on understanding violence philosophically & other essays by J. Glenn Gray

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On Understanding Violence Philosophically and Other Essays

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J. Glenn Gray

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and Other Essays

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ON UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE PHILOSOPHICALLY
AND OTHER ESSAYS

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vinced that man is never on the level of animals. Either he falls below them, as so often in his mad rages, or rises above them when he achieves humanity. Though I never feel inclined to argue about this matter, it gives me a certain satisfaction to hear from veterans of more recent wars that they have come to the same conclusion as a result of like experiences.

This intuition of the incommensurability of man and animal is hardly new, to be sure. I find in Aristotle's ethics the statement that "the incontinent man can do ten thousand times as much evil as the beast."[2] Those who are aware how rarely the sober Aristotle exaggerates will also realize that with our contemporary instruments of destruction, totally foreign to the untechnological Greeks, his remark is seen to be an understatement. The simple point, however, that I want to make is that we are probably on the wrong track in trying to understand human violence from the standpoint of animal behavior.

The underlying and unexamined assumption of so many of our scientists is that man is a rational animal, that is, an animal first of all with the attribute of reason added to him from without, as it were. In being violent he loses this attribute and becomes a beast, that is, irrational. I have gradually become convinced that this philosophical definition of man as an *animal rationale* is inadequate and therefore misleading. Naturally there is something "correct" about it but it is far from "right." By accepting it as a presupposition of our thinking about violence, we go wrong philosophically and get a false start on the endeavor to understand the source of violence within us. In a short essay I cannot, of course, give all my reasons for believing this Western definition of man to be in error. Let me, however, indicate a few of them simply

2. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103b.

in outline form. They are drawn in part, as readers will recognize, from my study of German phenomenology and existentialism.

Man is a being who possesses memory, and memory is a large and pervasive component of what we call our minds, as even the common etymology of the two words indicates. In Greek mythology, Mnemosyne, goddess of memory, was a titaness and mother of the Muses of Zeus. Even slight reflection is sufficient to convince us that reflection itself inseparably belongs to memory. Recollection is the collecting of ourselves, the gathering of what we have been and still are as well as what we expect to become. Recollection is able to cut across clock time in such a fashion that the near becomes distant and the distant near. This collecting *in* memory and *of* memory can transmute everything so that a seemingly trivial new experience changes the whole of one's perspective on one's past. More dramatically, the recollection of a forgotten incident in childhood may alter radically one's present and future relations to oneself and one's fellows.

Who of us has not been haunted by the recall of a momentary act of violence in himself or his companions, an act or even a gesture sufficient to propel us from the periphery of an angry mob toward its center? Similarly, there is hardly a violent man who on occasion has not been moved by an act of tenderness that will not cease to trouble him till his death. The intensity of memory bears frequently little relation to the duration or importance of what it recollects. Normal connections of cause and effect seem curiously out of balance here, indeed hard to discover at all in many instances. Memory makes self-knowledge difficult to the point of impossibility, for the self is not only ever in the making but is subject to no discoverable laws of orderly progression.

Hence memory is an uncanny but wonderful part of

being human. Only to the thoughtless is it simply a faculty of recalling what has been.[3] Animals, too, have memory in this limited sense of recalling the factual past. But presumably they do not inhabit their memories; memory for them does not transform past, present, and future as it does for us. They are not made "mindful" enough by memory to speak in tongues, to become guilty, or to make their existence in time a problem.

Men also possess imagination, and this power involves more than the reproduction of past images. It signifies also productive capacity. Imagination opens up to us the vast realm of the possible, which is a world more commodious than any actual world. Imagination enables us to live outside ourselves in space as memory enables us to live outside the present in time. Both, however, permit the gathering of the distant in the near, the bringing into presence of that which has been as well as that which never was.

Shakespeare understood so well this double nature of imagination as productive and reproductive, as the intricate joining and harmonizing of the real and the possible:

> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.

Surely man becomes human in any authentic sense only when this twofold power of imagination is made use of by him to create the poetry, painting, and music

3. Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, trans. Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968). See Part II, Lectures III and IV, for a provocative treatment of memory.

of a people as well as their scientific discoveries and philosophies. This second nature into which a youngster is gradually transformed, if he is fortunate, is much more decisive than the accident of his biological first nature, for it allows him the possibility of giving in his turn a local habitation and a name to what would otherwise remain a chilling and lonely expanse of world.

Such a capacity of imagination, when reflected upon, never ceases to excite our wonder—even astonishment, a sentiment Aristotle saw as the origin of philosophy as well as of art and science. His teacher, Plato, called these powers *ekstasis*, which is the ability man possesses to transcend his specific situation, to get outside himself in space and time. They permit him to participate in others' experiences, to understand what women go through in having a baby, if we are males, or to understand what men go through in mortal combat, if we are females. So often the traditional conception of man as a rational animal misses this dimension of *ekstasis*. It tends to conceive imagination as simply reproductive in the same way it conceives memory only as recall. The other species may well possess imagination in the limited sense as many do possess the popular notion of memory. But the capacity of self-surpassing, of bringing into presence, of naming, of ecstatic union of the possible and the actual—this capacity seems to be reserved to human beings.

In intimate association with memory and imagination, though subtly constituting another dimension of being human, man possesses consciousness and conscience. The words *consciousness* and *conscience* do not sound alike accidentally; originally they were the same, signifying "joint knowledge" or "knowing with others." In our Anglo-Saxon tradition, however, conscience has come to be associated with a moral faculty which enables individuals to know right from wrong, good from evil. And con-

sciousness on the European continent, particularly in German philosophy, has been developed as a continuation of the classic Greek understanding of *nous*, or mind in the sense of that which pervades the cosmos and is simply illustrated in man, not alone embodied in his rational faculties. Neither tradition has seen sufficiently, I believe, the unitary character of conscience and consciousness, by which we are at once distinctive individuals and members of the human community. Both are activities of the productive imagination and memory by which we are placed in the midst of the world and are inseparable from it by virtue of our ability to know jointly with our fellows. Consciousness and conscience allow a participation which makes man distinctive to a greater degree than either memory or imagination can when considered in separation.

Conscience is usually thought of psychologically as an inner state of the self. Conscience makes us guilty, we say, when we become conscious of an act of ours (or failure to act) that does not comport with that which memory and imagination have made possible for us. But guiltiness is thought of too superficially if it is understood in ethical terms alone. We awake to guilt when we first become self-conscious. Without sufficient consciousness or awareness we are unlikely ever to feel guilty, and without responding to guilt, that is, becoming responsible, we block any growth in consciousness of our being with others. It has become usual to understand conscience not as some divine imperative within but simply as the internalizing of the mores of our particular culture. While this is doubtless true, its significance is both different and greater than often believed. Conscience is "social" as consciousness likewise is in the sense that neither would come to be in isolated creatures. The new dimension they bring to the fore is

the ontological priority of the communal and community as the fount and origin of all memory and imagination in individuals.

We are gradually relearning today what the ancients already knew, that language is the common possession making man human. Though languages are relative to particular societies, language itself is not. And it is language which forms and largely determines all of us from birth. Consciousness seems to be a linguistic phenomenon, and this phenomenon is the source of all our *joined* knowing and caring and creating in the arts and sciences and in everyday living. Language is much more than logic, as it is certainly other than a tool of communication. It would be more in line with the actual situation to say, as Martin Heidegger has remarked, that our communication and our logic are the instruments of language. In any event, it appears clear that consciousness and conscience as the new dimension formed by and united with memory and imagination are the consequence of that inexhaustible public reservoir called language, which we still so imperfectly understand.

To develop any of these three ideas in detail would certainly require a book-length study and carry me away from the limited purpose of an essay on violence. I mention them in such sketchy and preliminary fashion only to indicate the limitations of the dominant notion that man is adequately characterized as an animal with reason, an attribute which he loses when he behaves violently. There are assuredly more aspects of the human situation that distinguish us from the other species and they from us. I am not inclined to believe that these distinctions make us superior to the animals in any moral or even ontological sense. What I am alone insisting on is the difference, a difference of kind rather than of degree.

II

The appeal of violence, perhaps especially for the younger generation today, results from the increasing difficulty of acting effectively as distinguished from mere behaving or reacting. One of the distinctive features of being human—when we put aside the definition of man as *animal rationale*—is the achieving of individuality through meaningful action. It has long seemed to me that the definition of freedom as the power to act is the soundest and most comprehensive way of understanding this important but ambiguous quality of human existence. To be sure, this presupposes that we think of action as something more and other than mere physical doing. We act when we speak with authority—that is, reflectively—and a statesman's speech can be frequently more truly an example of action than an inconclusive battle which costs many lives. Or at a less exalted level, a person acts when he takes charge of himself by resolving to choose his own course on a particular issue and no longer to follow unthinkingly the directives of his family, his school, his firm, or even his government. Action is always, as I see it, an assertion of one's individuality, hence of one's freedom, against the manifold forces playing upon us from outside ourselves. Individuality need not manifest itself in defiance of those forces, but it involves a consciousness that they are no longer solely determinative of one's course. There are, to be sure, degrees of freedom as there are degrees of power; neither is by nature absolute. Nor do any of us act very frequently in a full sense, and some people, I suspect, never act at all. Nevertheless, freedom is made actual as distinguished from being simply potential to the extent to which we act and live according to the convictions we

have formulated of what is distinctive in us as human beings, either individually or as communities.

As a result of many well-known forces today, such as increasing anonymity caused by industrialization, technology, and overpopulation, it has become vastly more difficult for any of us to act in significant ways or to believe in the importance of our individuality.

What does the frustration of this power to act do to us? The answer seems clear: it creates passions. Passion used to be understood in our tradition as the very opposite of action, a usage that I think we should revive because it is vitally needed. Passion, as philosophers like Spinoza understood, is an undergoing, a being acted upon from without in contrast to an action which is initiated within. As such it is the clearest contradiction of freedom. We still use the word passion in this sense when we speak of crimes of passion and consider passion as an exculpation of the offender because he is not in control of himself. In addition to this primary character of being acted upon, passion also implies that in its grip one suffers. The passion of Christ meant his agonies before and during the Crucifixion. Passion, therefore, in its original and still lingering meaning is a kind of suffering in which we are handed over to external forces, are acted upon, and are rendered unfree.[4]

4. By reverting to this original meaning of the word "passion," I do not intend to rule out its employment in an utterly different sense today, that used by Kierkegaard, for instance, when he writes that faith is a passion and "passion is the shudder of thought." When passion designates the sort of rapt amazement which thinking may experience at its boundaries, such passion is at the furthest remove from mad rage. As the shudder of thought, passion is indeed akin to what we have been calling *ekstasis* in the poetic, productive sense of the word. Here passion is never separate from thinking, is indeed thought potentiated to its highest degree. For that reason it lacks the negative aspects of suffering, vengefulness, and violence.

The typical response to this passion is violence, usually unplanned and spontaneous. Violence is defined by the *Oxford Universal Dictionary* as "the exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on or damage to persons or property." As a transitive verb, "to do violence to" is related to "violate." It is important to keep the meaning of the word violence distinct from terms like power, force, strength, and authority. I agree wholeheartedly with Hannah Arendt when she writes, in the essay already cited, that these latter terms refer to different phenomena and that it is a sad commentary on our muddled minds that today they are frequently used as synonymous. A major theme of her essay, incidentally, is that violence and power are more nearly opposites, and that violence is increasing in our time because power is eroding from our governing institutions.

In view of my distinction between action and passion, it may be desirable to discuss briefly the difference between violence and force, as I see them. Whereas most of us can grasp the difference between power and violence, that between force and violence is somewhat more difficult. I find in writers like Georges Sorel and Vilfredo Pareto something less than clarity here.[5] And even the

5. Pareto believes in force as a prerequisite for governing and as "the foundation of all social organization." He decries the use of violence as folly, impractical, and a weakening of the social fabric. "Often enough one observes cases in which individuals and classes which have lost the force to maintain themselves in power make themselves more and more hated because of their outbursts of random violence. The strong man strikes only when it is absolutely necessary, and then nothing stops him. Trajan was strong, not violent; Caligula was violent, not strong." [Vilfredo Pareto, *Sociological Writings*, sel. and intro. S. E. Finer, trans. Denck Mirfin (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), p. 135.] But later he is capable of damning governments which are not willing "to meet violence with equal violence" in putting down a group of rebellious citizens, and appears to approve the resort to violence on the part of private citizens when their government is not willing to use force to curb criminals and rioters.

Sorel is much less ambiguous. He writes that "the term violence should be employed only for acts of revolt; we should say, therefore, that the object of force is to impose a certain social order in which the minority governs, while violence tends to the destruction of that order. The middle class have used force since the beginning of modern times, while the proletariat now reacts against the middle class and the State by violence." [*Reflections on Violence*, trans. T. E. Hulme (B. W. Huebsch, 1912), p. 195.] This is clear enough, and generally Sorel, the radical Syndicalist, approves of violence as the appropriate instrument of the proletariat in wresting power from the ruling classes. But one looks in vain through his book for any sharp distinction of the boundaries separating force from violence. It is hardly sufficient to distinguish them in terms of the classes who may employ one or the other.

much-read contemporary Frantz Fanon in his *The Wretched of the Earth* seems to be guilty of systematic confusion on this distinction. Though his book has become in our time a kind of bible for those in our country who make a cult of violence, he is occasionally capable of writing about "peaceful violence"[6] and leaving the careful reader in doubt as to what he really means. Indeed, Barbara Deming, who teaches a doctrine of militant nonviolence, can challenge his readers to make the following experiment. "Every time you find the word 'violence' in his pages, substitute for it the phrase 'radical and uncompromising action.' I contend that with the exception of a very few passages this substitution can be made, and that the action he calls for could just as well be nonviolent action."[7] Though Miss Deming makes an eloquent case for nonviolent action and one with which I frequently agree, she does not convince me that Fanon can

6. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, pref. Jean-Paul Sartre, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1968), p. 81.

7. Barbara Deming, "On Revolution and Equilibrium," *Liberation*, February, 1968, p. 11.

be so interpreted or that he is always clear what he means by the words violence and force.

Force seems to be properly used only in the context of legitimate power and right and as a means to the achievement of communal ends. It may never be exerted beyond the extent necessary to secure these ends, or else it becomes mere violence. At an individual level I may struggle with someone assaulting my wife and daughters and kill him in the attempt to subdue his passion. My act would be justifiable and legitimate. But if I render him helpless and then shoot him in a fit of rage, this is illegitimate violence, even though in a human perspective it would be understandable.

Similarly, a legitimate government may employ all the force necessary to restrain a rioting band of citizens but never "meet violence with equal violence." An illegitimate government may be resisted by its citizens with all forceful means in their power in the name of right and justice, never for the sake of mere destruction or revenge. In short, force is a word deriving from legitimate authority and right; as action it must be based on such authority, either of just laws, or in their absence, on the moral convictions of men in thoughtful association with one another. Violence has no such mandate. As a product of passion, it is the will to triumph through destruction of all opposition.

Externally, of course, force and violence frequently look much alike. A foreigner in any land, if he chanced on a scene of coercion in the streets, might well be unable to distinguish an officer of the law from a thief or a victim of violence from perpetrators of violence—and this quite independently of the fact that officers at times behave violently, contrary to law, and that citizens at times act forcefully, within the law. The distinction I am making is never descriptive in any obvious

sense of the term, though it describes philosophically a state of affairs that every community of men seek to bring about when they abandon the condition of savagery. The claims of right and justice as opposed to physical strength and might depend on memory, imagination, and conscience for their validation. From them have arisen our civil laws and governments, always imperfect and relative embodiments of the persisting search for social and political self-realization under law.

The institutions that spring up as a consequence of this search for a civilized condition are exceedingly varied and sometimes impede human freedom. This occasions the bafflement of an outsider in a strange land; he does not participate in the slow evolution of that society's forms and structures, its "second nature," as Hegel would say. Even for the initiated citizen it is difficult enough on any given occasion to be clear about the legitimate and illegitimate use of authority by his state.

Such bafflement is not meliorated by the anarchist who steadfastly denies the possibility of any distinction between legitimate force and illegitimate violence. For him any government, democratic or otherwise, is an encroachment upon individual autonomy. According to the philosophical anarchist, even the most dedicated advocates of nonviolence as an instrument for effecting reform in existing institutions are simply employing violence in another form.[8] Such attempts to erase the boundaries between justice and might are a feature of every epoch. In a time like ours they confuse the many who are outraged by the insolence of office and governmental arbitrariness. But anarchy has rarely gained much support, even among the nonthoughtful majority.

8. See the article "On Violence" by Robert Paul Wolff, who takes the anarchist position, in *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 66, no. 19 (Oct. 2, 1969).

There are, to be sure, instances in which the boundaries between force and violence are exceedingly cloudy. In desperate situations, such as concentration camps, violence may be legitimate as the sole means through which the doomed victims may rescue a shred of their integrity before death. If there are men dominated by pure malice, an active principle of evil, there may at times be no recourse left to us but resort to discriminate violence, however incalculable its consequences may be. In warfare between nations, too, the distinction between force and violence quickly breaks down, but that is an issue with which I am not concerned here.

One must not, as Aristotle observed, seek to be precise any further than the nature of the subject matter permits. In the sphere of practical wisdom there is no place for absolute judgments and no sense at all in seeking to lay down absolute rules of conduct. But unless we do clarify the relative difference between force and violence and try to apply it in our lives, thinking and action are surely lamed and even frustrated. I at least find clarity in linking violence closely to passion, whereas force is a quality of action.

Passion, however, is a word too general to characterize the particular source of violence in civilian life of our day. To describe some of these manifestations I think we have to speak of rage, even mad rage, employing the word mad in the sense of devoid of sanity. Rage is in every respect a passion, not an emotion. It has little in common with anger, which frequently is a necessary and desirable emotion leading to action. Rage grips us from without, takes us out of ourselves. It is *ekstasis* in the bad, even evil, sense of the word. We reflect too little on the double nature of the ecastic state of mind. On the one hand, it is a source of man's highest productivity in science, art, and religion. On the other, like most of the

finest potentialities, it can be the fount of irredeemable malice. Rage is bent on destruction for the sake of destruction. It echoes always the Mephistophelian cry in the drama *Faust* that "all created things deserve to be destroyed."

As I study the faces of students in my college classes, I am sometimes greatly tempted to warn them that they have not the slightest idea of what they are capable. This rational dialogue we are carrying on together is likely to seem to some of the sheltered ones the dependable face of reality. At moments I, too, can let myself forget that these eager youths, very much centered in the activity of reflection, possess another nature. Yet I need only close my eyes to imagine those faces contorted with hatred, those hands, feminine or masculine, clenched or claw-like, those bodies tensed and ready to spring, in order to realize that all of us conceal, half-knowing, powers that are at the furthest remove from the present setting. More precisely, these powers are not *in* us but fall *upon* us, and render us capable of anything. How does one explain this to those who have never been so seized? The literature we study helps, yet only the most imaginative can get a partially adequate grasp of either the creative or destructive force of *ekstasis* from a college discussion, however intense it may be.

Hitherto our civilization has been shielded against this rage by its relative powerlessness. The violent man without weapons can create a shambles in his immediate vicinity but is easily subdued by police forces. But with the incredibly potent, miniaturized weapons of our contemporary *Homo faber* he can now destroy not only a neighborhood but a whole city. Who of us can repress a shudder when we dare to reflect deeply on the prospects of revolutionary violence in our age of technology?

And this shudder of dread persists when we meet, as

so frequently today, young people who are so utterly alienated from American culture, perhaps even from Western civilization, that they seem to welcome its destruction. These enraged ones are not simply a criminal element, such as are found in every society, but some of the more brilliant and gifted members of our society. When one finds them in a college class, their presence may be at once upsetting and profoundly enlightening.

It is difficult indeed to understand their mood, their temper of mind and disposition of heart. Yet it is urgently necessary to try and not to rest content with generalizations. What first strikes a superficial observer is the unkemptness of these young men and women. At times they remind one of nothing so much as scenes from a pictorial history of the American Civil War! Their external unkemptness is in itself not important, however annoying it may be to the bourgeoisie. But insofar as it may be a symptom of inner unkemptness it is disquieting.

The most disturbing evidence of an inner neglect is the misuse of language on the part of a militant minority of our well-educated youth. Equally deplorable is the fact that this abuse of language is rapidly spreading to many of their educated older opponents as well. Plato held, rightly, I believe, that "to use words wrongly is not only a fault in itself; it also corrupts the soul." This is a statement that requires more reflection than we usually accord it. I do not refer especially to obscene language, employed by them as a mark of their defiance of accepted standards of decorum. I am much more concerned with vituperative epithets and the contempt for careful and precise distinctions of meaning. It is as though, in their suffering and unhappiness, they were using language as a weapon, analogous to pistols and bombs, without concern either for its flexibility or beauty. In their mouths language becomes a succession of slogans in the

original meaning of slogan as a battlecry or warcry. This marks, so I believe, a deterioration of mind and character that is attributable to long-continued indulgence in passion.

There is a virtue in the careful use of our mother tongue that exceeds many other virtues, since it is the use of language that makes us human in the first place. As our common heritage, it is infinitely more worth preserving than nations and specific arts and sciences. If in passion we lose our love and care for our native tongue, we will have lost what can hardly be restored.

We take comfort in the circumstance that these radically alienated militants, young and old, are so few. But there is a much larger group of those unable to act who drift into a passion that is less than rage or fury, which may be called resentment. Perhaps the French word *ressentiment* gets the fuller meaning of this frame of mind or heart, because it retains the notion of sentiment. Resentment is truly a passion, not an emotion, stemming from an inability to act. Resentment can only flail about impotently.

The philosopher Nietzsche understood best this lamentable evil of our species. He emphasized the element of suffering in all resentment and its consequence in the desire for revenge. In *Der Wille zur Macht* he writes, "It is impossible to suffer without wishing to take it out on someone; even every complaint contains revenge."[9] And in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he speaks of the resentful ones as tarantulas and warns against all "in whom the impulse to punish is powerful."[10] Later in the same book, he explains why we should distrust the impulse to punish.

9. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht* (Leipzig: Gesammelte Werke, 1903–1912), Werke XI, p. 253 (my translation).
10. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, sel. and trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), p. 212.

Verily a great folly dwells in our will; and it has become a curse for everything human that this folly has acquired spirit.

The spirit of revenge, my friends, has so far been the subject of man's best reflections; and where there was suffering, one always wanted punishment, too.

For "punishment" is what revenge calls itself; with a hypocritical lie it creates a good conscience for itself.[11]

I fear that resentment is an increasing passion in our time. These quotations from Nietzsche and many others that could be cited help to explain why so many who do not actively engage in destruction take a secret satisfaction in the rage of the small minority. It hardly needs to be added that Nietzsche's insights clarify, too, the unreasoning rage of the opponents of hippies, campus radicals, and dissidents of every kind. Resentment deteriorates character as surely as does rage, if more slowly. It makes us accomplices in destruction and enables us to deny participation in such destruction, even to ourselves. This fact deprives us of any possible purgation, which is conceivably not totally absent even in mad fury. If we do succeed in tearing down the precarious fabric of our civilization, it will assuredly not be alone due to the enraged and furious ones but in still greater degree to the passive spectators of that destruction who are getting revenge for their generalized resentments—resentments which have little to do specifically with the human associations and institutions being torn apart.

There is still another dimension to the present mood of our alienated minority which we should strive to understand as best we can. It is their fierce individualism, an individualism that causes them not only to reject the traditional institutions but to reject also any close cooperation with one another. This facet of their mood contrasts sharply with the extremists of the 1930's, whose faith was in underground organizations and associations of the widest variety. In my reflection and research for this essay I was reminded of a section in Hegel's book *The Phenomenology of Mind* which may be of some help in illuminating their present temper. This section is called "Absolute Freedom and Terror" and is concerned with that stage in the phenomenology of culture, that climate of opinion or *Zeitgeist*, which gave rise to the French Revolution of 1789. Hegel is seeking to understand the spirit of that period between the age of Enlightenment which preceded and the Romantic movement to come. The title of this brief but pregnant section of the *Phenomenology* is significant. "Absolute freedom" is meant by Hegel in the pejorative sense of the individual who abstracts himself from all intermediate institutions as well as the state and society, considering his single will to be identical with universal will. Such an individual consciousness conceives the world of external objects and institutions of culture to have "no other nature than that of self-consciousness itself, or conceives it to be absolutely the concept."[12]

This frame of mind denies the possibility of its being represented by any other individual, just as it regards opposition to itself as unreal. Anyone suspected of being opposed to its abstract universalism is guilty without question. When people of this conviction get into positions of authority, their reign is one of terror. As Hegel expresses it, "This undivided substance of absolute freedom puts itself on the throne of the world, without any power being able to offer effectual resistance."[13] Political

11. *Ibid.*, p. 252.

12. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, rev. ed., trans. J. B. Baillie (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949), p. 601.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 601.

rule is not really possible for a mentality of this sort, since it is unable to conceive of anything objective to the self, its own self. Its activity exhausts itself in the rage and fury of destruction; there are no positive achievements nor real deeds. Hegel writes of the product of this spirit in a kind of fascinated horror as follows:

> The only work and deed accomplished by universal freedom is therefore death—a death which has no inner scope and fulfillment. For what is negated is the unfulfilled atom of the absolutely free self. It is thus the coldest and most senseless death of all, with no more significance than cleaving a head of cabbage or swallowing a draught of water.[14]

We need not believe that the mentality and mood which accompanied and to some extent produced the French Revolution will recur. Hegel did not accept the idea that history repeats itself. Nevertheless, there is a spirit of intense individualism abroad in our land that disbelieves so strongly in the principle of representation as to approach anarchy, and this is at least reminiscent of that earlier *Zeitgeist* Hegel is seeking to delineate.

If this mood continues to deepen in our populace it could result in a mad fury of destruction with meaningless death as an essential consequence of such strife. It is not wise to blind ourselves to this dread possibility. Foolish optimism is at least as inappropriate as pessimism. Both optimism and pessimism are superficial attitudes which tend to hinder efforts to think through our problems and then to act upon them. They look away from concrete problems and bask in complacent judgments about the world in general.

Valuable in Hegel's analysis is the recognition of the intimate interplay between the dominant spirit of a

14. *Ibid.*, p. 605. I have revised the Baillie translation here considerably.

period and actual events of history. Actual happenings help to create this spirit or mood, to be sure, something all of us realize. But we are much more reluctant to believe that the mood or spirit can help to bring about the events. I at least find that the notion of a *Zeitgeist* aids my understanding of our present militancy and violence much more than the explanation of mimesis, or imitation, which one can read in every newspaper columnist. For what we are confronted with in our city ghettos and our crowded campuses, to a lesser extent all over the land, is a spirit of alienation from traditional forms and mores by which we have hitherto guided our American course. Moreover, it is a passionately individualistic spirit with little use for organization or collective action, either legal or extralegal, a demand for an absolute "freedom from," in which the atomic individual conceives his will to be universal. This accounts for the relentless dogmatism and certainty of being right of our radicals, young and old. Their spirit is a moralistic one, an uncompromising rejection of any social ethics. It is an absolute morality for the individual self, paradoxical as that may sound. What is right for me is a sacred duty for me. All compromise is denounced as hypocrisy, for our present young generation the worst sin of all.

Though such a sketchy analysis of some dominant aspects of our present violent mood is bound to be one-sided and incomplete, it can perhaps lead to a more philosophical understanding when the lineaments are reflected upon. In our time there is a great disregard for intermediate structures and institutions like family, local community, and professional and fraternal associations. Hegel understood so well their necessity for the achievement of concrete freedom as the power to act, in contrast to an abstract absolute freedom which can only react with violence.

Many a young radical today thinks only in terms of himself and something called "the establishment." The absence of relation to and interaction with intermediate structures of the social whole is a striking aspect of this mood. The fruitlessness of this alienation—not all alienation is fruitless by any means—lies in the inability of the radical to find any concrete structures deemed worthy of his support and loyalty. Understood philosophically, it is a failure of consciousness to discover anything but self-consciousness or to gain a foothold in the objective world. Driven back upon itself, this kind of self-consciousness is likely to fall into destructive fury against that which it is unable to join, or to think itself into, or to make part of itself. The mood is one of disengagement from concrete realities, a beating of the wings of thought against the void.

III

If I were solely interested in an analysis of the phenomenon of violence, I would stop here and elaborate in more careful detail those things already indicated as the roots of civilian violence in our age. But analysis of the problem of violence, however indispensable, is simply preliminary. It seems that our society will never overcome violence; the issue is one of containing it, in itself a maximally difficult task. And if we are to contain both civilian and military violence we shall have first to understand its sources and then act upon that understanding. In our dark times the appeals of violence are so great that unless we seek to reduce these appeals, there may not be any civilization left to analyze for those of us who prefer analysis. Despite my preference in philosophy for Hegel over his successor Karl Marx, I am sympathetic

with Marx's famous observation to the effect that "a number of philosophers have understood the world; the problem is to change it." Therefore, let me turn now to some possible ways of reducing the appeals of violence that are suggested by the foregoing analysis.

Everyone realizes that formal education today has assumed a role unparalleled in previous eras. At the same time we have never been more dissatisfied with the kind and quality of the education we are getting and giving. Our dissatisfaction lies not so much with the transmission of information and even of knowledge as it does with our apparent inability to get below the surface of sense and intellect in order to form the dispositions of our youth. In old-fashioned language the failure is one in education of character. Or in my terminology, it represents a failure to instill in young people the capacity to act in contrast to behaving, or a capacity to discipline their emotions in contrast to indulging their passions. It is difficult to know how much formal schooling can remedy this failure in a time when powerful social pressures militate against individual action and discipline of the emotions. Yet there is a kind of despairing faith that education holds the keys to salvation from our troubles.

For this faith to become less desperate, we must seek to narrow the cleavage between formal schooling and informal education, or between learning in the schools and experience in the wider society. Our school systems will have to bridge this cleavage by conceiving education in a more inclusive and activist, in less bookish and abstract fashion, than we have hitherto done. I have argued elsewhere[15] that we must learn to consider service to our emerging world society as an integral part of formal education. This would compel us to give academic credit for

15. In the final chapter of my book *The Promise of Wisdom* (New York: Lippincott and Co., 1968).

work in the Peace Corps and the various domestic corps as well as requiring a year or more of public service for all our youth, emphatically including women. Properly supervised by educators, this field work can and should be as educational as any comparable time spent in the classroom. Since the need for armies is unfortunately not likely to disappear in our chaotic times, it is incumbent on us to transform the military into more of an educational institution, at the same time making it one option among many for the continuation of activist schooling for the rising generations. If we are to become truly serious about "the educating society," these and similar measures must be taken to integrate schooling into the wider context of contemporary experience.

Basic to all this is the ancient but ever neglected idea of Aristotle that you make a child brave, generous, kind, temperate, and just by providing repeated opportunities for performing brave, generous, kind, temperate, and just deeds and not by giving him lectures on ethics. The basic theme of Aristotle's ethics is the great idea of habit—*hexeis*—or habituation to conduct that is under the rule of the mean. The mean is not some middle path but rather an attunement of the self to its own limits and possibilities in which both excess and defect are avoided. Aristotle taught that every man in his first nature is incontinent—that is, given over to appetites that are unrestrained and self-indulgent. Incontinence is mad passion of whatever sort that misses the mean of man in the community of his fellows. Education is the acquiring of a second nature which brings one into attunement with oneself, with society, and with the world of nature. This education is largely a matter of habituation through early and constant practice in the mean of conduct appropriate to one's individual potentialities and society's proper functioning.

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Familiar as this ethical principle of habit is to everyone, it has rarely been heeded or put into practice in the formation of character. Indeed we commonly think of habits nowadays in a psychological sense alone and even give them the derogatory connotation of thoughtless mechanical modes of behavior—behaving as distinguished from acting. I am convinced that if we took this ethical principle seriously, it would make our schools as well as our homes many times more relevant to concrete social life. For this sort of habituating is one thing that can insure us against incontinence and passion—the evil kinds of *ekstasis*—which now threaten the foundations of society.

Intimately related to this Aristotelian principle are the writings of Martin Heidegger that relate to dwelling properly on earth. Because Heidegger's thinking is primarily ontological in intent rather than ethical, no one seems to have noticed the connection.

In its widest philosophic significance, however, the notion of habit is one of learning to inhabit this earth of ours properly. Heidegger's ideas are applicable in our technological era to the problem of living or dwelling in a human fashion. He shows in two or three of his essays, not yet published in English translation,[16] the intimate connection among the activities of building, dwelling, and thinking. According to Heidegger, you can dwell only when you get close to things, whether they be natural or of human fabrication. By getting close to, he means living with them, being attentive to the kind of being they are, learning their nature from within as it were, instead

16. I refer to the essays "Bauen Wohnen Denken," ". . . dichterisch wohnet der Mensch," and "Das Ding," in the book *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Neske Verlag, 1954). They are soon to appear in the Harper & Row series, in the translation by Albert Hofstadter.

of the more typical technological mentality of appropriating and exploiting them as they can be used for us. We must learn to let things be, says Heidegger, which of course does not mean to ignore them but precisely the opposite, to come close to them in their own nature. Only then can we properly build—"build" understood in its widest connotations: not only houses and workshops, factories and schools, but also poems, scientific theories, and political institutions. Thinking, too, can then be transformed from our traditional conception of logical and calculative reckoning into something more poetic, more concrete, and closer to the realities of daily life. So intimately interwoven with the activities of dwelling and building can thinking become as to be nearly indistinguishable from them.

Though Heidegger would probably repudiate any explicit relevance of his thinking to Aristotle's ethical principle, I find an important connection between habit and inhabiting that goes far beyond the etymological tie. We can learn to live properly—that is, to inhabit the earth—if we develop habits of being close to things and to each other. If we can acquire the habits of dwelling rightly in this global era, even in foreign lands among foreign people, by feeling close to them and attentive to the things they are silent about as well as what they say, we may learn to contain the violence in our natures. The art of dwelling rightly is the art of attunement, as Aristotle clearly saw.

It is now recognized that technology has torn man loose from his roots in his natural context and thus robbed him, temporarily at least, of a source of stability and endurance. To some of us it seems apparent that the estrangement from the things of nature underlies the social and political alienation gripping a portion of our youth. As one observes hippies living in the open air

and in the wilds, paying no attention to the proprieties of our culture, it is possible to wonder if they are not learning a new kind of dwelling and building and thinking that is not so remote as it seems from the related principles of habit and habituation. At all events, many seem to be happy and gentle, not violent, and in this sense remote from the angry Students for a Democratic Society, with whom they are frequently confused. The urgent need to gain new relationships in depth to those elements in our environment which perdure is surely close to the core of all efforts to cope with the uncanny phenomenon of violence.

This leads to the final and most inclusive possibility of containing violence. Ten years ago in writing the last chapter of my book *The Warriors* I came upon a thought which I have learned to accept still more than when I first discovered it. "A happy people is a peaceful people." Since I am concerned here with civilian violence, not international conflict, I would put it otherwise now. A happy person will never—or almost never—give way to the destructive passions of rage and resentment. On the other hand, the unhappiness that arises from the frustration of action and consequently thwarted self-realization and deprivation of freedom is nearly bound to be violent. What I then failed to see clearly enough is the extent to which happiness, more concretely understood, can be itself a source of action. I want to develop this point in conclusion.

It is usual for us to think of happiness as a state of mind that results from other causes, such as success, a fortunate marriage, a healthy body, or the esteem of our fellows. At the very least, we are accustomed to think of it as an accompaniment to such fortunate circumstances. It was Aristotle, however, who insisted that happiness is not a state but itself an activity, an insight we likewise

tend to disregard in modern times. But perhaps we can go further than Aristotle to suggest that the kind of happiness Spinoza and Nietzsche called joy can also be a source or fount of the harmonious or concordant disposition.

In the third book of his *Ethics* Spinoza goes to great length to establish the idea that the one way to overcome the negative passions of hatred, vengeance, envy, despair, and the like is to replace them with the positive emotions of love, generosity, gladness, and other emotions which arise within us, unlike the passions from outside ourselves. Spinoza considers joy to be "man's passage from a less to a greater perfection," whereas "sorrow is man's passage from a greater to a less perfection."[17] And he was certain that desire, which is man's most basic nature, more specifically the desire to persevere in our own being, directs us toward action and perfection in contrast to passion and dissolution. Joy is for him, in short, a wellspring of action and activity, once we conceive rightly our true situation in the world amidst man and nature. "When the mind contemplates itself and its own power of acting it rejoices, and it rejoices in proportion to the distinctness with which it imagines itself and its power of action."[18] Rejoicing is hence a source of power, aiding understanding of our essential situation and enabling us to persevere in it. Whatever else can be said of Spinoza's vision of living joyfully—and one can object to it as beyond the reach of most people—it was a counsel he practiced himself throughout his life. There breathes in his writings a spirit of serenity and gladness which is in part responsible for their enduring appeal.

Though very different in spirit from Spinoza, Nietzsche

17. Benedict Spinoza, *Spinoza Selections*, ed. John Wild (New York: Scribner's, 1930), *Ethics*, Third Part, p. 267.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 256.

likewise taught the centrality of joy as a pathway to overcoming the ultimate impotence of *ressentiment*. All his life Nietzsche combated the spirit of gravity and "the ugly dwarf," melancholy, and though in his youth he was under the influence of the pessimist Schopenhauer, he worked his way to a life-affirming and joyful wisdom. "Life is a well of joy," he declares in the second part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and at the end of the book there occurs his celebrated poem, which closes as follows:

> The world is deep,
> Deeper than day had been aware.
> Deep is its woe;
> Joy—deeper yet than agony:
> Woe implores: Go!
> But all joy wants eternity—
> Wants deep, wants deep eternity.[19]

One looks in vain throughout Nietzsche's writings for a sustained argument to the effect that joy is a wellspring of action whereas woe can merely suffer the passions of rage and resentment. Yet it is clear that he, like Spinoza, is profoundly convinced of this fact. Joy is for him "the plus-feeling of power," "a symptom of the feeling of attained power." "In the essence of joy lies the will to More."[20] This more-principle, as he names it, is the very substance of his ill-understood will to power. The deep eternity that joy desires is not to be comprehended as a temporal everlastingness, but rather as an enhancement of the Now, the moment that contains eternity within it. In order to grasp how Nietzsche seeks to unite the Now and the eternal, one would have to explicate his

19. *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 436.
20. *Der Wille zur Macht*, fragments 699, 688, 695 (my translation).

doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same, which does not belong here. Sufficient to our purpose is the insight he attained into the generative power of joy in human lives, a power that enabled him to affirm the suffering that wracked his body and mind and even to triumph over it for a period. And this is hardly a private experience of Nietzsche. Most of us have caught glimpses at least of the more-principle, even though we hesitate in our timidity to ascribe to it other than a psychological validity.

Spinoza and Nietzsche were bolder. They did not shrink from claiming for joy an ontological status as an independent force in human life. Each, however, in his own fashion. For Spinoza joy is the impetus necessary for us to perfect our understanding in its striving to see our small lives under the aspect of eternity. For Nietzsche, on the other hand, joy is the impetus of the will in its endeavor to incorporate the overflowing abundance of life's possibilities at every moment. But both discover in that species of happiness we call joy the origin of man's drive to transcend the merely temporal and to transform the normal enmities and weaknesses of our human estate into their opposites.

IV

In our present mood in America, there may seem little prospect for lessening the appeal of violence through these "remedies" I have briefly outlined. The ideas of reducing the gap between schooling and education, of habituating or attuning our young to "living into" the social and natural environment, and of instilling the conception of joy as an origin of action—taken together, these ideas amount to a near reversal of our usual perspectives on

the world. I am quite aware of this, and also of the fact that profounder reflection on my part would bring forth other "solutions" equally difficult to put into practice. I agree with Nietzsche that man's nature is as yet undetermined and that there is much still uncanny about human existence. Our present modes of life, so different from those of previous generations, will doubtless bring to light facets of human nature none of us has learned to anticipate.

Nevertheless, the only quality that is needed in order to counter present and future discouragement is courage. Courage is a laughing virtue, not simply a grim and tenacious enduring. The courageous are not given to self-pity, which is a widespread disease of our time. That courage which is other than physical bravery welcomes reflection on every aspect of existence, the dreadful no less than the wonderful. And contrary to popular notions, reflection can inspire cheerfulness rather than gloom.

The single faith that seems indispensable to a student of philosophy like myself is faith in the power of reflection. We need not expect that our reflections on violence, or any other subject, will greatly alter the course of human life. Yet it is required of us, I believe, to draw any and all phenomena of daily life through the lens of reflection. If we see very dimly, others may help to improve our vision.

Philosophical reflections on violence, as I have remarked, are not very numerous in our Western literature. It is, therefore, time, high time, that we reflect on this problem in our present context in order to seek means of mitigating it. If the social and natural scientists can be practically more effective than we in the short range, philosophers are more likely than they to uncover the roots of violence by renewed reflection on what it means to be a human being.

and gradually as an assistant and instructor in the complex tradition of German idealism. With the publication of *Sein und Zeit*, this inexperienced country boy suddenly became a famous professor. Both the professoriate and his philosophic tradition tended to complicate and "deform" the simple man. There is a professional deformation—I am not using the term in a moral sense—about academic life everywhere, though we who are in it are rarely aware of it sufficiently. It is perhaps particularly insidious and powerful in old Europe. The German philosophic tradition, despite its great merits, is too often devoted to abstractions and is obscure in expression. German professors lead lives that are sheltered and remote from the practical realities of daily existence. These deformations of institution and tradition worked their will on Heidegger. The early fame and later disgrace of his brief Nazi involvement contributed their part. His attempts to break out of these forms and deformations, to get into the open, as he likes to put it, seem to be attempts to recapture the early simplicities of his youth.

There is in Heidegger a lasting tension between the learned philosopher and the original thinker. This contrast is stated well in his poem: "Few of us are experienced enough in the difference between an object of scholarship and a matter of thought." Though his major writings are concerned with learned subjects, his deepest interest lies with that which is peculiar to his own thinking, going beyond the tradition, undeformed by it. His passion is for flashes of insight, which he seeks to distill in single words, phrases, and striking metaphors. As a thinker he wants to be simple in the manner of Socrates, whom he once called "the purest thinker of the West."[4]

4. Martin Heidegger, *Was heisst Denken?* in *What Is Called Thinking?*, trans. Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 17.

According to Heidegger, Socrates was purest because he constantly exposed himself to the full winds of reality and refused to run for cover by writing down his thoughts. Unlike Socrates in most respects, as we all know, Heidegger nevertheless cherishes the piety of that Socrates who dared to raise questions about things everyone else held as self-evident. More important still, he cherishes that Socrates who knew that human wisdom counts for little in the face of what we do not know, a knowledge Socrates bore with cheerfulness. Mystery is one of the basic words in the recent Heidegger. It is not for him a religious word, pointing toward some supersensible reality, but a philosophical one conveying the inexhaustibility of everyday things, which in our brief lives we can hardly make a start at fathoming.

II

Heidegger identifies the simple with the original and consequently insists on the difference between the beginning, understood historically, and the origin, understood ontologically. An original insight into what really is, he asserts, often becomes obscured even by the time it commences its historical career. If we are to rediscover it and advance its implications, we must get behind this historical beginning, as it were. The simple in thinking is thus identified with that which is basic or fundamental in reality. To get at these fundamental structures and interrelationships requires a stripping away of the concealments of historical development. Heidegger believes that if we can reach the roots of a matter or, to employ his idiom, the sun and soil that nourish these roots, we shall discover that the true natures of things reveal themselves.

"The oldest of the old follows behind us in our think-

Heidegger's regionalism is at once his strength and his weakness. He illustrates what a powerful and imaginative mind can draw of philosophic sustenance from attachment to home and the familiar things of use and beauty. But today we are living in a cosmopolitan world and are becoming nomads once more, exposing ourselves willy-nilly to the uncanny and unhomelike. It will not do for philosophy to lament this new situation, unwelcome as many of its features certainly are. Rather, a philosophy which cherishes practical wisdom must begin with these hard realities and by living close to them strive to make them more comprehensible to a baffled younger generation, drifting rapidly into an unfruitful self-alienation. Such nomadic thinking will not have the appeal that inheres in regional thought, but it will gain in realism and hardness and possibly interpret better man's true situation in all its comic and tragic dimensions.

It would be, however, a fatal mistake to assume that a new way of thinking (which I have called nomadic and will develop elsewhere) can dispense with the legacy of home and specifically the legacy of a Heidegger. He himself is constantly enjoining us to think for ourselves, not to walk along his own paths or write dissertations about his works. In *What Is Called Thinking*? he cites Nietzsche's letter to George Brandes: "After you had discovered me, it was no trick to find me: the difficulty now is to lose me." And Heidegger remarks that after we have succeeded in finding Nietzsche's thought, we may well try to lose it again. "And this, to lose, is harder than to find; because 'to lose' in such a case does not just mean to drop something, leave it behind, abandon it. 'To lose' here means to make ourselves truly free of that which Nietzsche's thinking has thought."[11]

11. *What Is Called Thinking?*, p. 52.

Such a procedure holds equally well for Heidegger. We have, of course, hardly yet discovered him, much less understood him. But once this is accomplished, we should have the courage and independence of thought to clear our own paths. Only on such a course will full recognition be paid to the long and often lonely labors of an original thinker named Martin Heidegger.

thought. The pre-Socratics thought about the things of nature and man from the standpoint of the mighty spectacle itself, not the other way around. As he puts it in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*:

> The Greeks did not learn what *physis* is through natural phenomena, but the other way around: it was through a fundamental poetic and intellectual experience of Being that they discovered what they had to call *physis*. It was this discovery that enabled them to gain a glimpse into nature in the restricted sense. Hence *physis* originally encompassed heaven as well as earth, the stone as well as the plant, the animal as well as man, and it encompassed human history as a work of men and the gods; and ultimately and first of all, it meant the gods themselves as subordinated to destiny. *Physis* means the power that emerges and the enduring realm under its sway. This power of emerging and enduring includes "becoming" as well as "being" in the restricted sense of inert duration. *Physis* is the process of arising, of emerging from the hidden, whereby the hidden is first made to stand.[10]

The above paragraph puts more clearly than any other I have been able to find the significance of the pre-Socratics for Heidegger. It also hints at the notion of what genuine thinking is, which he develops in later works. He does not want us to return to the pre-Socratics for the sake of their discoveries but to recover their stance as thinkers. This stance was one of simplicity, astonishment, and openness to the world as world. Only by returning to this stance will we be in a position to make a leap into the kind of thinking that will reveal our world to us as theirs was revealed to them. A thinker's task is to reveal Being, according to him, and relate it to, and distinguish it from, single existents and their sum.

This task can be accomplished only by means of a

10. Manheim, p. 12.

poetic and intellectual experience, similar to that given to the pre-Socratics. In such later works as *Was heisst Denken?*, *Holzwege*, and *Vorträge und Aufsätze* Heidegger has come to grasp this kind of experience in terms of man's learning to dwell rightly on earth. Dwelling and a capacity for dwelling rightly have come to have for him the ontological sense and weight that being-in-the-world held for him in the earlier *Sein und Zeit* period.[11] If the fundamental characteristic of dwelling is care-taking, as he emphasizes in a key essay of the last-named volume, the activities that constitute care-taking are thinking and building. Let me first characterize briefly what he conceives to be the essence of thinking before I turn to his discussion of poets and poetry.

Thinking is called or bidden into existence by what there is to think about, and this, in the broadest sense, is Being itself. Being, however, is not something that lies behind appearances, but *is* their face or countenance. The truth of things shines in their appearance; it is the elusive substance of appearance. We must look for the truth of Being in the intricate structures and manifold phenomena of this motley world, of which man is so inextricably a part. In the phenomena of our cultural past the thinker must discover the unthought elements in every previous system if he is not to miss the essential and authentic. In the phenomena of nature he must seek to penetrate the disguises of appearance and come upon the necessary relations and abiding powers. Truth is an uncovering or revelation of what is, but there is always still another veil or cover concealing the essential. As Hei-

11. Compare Vincent Vycinas, *Earth and Gods: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* (The Hague: 1961). I am indebted to Vycinas for this point and at several other places in this essay. His scholarly study of the later Heidegger deserves to be known better than it is at present.