an imaginative pantomime, such as the legend of Empedocles’s leap into the burning crater of Etna, or the legend of the death of Heraclitus, who is said to have ended his life by covering himself with cow dung and setting fire to himself. The philosophical love of fire has a history that goes back to the first millennium before the Christian era and is still going on today. All this time, talk of death by burning was a form of playing with fire in itself. The sublime metaphors for burning and metamorphosis sometimes provoke regressions to literalism that we call “fundamentalist” nowadays. Precisely because regression is never fully ruled out, the attraction toward transposition into the spiritual sphere contains a civilizing impulse. Even Goethe enjoyed this high-risk game, as shown in the poem “Selige Sehnsucht” (Blissful Yearning), where he extolled the life “that longs for death by fire.” The esotericism of the East-West divan was consciously related to the inadmissible secrets of great theory: the longing for death is

the cipher for desire for the higher form of life, but this leaves an open question whether such a life, if it deserved the rating “higher,” would be conceivable merely as a life billeted in mortal bodies.

Having indicated the source of the theme of suspended animation, I will confine myself to some exemplary footnotes on the stages of its development in the ancient European tradition. Further investigation would be beyond the scope of the present work. I shall now call Marcus Tullius Cicero, the author of the *Tusculan Disputations*, as the first witness for the metamorphoses of the theme of suspended animation in the post-Greek tradition. Around 350 years after Plato founded the Academy, Cicero tried to convince the Romans, who had previously been immune to theory, to accept philosophy. It is indicative of the situation that Cicero unerringly chose the legendary speeches of the Greek founding figures best suited to founding philosophical life on an ethics of spectatorship. In the fall of the year 45 B.C.—at the height of Caesar’s autarchy and in light of his imminent and violent removal from politics—Cicero evoked Pythagoras to quote an allegory of his that was supposed to demonstrate the noble vocation of people living a life of contemplation, whether as voluntary hermits or involuntarily marginalized persons. When a disconcerted provincial ruler asked what a philosopher was supposed to be, Pythagoras replied

that the life of men seemed to him to resemble those games which were celebrated with the greatest possible variety of sports and the general concourse of all Greece. For as in those games there were some persons whose object was glory and the honor of a crown, to be attained by the performance of bodily exercises, so others were led thither by the gain of buying and selling, and mere views of profit; but there was likewise one class of persons, and they were by far the best, whose aim was neither applause nor profit, but who came merely as spectators through curiosity, to observe what was done, and to see in what manner things were carried on there. And thus, said he, we come from another life and nature unto this one, just as men come out of some other city, to some much-frequented mart; some being slaves to glory, others to money; and there are some few who, taking no account of anything else, earnestly look into the nature of things; and these men call themselves studious of wisdom, that is, philosophers: and as there it is the most reputable occupation of all to be a looker-on without making any acquisition, so in life, the contemplating

things and acquainting oneself with them, greatly exceeds every other pursuit of life.⁵

It is impossible to avoid citing this well-known Olympian allegory if we are trying to explain how Plato's semi-Oriental Hellenic metaphysics of suspended animation was transplanted into the Latinized West. This passage crams all the stereotypes relating to the bios theoretikós tightly together: first, the division of people into three categories, those looking for honor (Thymotacists or politicians), those looking for money (eroticists or chrematistic people), and those looking for truth (theoreticians or philosophers); then, the elevation of the third type to the ontological aristocracy; and finally, the movement of all three types through transmigration of souls, since it is expressly said they have "come" to this life from another life. Incidentally, we can gather from this that for a long period the ancient Mediterranean world was receptive to the attraction of the Eastern ethic of reincarnation that always offered mortals a second or third, or even a hundredth or thousandth, chance by proposing the idea of long migrations through many lives on earth. It took another five hundred years for the metaphysical dogma of living once and dying once to become definitively established in the Western hemisphere, with the result that all morally important decisions had to be squeezed into a single life. The consequence was that the dramatic fear of hell replaced the epic concern about reincarnation (the fear of hell is, incidentally, a basic factor of what is called "political theology," but which should more accurately be described as the imperial management of the fear of death).

In his capacity as an importer of philosophy, Cicero was so taken with the advantages of the Greek-style contemplative life that he was deliberately deaf to the self-sabotaging message of the Olympian allegory. As everybody knows, at sports contests the spectators nearly always form the largest group by far, and nobody who had ever been in a Greek or Roman arena would try to claim that it was the spectators who specifically represented the noble elements of society. The allegory was evidently intended as a vehicle for a suggestion whose plausibility rested on deliberately hidden sources. In reality, the author was interested in boosting his own courage for the theoretical life after there was no longer space for people like him on the practical stage of his times. Cicero should have been the first to see that now it was Rome's turn to be ripe for philosophy. From

that moment on, lofty ideologies for meditative private life were needed there as well. Even if Marcus Brutus, the man to whom Cicero addressed the *Tusculan Disputations*, was the leader of a group of conspirators at that time, a group that struck the autarch Caesar down in the Curia of Pompey with twenty-three dagger thrusts just a few months after writing the founding document of “Roman philosophy,” this did not change the course of things. Nothing could prevent the progress toward monarchical world reform. As soon as Caesarian centralism won out, it forced the people with the old *res publica* sentiments to the margins and made them mere observers of the imperial show. At that moment, the “political” age also came to an end in Rome, since its citizens had reason to feel defeated by their own state system. From then on, even the largely theory-resistant Romans could not do without some degree of contemplative cultivation. In his retreat in Tusculum, Cicero emerged as the right man to prepare the citizens of his country, who were facing disempowerment, for the benefits of the *vita contemplativa*. The transition to reflective existence was worth an error in reasoning: Cicero unhesitatingly created a lofty nimbus for the future Roman spectator by portraying Pythagoras making the many in the stadium into the few in study. Turning contemplation into an aristocratic pursuit meant that the noble phantom of the total observer disinterested in sensuality made its appearance even on rough Roman soil. Even in the Latin sphere, usually known for its stalwart reflexes, people engaged in reflection in a state of suspended animation were stirring, having migrated into this life from another one. In the ensuing two thousand years, they would be encountered at every turn in the Western culture of rationality. They gave observers at the heart of the European culture of perpetrators the assurance that the sun of consciousness shone equally over the best and worst deeds.

I shall skip over the Christian Middle Ages, which articulated its interest in suspended animation as the aspiration for sainthood within a person’s lifetime, and take my next example from the late sixteenth century. It consists of an outstanding passage from Giordano Bruno’s essay “Degli heroici furori,” written during Bruno’s stay in England around the mid-1580s and published in 1858, citing Paris as the fictitious place of printing. The publication occurred two years before the appearance of the popular German book *Historia und Geschicht Doctor Johanni Fausti*. It shows how thought at the beginning of the modern age appropriated the classical

schema of suspended animation in the spirit of subversive energizing. It not only rescues contemplation from the suspicion of monastic escape from the world and intellectual feebleness; it invests the contemplative life with enthusiastic or, as Bruno said, “heroic” energies, although he would hardly have meant the glorification of aggressive enterprise that celebrated its appearance in the age of the Condottieri. Bruno extolled the enthusiasm that pours into the mortal shell of the artistically talented person in a state of suspended animation and fills him to the brim with ideas. The reinterpretation of the traditional myth about the hunter Actaeon, retold by Ovid and other authors, shows what is primarily significant about investing spiritual death with dynamic force. Once, the young man Actaeon, on one of his forays through the woods, surprised the goddess Diana bathing naked. Furious, the immortal huntress splashed him with water and turned him into a deer, whereupon he was immediately torn to pieces by one of his own hounds.⁶

In the Neo-Platonic tradition, the lesson of this story was that the error of the profane mind consists in wanting to gawk at divine things under the guise of outward objectivity. In other words, anybody who correctly grasps the higher truth will be transformed himself into the truth he grasps. He ceases to be the subject standing aside that he was in his unenlightened existence. He dies as a profane person and lives on inside himself as the lucky winner by exchanging trivial existence for the life of the mind. Bruno comments on this process as follows:

Therefore, Actaeon, who with these thoughts, his dogs, searched for goodness, wisdom, beauty, and the wild beast outside himself, attained them in this way. Once he was in their presence, ravished outside of himself by so much beauty, he became the prey of his thoughts and saw himself converted into the thing he was pursuing. Then he perceived that he himself had become the coveted prey of his own dogs, his thoughts, because having already tracked down the divinity within himself it was no longer necessary to hunt for it elsewhere....

[F]rom the vulgar and common man he was, he becomes rare and heroic, rare in all he does, rare in his concepts, and he leads the extraordinary life....

The great hunter sees: he has understood as much as he can, and he himself becomes the prey; that is to say, this hunter set out for prey and

became himself the prey through the operation of his intellect whereby he converted the apprehended objects into himself....

She who kindled my mind to the higher love, she who rendered every other goddess base and vain to me; she in whom beauty and sovereign goodness are uniquely displayed, is she whom I saw coming from the forest, huntress of me, my Diana, among the lovely nymphs upon the golden Campania, wherefore I said to Love:—I surrender myself to this one.

And he to me:—Oh fortunate lover! Oh spouse favored by your destiny! She who alone among so many has within her bosom life and death, and adorns the world with holy graces, her you have achieved by labor and by fortune; captive though I am in her amorous court, I am so highly blessed, that I do not envy the freedom of any man or god.²

In conventional histories of ideas of the modern age, too little attention has been paid to explaining how, precisely in this epoch associated with the rise of the bourgeoisie, those responsible for the process of theory tried to affiliate with an artificial aristocracy renowned for its enthusiasm. The cult of the genius is all that remains of this today. People have forgotten, or never realized, that genius was licensed in the Renaissance as a neopagan substitute for Christian sanctity, but both sanctity and genius were typical reinterpretations in that epoch of the ancient concept of apparent death. Then, as before, the individual was supposed to cast off his profane mortal ego in exchange for an indestructible intellectual and spiritual self. This exchange brought the medieval person into the community of saints; for the individuals of the early modern age, it was equivalent to being accepted into the nobility of the “frenzy.” In Bruno’s theory of the heroic emotions, the activist orientation of the Renaissance was asserted by shifting the accent from meditative contemplation to creative panache. The image of the mauled hunter vividly illustrates the risk of passion in an existence filled with the mind. The ancient calm of the soul was replaced by the intermediate power of deeds and suffering for the sake of an idea.

The modern age’s culture of enthusiasm reached its peak in the work of Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Just as Bruno’s Actaeon myth dynamized the concept of suspended animation for the rising creative class in the sixteenth century, Fichte launched a wholly new design for suspended animation, completely reformulated in attack and initiative, for the bourgeoisie of the

early nineteenth century. When the new class set out to overcome the ancient and medieval loyalty to the natural course of events in order to give scope to the modern passion for shaping the world—in fact, for consciously guiding the course of history—it could rely on the undivided sympathy of philosophers. Yet, for those appointed to act, the situation was not to remain at the level of confused plans, obscure deals, or pretentious showing-off. Fichte’s momentous insight was that the unleashed ambitions of the modernists had to be invested with a moral viewpoint: only this could give the forces for complete change an unerring sense of direction rooted in the self-evident obligations of the good.

A project with such lofty ambitions was bound to refer back to the traditional Platonic practice of suspended animation. Here, too, the mysterious path leads inward, acting as a guide to the self-observation of thought and demanding the subject’s retreat from its habitual self-abandon. As Fichte forcefully demonstrated, this results from the “unconscious” submission of thought to the concepts of external things. (The term “unconscious,” which was to have such an impact on the modern culture of reflection, appeared here with systematic emphasis for the first time.) Here, too, the best of all exercises consisted in an *epoché*-type movement of dissociation. The subject would revoke its disastrous unconscious externalization to seemingly independent dimensions by constantly focusing its thoughts on its own actions. Faith in the primacy of the external world would be systematically dismantled, all the maneuvers of thought about the self determined by externals would be vigilantly detected, and any regressions to superstitious belief in independent objects would be repeatedly prohibited until the last remnants of the self-abandonment of consciousness had been eliminated. In this context, idealism imagines a pure exercise of the mind becoming focused on its own operation. If we see philosophy as having torn itself away from every kind of objectivism and renounced any kind of fetishist belief in a prior, autonomous existence, we can say that after Fichte it entered a zone of absolute freedom. The ego, previously addicted to the world, was extinguished in this zone and replaced by an “endogenous” kind of unconditional vitality illuminated by consciousness. From then on, the wise man was a pure functionary of the absolute. He saw himself as a ray emanating from the divine stored in every ego in the phenomenal world. He understood himself as an authorized agent

of the idea and lived on earth as a person in a state of suspended animation imbued with the highest motivations.

What is new about this is the radical nature of the reorientation from contemplation to the offensive. Fichte uses the example of the “ruler” to explain the *modus vivendi* he commends, which is simultaneously extinguished and more than alive. The ruler imagines the philosopher as a potentate enlightened by epistemology. Referring to this in his eighth Erlangen lecture, “The Nature of the Scholar and Its Manifestations in the Area of Freedom,” in the summer semester of 1805, Fichte said that the ruler

recognises in himself one of the first and immediate servants of God—one of the material organs through which God enters into communion with reality....

He will never rouse himself to energy and labor merely that something may come to pass, or that he may gain a reputation for activity; for his desire is not merely that something may come to pass, but that the will of the Idea may be accomplished. Until it speaks, he too is silent; he has no voice but for it....

In this way does the Idea possess and pervade him without intermission or reserve, and there remains nothing either of his person or his life that does not burn a perpetual offering before its altar. And thus is he the most direct manifestation of God in the world.⁸

It seems legitimate to assume that Fichte was sketching an indirect self-portrait: there are obvious analogies between a selfless political regent at the head of a community system and a logical regent in front of an enthusiastic auditorium. We encounter a figure of thought of what was later called fundamentalism insofar as this defines an action arising from ostensibly divine empowerment, with the subtle distinction that those who usually profess fundamentalism are quick to defer to willfully inflated authorities, whether holy scriptures or intellectual and spiritual leaders. The action defined by Fichte, on the other hand, was supposed to be generated wholly endogenously by the thinking person’s untenable intuitions.

This philosophy issues no invitation to the contemplative life. It issues call-ups in the holy war for rational design of the world. Being dead in advance, the participants in the moral campaign (which Fichte, unlike

Marx, sees as continuing into an open future without any concept of final victory) have no need to fear for their personal safety. In his text from the year 1800 on the destiny of mankind, Fichte demonstrated what kind of speech they emit after breaking through to the realm of spirits:

The threads by which my mind was heretofore bound to this world ... are forever severed ... and I stand free, calm and unmoved, a world unto myself....

The sure end of all pain, and of all susceptibility of pain, is death; and of all which the natural man is accustomed to regard as evil, this is the least so to me. Indeed, I shall not die for myself, but only for others, for those that remain behind, from whose connection I am severed. For myself, the hour of death is the hour of birth to a new and more glorious life.⁹

Fichte's superman was a super-dead-man who would be more alive than any normal living person. Indeed, the relationship between the living person and the seemingly dead one is reversed: the non-idealists are actually the dead men shuffling through the world in their biological casing, while those awakened to real idealism embody the true living persons. According to his son's testimony, the last intelligible words Fichte is supposed to have said before his death at the end of January 1814 were "I feel I have recovered." In his later works, Fichte became increasingly sure of the angelicizing of knowledge without using the term. His thesis ("We need no bearer of knowledge. Knowledge must be considered ... as bearing itself") severed the bond between the empirical person and the knowledge of the absolute imperative to be generated in him.¹⁰ Humans are only a means to the angels they can be if they make an effort. The will enlightened by knowledge accepts the world solely as material for boundless improvement.

Conversely, those who believe that knowledge is "a quality, say, of a presupposed substantial human being" will be incapable of grasping a philosophical thought, because for Fichte thinking philosophically means suspending any dogmatic preconditions in one's consciousness.¹¹ It follows that this suspension has to include the "persons" stubbornly preconditioned by non-philosophers as well as bad philosophers. We know nothing of what is called Man as long as we know nothing of knowledge. Even the fact that people are quick to recognize their own kind does not help, because it only makes them set up mutually ignorant alliances celebrated as "dialogue."

The flight into “intersubjectivity” leads nowhere except to shared confusion.

Fichte reprimanded a large part of twentieth-century philosophy in advance in two lines. He weighed consensualism in the balance and found it philosophically wanting. As he saw it, for each individual the point was to break through to the level of unconditional, quasi-angelic freedom; only then could one consider cooperation between parallel kinds of enthusiasm. While he regarded “intersubjectivity” as an illusion of semi-intelligence, he thought it was worth considering interilluminated relations. It is not man that has knowledge but, God willing, knowledge that has man. I think there is no need to explain why this design for the cognitive suspended animation of people in the bourgeois age found no appreciable following, either in the nineteenth or the twentieth century.¹²

Finally, I would like to explore the aestheticist revision of ancient European traditions related to the theme of cognitive suspended animation in the work of Paul Valéry. Many experts in literary history regard Valéry as the greatest French poet of the twentieth century. In 1894, while living in Montpellier, Valéry, then age twenty-three, began collecting ideas for an artificial character that would combine all the features of a perfectly intellectualized existence. This bold figure was called Monsieur Teste, a name with the double meaning of “the head” and “the witness.” His inventor used him as a test person for the experiment of an existence devoted to clarity. Clarity is an antivital maxim; it aims to use the mind to curb life, and thus achieve life enhancement. Valéry’s intellectual puppet was the prototype for all those real existing men without qualities who came to visit the twentieth century, from Robert Musil to Fernando Pessoa to Max Bense. In the same year Valéry began his experiments with Monsieur Teste, he started practicing a form of permanent self-analysis whose literary trail inaugurated the genre of the philosophical diary. Valéry’s notebooks, the result of over fifty years of daily morning meditation in written form, undoubtedly represent the most intensive testimony known to the twentieth century of an intellectual existence spent in constant practicing—it numbers over 26,000 pages in the 29-volume facsimile edition published by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris from 1957 to 1961.¹³ Of these, around 3,000 pages are included in the version of the *Cahiers* edited by Valéry himself and arranged according to “themes” or key concepts.¹⁴

Monsieur Teste is an artificial figure incorporating Platonism with dandyism in a perfect synthesis. We can get an idea of his character (or, better still, its design) by imagining how Edgar Allen Poe might have described the figure of Socrates if he had been privileged to be present at the philosopher's dying scene. Poe would have penned a monstrous work on the border between life and death, not in the style of a spellbinding horror story like "The Case of M. Valdemar," but in the spirit of logical artistry. This novel on experimental philosophy would seriously explore the primacy of theory over life and the separation of the intuitive mind from its biological carrier. Poe's Socrates would outdo Plato's on one specific point: the wise man would not reveal the information about the separation of the intellect from bodily life for the first time on the day of his execution. He would not have waited until old age to reveal the secret of his *modus vivendi*. He would make the discovery of the principle of the countervital spirit into a cause for the young and the best forces. He would take the risk that virile monsters could emerge as witnesses for a non-morbid superiority of the sense of the possible over the sense of reality. They would be athletes of reservations about existence, determined to resist temptation through individual fulfillment.

This is exactly what materialized in the literary exercising of the young Paul Valéry. The inner observer, in the shape of Monsieur Teste, was built up to such strength that his own existence would only serve as the stuff with which to begin relentlessly developing theory. Teste is the man who has formally broken with the primacy of life, not as a theory cripple in the protected space of long-term academic contracts, but as a logical athlete who does not hide from anybody yet is noticed only by the handful of people who intuit his *raison d'être*. He exists as a workshop director at a virtual Bauhaus of ideas. He operates at the interface of precision and the soul. If he took up a practical job, it could only be at a center for arts and metapsychology. He sees himself solely as a variable point in the game of possibility curves. This is why Valéry writes that he "existed in lodgings of the most usual sort,"¹⁵ and that he lived in an "abstract and banal" place.¹⁶ Tidy or untidy, he always used it as a mere container for a logical experiment. Nothing in it suggested a place of residence, if residence means the creation of a bond between space and inhabitant. Even more uncanny is that Teste has no relationship to himself and his life story, nothing that suggests "personality" in the trivial sense of the word. The narrator of *An*

Evening with Monsieur Teste can say that “Monsieur Teste had no opinions. I believe he stirred his passions when he willed”¹⁷ and that “when he spoke, he never lifted an arm or a finger. He had killed his puppet. He never smiled, nor said good morning or good night; he seemed not to hear a ‘how are you?’”¹⁸ There is a parallel passage in the *Cahiers* written around 1906: “He knows too much to live.”¹⁹

In short, Monsieur Teste is the intellect that doesn’t fall into the trap of personal fulfillment. He refuses to become a “character”; all he demands of himself is to keep up the most intensive form of possibility. As a result he refuses to be “extraordinary”: “I hate extraordinary things. Only weak minds need them.”²⁰ He knows that every cult of genius is based on comfortable emotional capitulation to the intelligence observed from outside. Real intelligence is operative; it lives in combination with the working of analogue intelligence. Monsieur Teste only accepts the question posed in the spirit of Spinoza: “What can a man do? What can a man do....!” He adds, with almost Socratic logic, “You know a man who knows that he doesn’t know what he is saying!”

Such ignorance cannot be attributed to the type of simple self-contradiction that spoils the impact of the trivial Socratic sentiment “I know that I do not know.” Monsieur Teste’s ignorance is the discreet warning light of a discipline that demands to know all the hidden implications of everything that is known. Positive knowledge and local evidence invariably fail in the face of this demand, which reaches into infinity. Because of this, Monsieur Teste’s knowledge has broken with the illusion that cognition is final. In his sphere the rule is: “To think is to feel the products of an urge to eliminate.”²¹ In the intellectual, as in every culture of the life of practice, only the current form counts. To have thought is one thing, to rethink now another, and the only thing that matters is this constantly new “another.”

Valéry used his logical dummy called Monsieur Teste to demonstrate how the intellectual, the athlete, the person in a state of suspended animation, and the angel merge together. Incidentally, a monster “man of possibilities” like this can be married without contradicting his basic principles: he lives in a kind of meta-celibacy unaffected by the realities of marriage. Valéry makes the model man’s wife utter some of the most powerful statements about his way of being. In a letter to a friend, Emilie Teste says that an important feature of her husband’s existence is the capacity to be severe: “I don’t believe anyone can be as adamant as he is.

He breaks your spirit with a word and I feel like a flawed vase rejected by the potter. He is stern as an angel, Sir.”²² Teste’s plucky wife not only mentions the parable of the potter from St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans, which defends God’s unfathomable decisions on the well-being or misfortune of individuals against human objections; she also appears familiar with Plato’s remarks on Socrates’s absences, as shown by this comment on her husband’s powers: “He stretches them over the unknown depths within him, into some abyss of the difficult. I wonder what becomes of him there? ... One would have to have seen him in those excesses of abstraction! At such times his whole countenance is altered—obscured ... a bit more of such absorption, and I am sure that he would be invisible!”²³ Madame Teste also mentions a conversation with a Catholic cleric who describes her husband as a “monster of seclusion” and identifies signs of satanic pride in him. However, as real arrogance would require condescension to a positive quality, pride “in a soul already too much exercised” turns on itself and becomes neutralized to a quality of general superiority without any clear direction. Monsieur Teste is too proud for pride, too free for free thinking. The pride of the perfectly intellectualized existence obeys the maxim “Despise your neighbor as yourself.”²⁴ In 1934, forty years after he invented his experimental figure, Valéry noted, “All right [said Monsieur Teste]. The essential is against life.”²⁵

At this point, I will interrupt these references to variations and developmental stages of the Platonic schema of apparent death to point out that, given the abundance of legends, they should each be regarded as almost arbitrary. The ancient European adventure of mortification for the sake of pure cognition spans an era of almost two and a half thousand years by now. No historian of ideas and no typologist would presume to think that the content of an epoch of that size could be exhausted with a few examples of the kind I have presented. However, our explorations provide sufficient insights into the specific nature of the subject to allow us to establish some important constants. I shall confine myself to the three most important features without which we could not understand the art of advanced approaches toward a beautiful death for the sake of knowledge. I call the first the retreat from profane life, the second the reinforcement of centrist witnesses, and the third the exchange of small subjectivity for the great soul.

I can deal with the first point briefly. I devoted a lengthy chapter of my book *You Must Change Your Life!* to the phenomenon of retreat, and I discuss in detail the process of alienation from ordinary existence, which I call “secession.”²⁶ All theoretical and ethical life is secessionist to some extent, because it is based on the decision to leave behind the probable that unites the majority of people in order to resettle in the realm of the improbable. Life in the secession through thinking owes its existence to the distancing techniques people use to transport themselves to the special zone of theory. I have shown this in the book just mentioned in relation to the aspiring ethical forms of life that are not infrequently misunderstood as “religions”; almost the same applies to the bearers of epistemic ambitions. What Husserl called *epoché* would not be appropriately understood if we only wanted to perceive it as a mental act and nothing else. Radical refusal to accept prevailing circumstances actually entails much more than merely “bracketing” the everyday attitude to the world and life. In the past two and a half thousand years, *epoché*, with its entire consummated existence, has assumed the scale of a mass emigration from the real into the possible. In societies based on estates, this migration, which countless individuals have embarked on in every age, seems mainly like a transfer from the third (bourgeois) and second (noble) estate into the first, the clergy. Yet, “clergy” is merely a vague address for subtle emigrations. These encompass the intelligentsia’s permanent emigration from stupidity and the permanent secession of moral feeling from real existing vulgarity, and accomplish the permanent transgression of boundaries of skill onto higher levels of virtuosity. At times, a now-faded political fairy tale from the early twentieth century was used to try to reclaim permanent *epoché* as permanent revolution against institutionalized society. We know the results.

There is nothing further to add to the second point, either. The attempts at strengthening one’s inner witness—which is present at the life process as if an eccentric observation post had been set up in one’s own soul—have been codified a number of times in the history of the mind principle. The release of observation from local life has appeared under many different names in the course of mental evolution. In ancient Indian philosophy, the disinterested subject that lies at the root of every interested existence was called *atman*, which initially meant something like breath or spirit, and is related to the German word *Atem* (breath). Buddhism countered this with a kind of “breathless” concentration. Platonism’s answer to the Orient was its

discovery of the “noetic” psyche that European philosophy treats as the mind-soul untouched by the passage of time. The Latin Platonists (including St. Paul) adopted this figure under the name of *homo interior*, which describes a mental impression that remains after the withdrawal of the exterior person, a theme that Husserl repeated in his thought experiments on obtaining the essence of the self by destroying the world. The Stoics circumscribed mental residue with the image of the “inner statue”; the life of practice was supposed to actively support its elaboration. Medieval mystics spoke of soul sparks or the subtle resident of the inner citadel. At the beginning of the modern age, Adam Smith introduced the inner “unbiased observer” into his theory of moral feelings. This figure’s task was to advise the individual in emotional conflicts, and to advocate a lofty morality in general. The German idealists emphasized the transcendental subject that is sometimes interpreted as the advance post of the absolute spirit in the individual subject. Finally, the postidealists evolved a critical subject that can see in the dark and succeeds in penetrating the “illusory connections” of the general catastrophe. The latest version of the witness myth, produced by Luhmann’s system theory, discusses an observer who watches others’ actions intelligently. In the process, thought, unrelated to external basic points of “truth,” is seen as the differential between first- and second-order (or higher-order) observations. Every variant of witness consciousness postulates a more or less eccentric intelligence (with the eccentricity always directed inward) that is capable of obtaining a certain amount of overview and insight from its methodically achieved seclusion. The series as a whole tends to entropy, as if the mind were obliged to profane itself progressively.

Like the theme of retreat from the outside world and the figure of the interior witness, the third common feature of cultures of suspended animation, the exchange of the local ego for the higher self, is too big a subject to discuss adequately here. In my earlier remarks on the reversed relations between hunters and prey in Giordano Bruno’s work, I mentioned the importance of the schema of subject change for the entire area of Platonism and Neo-Platonism. This kind of change gives rise to a partly monastic, partly civil death rhetoric in which the disappearance of the perceiver in the perceived is the natural price paid for access to higher truths. To this day, theory lacks a scientifically satisfactory history of ideas of beautiful death, which is why there are not just personal reasons for my

being able to speak about these subjects here only indicatively and without any scholarly apparatus.

Anyway, a glance at the tradition confirms the basic trend of this observation: it was the epistemic virtues of people in suspended animation that were supposed to qualify these exquisite monsters for the theoretical professions. Of course, we no longer talk openly about the pathos-filled relationships between self-effacement and method; we generally forgo metaphysical special effects and are content with apparently harmless introductory courses in which the previous virtues of the dead are discreetly shifted into the reach of the next generation. We teach young academics to search for the transpersonal standpoint without their having to fast and pray. We educate the novices of theory to respect the general in particular and the particular in general; we awaken them to the sense of the formal side of everything, initiating them into the self-effacement of thinkers. Today, too, the moral of history is: as far as possible, people should make themselves invisible behind their terminological methods. In the natural sciences, the human observer retreats completely behind “measuring” through observations with equipment, and the “subjective factor” only comes into play (as discreetly as possible) when interpreting the measurements.

In the case of the protagonists of theory, if this retreat from their own all-too-personal being becomes ingrained in flesh and blood, the primacy of method will become second nature to them, and the priority of the object an almost “personal” need. As a rule, scholarship today is practiced like an ordinary profession, as if collaboration on the epochal project of coming to terms with the world had become a routine assignment. The epistemic career is often face to face with a second life in non-academic situations, in which the subject of theory oscillates back, more or less unobtrusively, to ordinary forms of thought and perception. In this way, existence in everyday life becomes undeclared compensatory coaching against the one-sidedness that has to be practiced for professionally done science. The routine nature of daily life is linked to the non-routine nature of art to reproduce the implicit wealth of spontaneous life experience in explicit forms. We have art so as not to be ruined by scholarship making our relation to the world and ourselves artificial.

COGNITIVE MODERNISM

THE ASSASSINATION ATTEMPTS ON THE NEUTRAL OBSERVER

In the course of our interpretation, we have arrived at a crossroads branching out in three different directions. The first takes us straight to the entrance, because one could think we have reached the goal in this matter and have learned as much from the topic as we could under present-day premises. If we took this path, I could close the file immediately and thank you for your attention. If we took the second path, I would like to follow a suggestion from Max Bense, who remarked that now and again in the midst of abstract reflection one should turn to individual philosophical personalities to “transform that scarcely admitted inhumanity of the spirit into a beautiful immediacy.”¹ In that case, my lecture would have to end with some case studies in the immediate area of local observation, a project from which I dissociate myself for obvious reasons. Finally, on the third path we would take the opportunity to finish the wider story we have started, and this is exactly what I wish to do now.

It seems as if we could survey the field quickly and be satisfied with noting the results I indicated at the beginning. Indeed, there is no doubt at all about the start of the story: epistemological modernism has spread to a very wide area, breaking with the exalted fictions of disinterested reason and recalling cognitive subjects from their artificial mortifications. If there is a point about this situation that needs interpreting, it is about due appreciation of the process, whether we count it as one of the emancipatory good deeds of modernism or whether we judge it as an occult crime with indeterminate results. There are arguments to be made on both sides. Since the complete elimination of the apparently dead person from the modern culture of rationality occurred in a climate of upheaval against tradition, the dramatic view initially seemed the more plausible. The anti-metaphysical rebels fought in the first place for the destruction of the powerful “ghost”

that the people of the metaphysical age had conjured up with illusions of a nether world they could anticipate themselves in their lifetime.

I could leave it at that and record modernism's departure from the cognitive ideology of angels—or from the metaphysics of the separable noetic soul—if only there had not been such a grand coalition of conspirators present at the killing of the person in suspended animation. The liquidation of the ancient European subject of theory was by no means the work of a lone killer. In fact, it resulted from an abundance of parallel polemical developments, each of which contributed to the overall result. I have counted a total of ten assassins. Each gave his own reasons for settling accounts with the ghost of the man of theory. We can assume that more detailed research would yield longer lists: properly compiled, they would look like a common history of science, philosophy, and politics in Europe since the late eighteenth century. Their global theme would be the main event of recent Western thought, which could be called the secularization of cognition, a process that turned out to be a politicization of cognition and ramified into naturalist and culturalist variants early on. Above all, it was the avant-gardes of modern reflection since the death of Hegel that brought a tumultuous case against the classical tradition: this led to what we presently call thought in the basic postmetaphysical position. In substance, the case was conducted as a critique of neutral reason.

I would like to invoke the dramatic image of angelicide once more to describe the fate that cognitive modernism has in store for the sacred monster of older cognition theory, the person in a state of suspended animation who departed from life for the benefit of cognition. Ten conspirators arrived at the scene, ten daggers were drawn for the great attack, and even if all the blows did not fall simultaneously, they were united in a combined effect. I will skip the scenic description of the angel falling to the ground, but at least allow me briefly to inspect the line-up of assassins. Since no Mark Anthony has appeared to hold the funeral oration for the noble victim of the epistemological conspiracy, somebody has to make a start and try to fill the gap. However, I do not want to incite either the people of Rome or of Tübingen to take revenge on the conspirators. Since I would prefer to solicit understanding for the murderers' motives without denying respect to the victim—and without passing judgment on his capacity for resurrection—it is enough for me to present the list of attackers and suggest their motives.

The first thing to mention here is the re-embedding of theory in practice associated in Germany above all with the fresh impetus of the young Hegelians. This turnaround heralded a general epistemological climate that reversed over two thousand years of splitting the bios theoretikós. It would be a mild understatement to say that this was the beginning of the second democratic experiment, insofar as democracy, as indicated earlier, is just another name for giving priority to practical and political life as against every other project of existence. This led to the magnificent fiction in democracy of the contemplative life being relegated to modest formats. The heading “democracy” signifies that common sense takes priority over heroic thought: it establishes the primacy of solidarity over exemplary images of individual importance and proclaims the importance of the common good above the arrogant individual’s personal stake in happiness. Here, I shall take the name of Karl Marx to represent many philosophers from this tendency. Although he may only be a dubious witness for concern with democracy, there can be no doubt of his pioneering role in subordinating the theoretical to the practical life. His work is associated with the fateful incursion of the real into the sphere of theory. This turnaround was fateful most of all because Marx interpreted the essence of the real not only as material production but also as war for the acquisition of products and, therefore, as perpetual class war (until the final victory of the producers). The result was that all philosophy from then on was supposed to be obliged to take a position on the respective current front line of the longest struggle. It is unnecessary to explain in detail why there could not have been a more radical reversal of the ancient European culture of rationality than the militant turn that linked it, from the perspective of the historian of ideas, with the basic tenet of Marxism: where there was contemplation, there should now be mobilization. The abiding catastrophe of now-impure theory began with the introduction of militancy before the March 1848 revolution and its presupposition of civil war in philosophy.

The second factor I shall refer to is modern thought’s renunciation of the fictions of epistemic suprematism. Friedrich Nietzsche is the main person to mention in this context. His theoretical impetus amounts to a critique of perspectivist reason. In his contributions to the critique of reason, Nietzsche accomplished nothing less than the proof that all cognition is local in character and that, in imitating the divine eye, no human observer is able to go as far as really transcending his own location. The advice of the new

critique of cognition was to stop jumping out of one's skin for the sake of the phantom of a transpersonal wisdom and, instead, to slip completely into one's skin in order to exploit to the limit the cognitive opportunity offered by the untenable perspective of a singular existence. There is no need to explain how this leads to science converging with belles lettres and theory being transformed into creed, without a decision being made in advance on the precedence of one or the other.

In third place, I would like to put an attack that is closely related to the two previous ones: I call it the infiltration of the classical apathy principle by partisan thinking. I would like to cite Georg Lukács here as representative of a whole army of intellectuals who worshiped the principle of partiality. Lukács occupies a particular ranking among twentieth-century philosophers, an outstanding but problematic position, because after his conversion to Marxism he tried to elevate the principle of "class consciousness" to the a priori of all morally defensible intellectual activities. In this respect, he not only made his contribution to bombarding the ancient European academe with the campaign category of "bourgeois science," which was to help in defaming every non-Marxist form of theory formation as the accomplice of the "existing order"; in addition, as an apologist of Lenin's and Stalin's exterminatory politics, Lukács collaborated in idealizing "revolutionary violence" in the Soviet Union. This violence was to claim victims on a scale of between twenty-five and forty million human lives. Lukács did what was necessary to disavow logical pacifism, without which, as I indicated earlier, the ancient European heterotopia of the academic sphere—and its reflection in the civil pacifism of the scholars' republic—would not have been viable. From this perspective, the humanist and classicist Lukács, whom official communist organizations generally treated as an outsider, is the tragic secret figure of left-wing intellectual fascism in the twentieth century and, therefore, usually spared explicit criticism, inasmuch as the fascism resounding in theory is consistently based on exaggerating war as the last resort of reality, regardless of whether it uses the right-wing jargon of race war or the left-wing language of class war.

The fourth place on my list goes to the subversion of the Western culture of rationality by phenomenological analysis, which placed all theory on the pretheoretical ground of "atmosphere." The key figure to remember here is Martin Heidegger, a philosopher who quite unmistakably belongs to the

movement that started with the three already-mentioned attacks on pure theory. If Heidegger is regularly criticized for his one-time closeness to the “National Socialist revolution” of 1933, such accusations can only be properly appreciated if they are embedded in modern philosophy’s renunciation of the tradition of contemplative rationality, to which Heidegger repentantly wanted to return after his fall. His case sheds light on the dangers of militancy, which tempted many philosophers of the modern age into wanting to become organs of the “revolution,” of “history,” or of “events.” As long as we lack an incisive critique of “embedded” reason, research into Heidegger’s undeniable lapse, however meticulous, is only of limited value. It usually reveals more about the accuser’s attitude than the motives of the accused.

The fifth point I would like to mention is how faith in disinterested perception in the modern sciences has been shaken, particularly by the events in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Physics, the previously unchallenged ruling discipline of the natural sciences, lost its innocence at the latest because of the two nuclear apocalypses of August 1945 and was relegated to a war of the Titans. The German physicist and philosopher Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, for example, who was involved in developing the “German bomb,” which was never built, drew the conclusions from this by coining the phrase “science and responsibility,” which is indispensable for all time to come. In doing this, he not only formulated a maxim of ethical cognition for the natural sciences in technological civilization, but also provided approaches to the endless conundrum of redefining the configuration of scientific esotericism and political exotericism.

My sixth point concerns the effect of existentialism in blasting open philosophical systems thinking and natural science ideology. This process also dates back to the first half of the nineteenth century. Its opening scene played when Kierkegaard objected that Hegel had forgotten the real existing individual when he constructed his system. This approach reached its culmination in the mid-twentieth century when Jean-Paul Sartre, inspired by the phenomenologists Husserl and Heidegger, presented his widely influential theory of committed existence. It belongs to the infiltration of contemplative reason by militant attitudes, with the specific difference that committed people in the Sartrean mode do not invoke a mandate from “history” or the “revolution” but rely solely on an unfathomable existential choice. As we know, Sartre (before he willfully undersold himself by

currying favor with Marxist sociology) interpreted the essence of man as a surplus of negativity that asserted itself by permanently breaking away from actuality and previous issues. The theatrical metaphor of “commitment” reveals how in the twentieth century even a profound theory of human freedom could be utilized to pave the way for the destruction of contemplation.

The seventh place goes to the infiltration of academic discourse by the sociology of knowledge. It exposed the semblance of objective theory by demonstrating that all established discourse was strictly tied to academic success patterns and the linguistic games of ruling majorities. Max Scheler in the early twentieth century was the first to make an impressive summary of this research in his studies on the sociology of knowledge in which he revealed that perceptions are indissolubly linked to interests. He distinguished three basic types of knowledge: educational knowledge, knowledge of salvation, and knowledge of domination, corresponding to the three main anthropologically deducible complexes of interest in education, salvation, and domination.

The seemingly harmless word “interest”—a polite code name for the passions since the seventeenth century—signifies the ultimate catastrophe of pure theory. It forces even the most sublime forms of cognition to reenter the setting of the life in which a position is taken. Aside from this, we should mention two concepts and two names that are still talking points for academics: the paradigm theory developed by Thomas S. Kuhn and the theory of discourse evolved by Michel Foucault. For the moment, it is unclear whether we should read these explorations as value-free ethnologies in the theoretical field or as critical exposure of discursive conformity.

In eighth place, we note the attempts by feminism to reveal all the orders of discourse until now as fabrications of masculine domination. Suddenly, we are struck by the degree to which the masculine understood from earliest times how to pose on the terrain of the quest for knowledge as the incarnation of humankind as a whole. The infiltration through gender studies of fictions of a hypothetically genderless, almost exclusively male, science goes back to the beginnings of the women’s movement, but first peaked in the 1970s with the proclamation of an explicit feminist epistemology. The thesis of gender determination of theoretical behavior is generally accompanied by reference to its unrecognized physical determination. In turn, the materiality of the physical should always depend

on culturally specific effects of power. Here, we need only mention the name of Judith Butler and her influential study *Bodies That Matter* (1993).²

The ninth place on our list is taken by the refutation of apathy in theory by the contemporary neurological sciences. This has recently led to the proof that the links between logic and emotionality in the human brain structure go deeper than any self-observation, however acute, is capable of comprehending. This discipline's results culminate in the demand to shelve the dream of purely apathetic-noetic theory. The main figure to mention here is António R. Damásio, whose studies on human and animal consciousness exposed the "Cartesian" dualism of reason and emotion as untenable and demonstrated the key role of emotions for all cognitive processes.³

In tenth and last place comes the conquest of the myth of the rapture of the cognitive person in recent academic research. Bruno Latour is the most important name here. He has also raised subversive demands in political theory for the reinclusion of experts. From now on, he argues, they should not only appear on the scene as external ambassadors from the world of ideas; they are no longer the emissaries of foreign ontological powers like atoms, stars, or Platonic bodies and should no longer invoke the mission of representing external knowledge in a society of ignorant people. Instead, in the future they will have to see themselves as coproducers of the knowledge elaborated in the knowledge societies and circulated in diverse parliaments.⁴

Like technology, scientific knowledge should be understood as the "continuation of social relationships by other means."⁵ Do I have to explain why the tenth dagger is especially painful for the victim, who is already lying outstretched? The theoretical person looks up briefly one more time and, overcome with shock and amazement, says to the last attacker, "You too, Brutus?"

Starting from this ten-dagger synopsis, a critique of theoretical reason could be written to replace the proposals so far for describing the fields of knowledge of the modern age in a new way. In this context, Pierre Bourdieu has advanced some rather interesting proposals with his studies on the sociology of *homo theoreticus*, which he intended as a critique of scholastic reason.⁶ In my opinion, these attempts, however inspiring they may be individually, are not really successful because they remain stuck within the boundaries of old-fashioned sociology.⁷ At the same time, they tell us to

what extent the contemporary theory scene, and especially the French one, of which Bourdieu has a good overview, resembles a bonfire of vanities. They show how deeply the human, the all too human, especially the struggle for prestige and privileged status, influenced the behavior of the class that does theory. Bourdieu evidently demonstrated a science-specific Darwinism in which the law of the survival of the most mediocre applies. Moreover, he uncovered a corresponding Hobbesianism which argues that the theoretician is a wolf unto the theoretician. Where Bourdieu looks most closely and carefully, he provides a serious satire on the mores of the academic world. Sometimes he gets so close to the material that, viewed from a greater distance, the solid institutions of knowledge dissolve into a shimmering mosaic of discursive small wars.

We have now reached the end of the present endeavor. I realize it would be a mistake to finish with such a bleak prospect as that offered by Bourdieu's disillusioned references to the mannerisms of the completely secularized *homo academicus*. It would not only be a mistake from a rhetorical viewpoint, but a blunder in the matter itself as well. The re-embedding of the sciences in the sphere of life (to employ Husserl's resonant term once again) and the reawakening of the scientific or philosophical perceiver to bodily existence with all its inhibitions about passions and interests, including regressions into all-too-human behavior, were in fact not just attacks against the long-established tradition by which cognition devolved solely in the selfless who swapped their empirical ego for the transpersonal mind. Nor were the developments we have described mere concessions to the cognitive experiment of modernism that Nietzsche called the "reversal of Platonism." They were important because they simultaneously brought about the inevitable metamorphoses of the scientific idea that helped toward the transformation of that demanding, fragile, and improbable business of scholarship in the contemporary world. Where the metamorphosis succeeded, we can still see a positive correlation between discretion and method among many members of the theoretical profession today. In many areas, there is still a deep consensus between asceticism and discourse culture, even if the metaphysical exaggerations of the past have lost their credibility. Even in today's world, regardless of many problematic developments, philosophy and science are practiced as noble exercises of conscious life, although the naive ideology of angels has played out its role. The true players of life in the theoretical professions

demonstrate by daily example that there must be a third option between death and the common lot.

Who, then, is going to rule out the idea of the angel of theory passing this way again from time to time? Who would be able to stay loyal to the *métier* of philosophy were it not for the occasional moments that give us a distant glimpse of what was happening to Socrates as he stood in the doorway and listened to his inner voices?

To articulate the happiness and misery of the theoretical life, I would like to give the last word to a poet. Today, indeed, it is poets rather than philosophers who succeed in giving expression to existence in the involuntary *epoché* of the melancholy person and the voluntary discretion of the eccentric observer. Let us leave the world of scientific disciplines, a world that can often be narrow and confining, and journey to the sphere of sovereign marginality we reach on reading Fernando Pessoa's *Book of Disquiet*:

The nocturnal glory of being great without being anything! The somber majesty of unknown splendour ... and all at once I experience the sublime state of the monk in the wilderness or of the hermit in his retreat, acquainted with the substance of Christ in the stones and in the caves of withdrawal from the world.

And at this table in my room I'm less of a petty, anonymous employee. I write words as if they were the soul's salvation and I gild myself with the impossible sunset of high and vast hills in the distance, and with the statue I received in exchange for life's pleasures and with the ring of renunciation on my evangelical finger, stagnant jewel of my ecstatic disdain.⁸

NOTES

Introduction: Theory as a Form of the Life of Practice

1. Peter Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life!* (London: Polity, forthcoming). Original German edition: *Du mußt dein Leben ändern: Über Anthropotechnik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009).
2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 96.
3. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
4. I present arguments for rejecting the term “religion” altogether in my book *Du mußt dein Leben ändern*, pp. 133–70. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, an old master of “religious” science in the twentieth century, arrived at similar conclusions from different motives in his classic work *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), first published in 1962.
5. Sloterdijk, *Du mußt dein Leben ändern*, pp. 571–72. The English edition of Belting’s book is *Likeness and Presence*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

1. Theory and Asceticism, Modern and Ancient

1. The term “anthropotechnology” first appeared as an entry in the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* of 1926; I am grateful to Prof. Michael Hagemester for pointing out this article.
2. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, “Der Dichter und diese Zeit,” in *Gesammelte Werke in Einzelausgaben, Prosa II* (Frankfurt am Main:

Fischer, 1959), pp. 244ff.

3. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Kleine Dramen* (Leipzig: Insel, 1906).

4. Edmund Husserl, *Arbeit an den Phänomenen: Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Bernhard Waldenfels (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1993), pp. 118–20.

5. Hans Blumenberg, *Ein mögliches Selbstverständnis: Aus dem Nachlaß* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam Junior, 1997), p. 85.

6. Cf. Beat Wyss, *Hegel's Art History and the Critique of Modernity*, trans. Karoline Dobson Saltzwedel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

7. Titus Lucretius Carus, *De rerum natura*, book 3, ed. W.H.D. Rouse, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 945.

8. Letter of May 17, 1934, to Rudolf Pannwitz, cited in *Husserl: Ausgewählt und vorgestellt von Uwe C. Steiner* (Munich: Diederichs, 1997), p. 87.

9. Plato, *The Symposium*, ed. M. C. Howatson and F.C.C. Sheffield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 5, line 175.

10. Ibid.

11. Demands of this kind, applied to Judaism and the State of Israel, have earned the obdurate French Platonist Alain Badiou charges of anti-Semitism and fascism. Under pressure of being suspected of “logical fascism,” Badiou has recently retreated to positions similar to the “logical socialism” of Peirce and some German neo-Kantians after 1900.

12. Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt, 1978), 1:197ff.

13. Martin Heidegger, “What Is Metaphysics?” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 105.

14. Susan J. Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

15. Galatians 2:20.

16. Baruch Spinoza, *Tractatus Politicus*, quoted in Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 262. Cf. the

Catholic definition of peace based on the Constitution of Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*: Pax non est mera absentia belli ... sed recte dicitur “opus iustitiae” (Isaiah 32:7).

2. “The observer has come”: The Creation of Persons Fit for *Epoché*

1. Alternatively, it may turn out that astonishment is not a noble emotion but, as Descartes claimed, the most uncomfortable of the “passions of the soul.” He placed it at the top of his list and spared no cognitive effort to shut it off. Cf. the section, “*étonnement*,” in the *Traité des passions de l’âme*, 1649. English edition: René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, trans. S. H. Voss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989).

2. Friedrich Nietzsche, “Before Sunrise,” in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1969), p. 186.

3. Cf. Peter Sloterdijk, “Die Stadt und ihr Gegenteil: Apolitologie im Umriß,” in *Der ästhetische Imperativ: Schriften zur Kunst*, ed. Peter Weibel (Hamburg: Philo & Philo Fine Arts/Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 2007), pp. 184–229.

4. After an expression coined by Odo Marquard.

5. This Western figure of thought only collapsed with the rise of post-modern discourse theory à la Foucault, in which the mind itself is exposed as obscured power.

6. See Peter Sloterdijk, “Wie durch das reine Medium die Sphärenmitte in die Ferne wirkt: Zur Metaphysik der Telekommunikation,” chap. 7 in *Sphären II: Globen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), pp. 667–787.

7. Aristotle also called this the *eleutheros bios*, the “free life,” in contrast to “philistine” existence consumed by everyday cares.

8. Cf. Peter Sloterdijk, “Die Exerziten der Modernen,” part 3 in *Du mußt dein Leben ändern: Über Anthropotechnik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009), pp. 493–638.

9. Hannah Arendt, *Denktagebuch*, vol. 1, 1950–1973, ed. Ursula Ludz and Ingeborg Nordmann (Munich: Piper, 2002), p. 414.

10. Elitist, because the Constitution of the United States of America defines politics as a business of prosperous amateurs who champion the community without having to live from politics. The concept of an aristocracy of democratic amateur politicians is based on Hannah Arendt's idea of "acting" in her book *The Human Condition*. It leads to the disturbing result that there are no remaining contemporary examples for the essential in the existence of man as *zoon politikon*, a political animal.

11. The best way to convey the historical complexities in the relationship between philosophy and politics is to look at four modifications of the mistress-maidservant relationship. Ancient philosophy represents a mistress that politics wanted to make into its maid. In the Christian era, politics itself became the maidservant of theory. Modern philosophy revived the attempt to become mistress of the world, but could only achieve this by dismissing science from its service; in turn, the sciences became the handmaid of technology, which is their real mistress. Philosophy finally lost the power struggle right across the board (we recall Heidegger being shamed for making a wrong commitment, and the way Sartre voluntarily sold himself out by dishonestly siding with a barbaric dictatorship). After its defeat, philosophy agreed to be democracy's maidservant or receptionist. This final subordination characterizes present-day academic philosophy; it imprints philosophy almost pervasively with an unhappy consciousness based on its concept of the world as well as its scholastic concept. From the time sovereignty was transferred from theory to modern art, nonsubordinate philosophy continued to be feasible only through an alliance with the arts.

12. Alphonse de Lamartine, "Isolement" (1818) in *Méditations poétiques* (1820): "Sur la terre d'exil pourquoi resté-je encore / Il n'est rien de commun entre la terre et moi."

13. Dieter Lenzen, "Vom Oikosherrn zum Pädagogen: Erste Deszendenz des Vaters: das antike Griechenland," chap. 5 in *Vaterschaft: Vom Patriarchat zur Alimentation* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1991), p. 76ff.

3. Theory and Suspended Animation and Its Metamorphoses

1. Plato, *Phaedo*, in *Classics of Western Philosophy*, ed. Steven M. Cahn (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977), p. 71.
2. Ibid., p. 74–75.
3. Ibid., p. 73.
4. Ibid., p. 72–73.
5. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, trans. C. D. Yonge (Middlesex: Echo Library, 2007), p. 82.
6. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. David Raeburn (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 2004), p. 101ff.
7. Giordano Bruno, *The Heroic Frenzies*, trans. P. E. Memmo, Jr. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), pp. 125, 126, 42.
8. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, “The Nature of the Scholar,” in *Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s Popular Works*, trans. William Smith (London: Trübner, 1873), pp. 207, 210.
9. J. G. Fichte, “The Destiny of Man,” trans. F. H. Hedge, in *The German Classics*, ed. K. Francke and W. G. Howard (New York: German Publication Society, 1914), 5:63, 65.
10. J. G. Fichte, “The Facts of Consciousness,” trans. A. E. Kroeger, *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, ed. William Torrey Harris, 18 (1884): 159.
11. Ibid., p. 159.
12. The only exception, the Munich Fichte School around Reinhard Lauth (1919–2007), remained a forlorn enclave for a reactionary avant-garde. Professor Lauth’s subsequent development as an Islamophile shows how Fichteanism can overflow into a kind of jihadism.
13. The appendix to volume 1 of the edition of the *Notebooks* in the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris, provides a reverent list of the 261 handwritten notebooks that Valéry filled with notes between 1894 and 1945. Paul Valéry, *Cahiers* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1957–1961), pp. 1374–1415.

14. Paul Valéry, *Cahiers*, 2 vols., ed. J. Robinson (Paris: Gallimard, 1973).
15. Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, trans. Jackson Mathews (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 11.
16. Ibid., p. 11.
17. Ibid., p. 5.
18. Ibid., p. 3.
19. Paul Valéry, *Cahiers/Notebooks*, ed. Brian Stimpson (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000).
20. Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, p. 17.
21. Valéry, *Cahiers/Notebooks*, ed. Stimpson, p. 222.
22. Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, p. 23.
23. Ibid., p. 26.
24. Ibid, p. 57.
25. Ibid., p. 78.
26. Sloterdijk, *Du mußt dein Leben ändern: Über Anthropotechnik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009), chap. 6, pp. 338–78.

4. Cognitive Modernism: The Assassination Attempts on the Neutral Observer

1. Max Bense, *Vom Wesen deutscher Denker: oder, Zwischen Kritik und Imperativ* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1938), p. 7.
2. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
3. António R. Damásio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt, 2000).
4. See Peter Sloterdijk, “Ein Philosoph im Exil oder: Der Mann, der die Wissenschaften liebt,” laudation for Bruno Latour on the presentation of the Siegfried Unseld Prize, Frankfurt am Main, September 28, 2008.
5. Bruno Latour, “The Berlin Key, or How to Do Words with Things,” in *Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture*, ed. P. M. Graves-Brown (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 10–21.

6. Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
7. On replacing conventional sociology, see Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
8. Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 15.

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