

Questions de recherche, 5 octobre 2017:

« **Aber ist das eine Antwort?** » (Heine) : **On Questioning in, by, and about Literature**

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Heinrich Heine: *Gedichte 1853 und 1854*:

Traduction (Saint-René Taillandier): H. Heine: *Le Livre de Lazare* (1854):

VIII.

VIII

Zum Lazarus.

RÉMINISCENCES.

I.

I

Laß die heiligen Parabolen,
Laß die frommen Hypothesen -
Suche die verdammten Fragen
Ohne Umschweif uns zu lösen.

Laisse là les paraboles sacrées, laisse là les pieuses hypothèses; essaie de nous résoudre sans ambages ces infernales questions:

«Pourquoi le juste se traîne-t-il sanglant, misérable, sous le fardeau de la croix, tandis que le méchant, heureux comme un triomphateur, se pavane sur son fier coursier?»

Warum schleppt sich blutend, elend,
Unter Kreuzlast der Gerechte,
Während glücklich als ein Sieger
Trabt auf hohem Roß der Schlechte?

A qui en imputer la faute? Notre-Seigneur n'est-il pas tout-puissant, ou bien est-ce lui-même qui est l'auteur de ce désordre? Ah! vraiment ce serait lâche.»

Woran liegt die Schuld? Ist etwa
Unser Herr nicht ganz allmächtig?
Oder treibt er selbst den Unfug?
Ach, das wäre niederrächtig.

Telles sont les questions que nous répétons sans cesse, jusqu'à ce qu'on nous ferme la bouche avec une poignée de terre; - mais est-ce là une réponse?

Also fragen wir beständig,
Bis man uns mit einer Handvoll
Erde endlich stopft die Mäuler -
Aber ist das eine Antwort?

Heinrich Heine: Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke, hg. v. Manfred Windfuhr, Band 3/1, S. 198 (dt.), S. 294 (franz.)

SPECULUM MENTIS

or

The Map of Knowledge

by

R. G. COLLINGWOOD



βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι' ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι

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air to breathe. But if this freedom is not asserted at all, we get the mere absence of art and the substitution of photography; and that is the danger that threatens the 'realistic' artists who aim at transplanting historical fact bodily into their pictures and plays.

§ 5. *Knowledge as Question and Answer*

Now we have already insisted that the aesthetic experience is imaginative not in the sense that all its objects are fictitious, but in the sense that it treats them indifferently, whether they are fictitious or real; its attitude, whether towards a real object or a fictitious, is the attitude which neither asserts reality, truly or falsely, nor denies it, but merely imagines. This attitude which makes no assertions, and whose object is therefore as such neither real nor unreal, has been much studied by recent philosophers, under the name of hypothesis, intuition, supposal, representation, and so forth. The credit of recognizing the identity of this attitude with art belongs primarily to Croce. But all these philosophers fall into the error of isolating this attitude and regarding it as a self-contained phase of experience, from which the other phases—notably the attitude of assertion and denial—must be reached by some kind of transition. And this transition is never successfully described. It is in fact an impossible transition. Once the mind has succeeded in attaining a condition in which it neither asserts nor denies but only represents objects to itself intuitively or imaginatively, there is no reason why it should ever pass out of this condition. The ability to assert or deny is an ability which it could never acquire. Hence it is customary to fall back on some meaningless formula to bridge over the unbridgeable gulf between supposal and assertion: to argue that this is effected by the law of the unity of the

spirit—a law which has just been openly defied and rendered impotent ; or by the practical necessities of life—necessities which the mind, as described by these philosophers, would simply fail to face ; or by the intervention of the concept—which is merely postulating that the problem has been solved when it has not, for the question is, how can the concept intervene ?

The fact is that imagination never thus exists *in vacuo*, and therefore the problem of how it is to escape from its vacuum is an unreal problem, and insoluble because it is unreal. Supposal and assertion are not two independent chapters in the history of the mind ; they are two opposite and correlative activities which form as it were the systole and diastole of knowledge itself. A crude empiricism imagines that knowledge is composed wholly of assertion : that to know and to assert are identical. But it is only when the knower looks back over his shoulder at the road he has travelled, that he identifies knowledge with assertion. Knowledge as a past fact, as something dead and done with—knowledge by the time it gets into encyclopaedias and text-books—does consist of assertion, and those who treat it as an affair of encyclopaedias and text-books may be forgiven for thinking that it is assertion and nothing else. But those who look upon it as an affair of discovery and exploration have never fallen into that error. People who are acquainted with knowledge at first hand have always known that assertions are only answers to questions. So Plato described true knowledge as ' dialectic ', the interplay of question and answer in the soul's dialogue with itself ; so Bacon pointed out once for all that the scientist's real work was to interrogate nature, to put her, if need be, to the torture as a reluctant witness ; so Kant mildly remarked that the test of an intelligent man was to know what

questions to ask ; and the same truth has lately dawned on the astonished gaze of the pragmatists.

Questioning is the cutting edge of knowledge ; assertion is the dead weight behind the edge that gives it driving force. Questions undirected by positive information, random questions, cut nothing ; they fall in the void and yield no knowledge. Information, when it is not ground to a keen edge of inquiry, is not knowledge but mere pedantry, the talent buried in the earth. It ought to be put out at interest, to yield new knowledge and so to purify and correct itself as well as to increase its bulk. Text-books and encyclopaedias are contemptible only when regarded as constituting and exhausting knowledge itself ; as records of the achievement of knowledge, as constituting the body of information which directs our further questionings, their importance is immeasurable. Information may be the body of knowledge, but questioning is its soul.

Supposal and questioning are at bottom the same thing ; or rather, supposal when seen in its proper perspective as an integral element in knowledge turns out to be questioning. The activity of questioning is a puzzle to empiricist theories of knowledge because in it we seem to contemplate an object which does not necessarily exist, and empiricism believes that it is only because an object really exists that it has, so to speak, the force to imprint itself upon our mind or engage our attention. But we never ask a question without to some degree contemplating the non-existent ; for asking a question means envisaging alternatives, and only one at most of these alternatives can really exist. Thus questioning is essentially a suspension of the activity of asserting, and that is how we have defined the aesthetic experience or imagination. But true questioning is a suspension which looks forward to a renewal of this asserting

activity, in the shape of the answer. In art, on the other hand, the suspending of assertion seems to be an end in itself, and does not look forward to its own negation, the renewal of assertion. Art, as pure imagination, imagination without assertion, may be paradoxically defined as a question which expects no answer: that is, a supposal.

But a question looks back as well as forward. To ask any question, even the silliest or most irresponsible, we must already possess information. A mind which did nothing but question could not even frame its questions; the questions which it asked would be mere marks of interrogation, the empty form of questioning, questions which asked nothing. And they would not be even that, for even the empty form of questioning implies the knowledge that there is information to be had. Similarly, in terms of inductive logic, you must know your facts before you can frame your hypothesis; and this means not only that without knowing the facts you cannot frame a relevant or illuminating hypothesis, but that you cannot frame any hypothesis whatever. Any act must start somewhere, and a pure act of imagination, just because it was completely divorced from fact, would have nowhere to start from and would therefore have no reason for determining itself in any one way rather than in any other. So, even if art is pure imagination, it must spring from a soil of concrete fact; the artist must really exist in a real world, and his works of art are necessarily a kind of sublimated version of his experience as a real person, however unconscious of this fact he may be. The work of art is an imaginative cutting edge to a mind whose solid backing of factual experience may be forgotten for the moment, but is none the less very real; or rather, it is not forgotten but distilled into the work of art, present to the mind in this form and no other.

Thus the imaginative activity of art is itself supported and surrounded by a medium of fact ; but the essence of the purely aesthetic frame of mind is that this medium or background is overlooked. The artist necessarily overlooks it, but that does not excuse the philosopher from doing so ; and his attempt to build up a philosophy from a basis of pure imagination is doomed to failure because the basis itself is unsound. Imagination does not exist in the free state, and itself requires a basis of fact. This basis of fact in turn requires a basis of imagination, for no fact can be known until it has been sought by the imaginative act of questioning, and this question itself requires a further basis of fact, and so *ad infinitum*. This is not an infinite regress only because the two moments, question and answer, are not actually separate. Their distinction is an ideal distinction only, and the presupposition of each by the other is only a way of stating their inseparability. The process of knowledge is therefore, strictly speaking, not so much an alternation of question and answer as a perpetual restatement of the question, which is identical with a perpetual revision of the answer. If it is objected that this reduces all the diversity of knowledge to a bare identity in which there is only one judgement judging one truth, our answer—to be given in full later on—will be that this identity contains all diversity within itself.

§ 6. *Art as a form of Error*

Since pure imagination nowhere exists, since all imagination builds on fact and, as question, returns to fact, there is no such thing as an autonomous and self-contained life of art, art for art's sake, aesthetic experience in which every trace of fact is absent. Empirically we all know that art for art's sake is an illusion, that the self-contained life of