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1977

## Conversations on Dialogue

Reino Virtanen

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Reino Virtanen

Conversations  
on Dialogue

new series no. 54

*University of Nebraska Studies*

1977

# Conversations on Dialogue



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Reino Virtanen

# Conversations on Dialogue

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To Sylvia, Alice, and Vivian

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# 1. A Dialogue on Dialogue

After luncheon in Tedesco's dining room

TEDESCO: Have you noticed how nowadays the word *dialogue* is on everyone's lips, and yet no dialogues to speak of are being written?

LANGLEY: Ah, that's because modern writers have less need of this form than Plato had. They have various means at their disposal to convey their thoughts or to set forth their discoveries. The treatise, the essay, even the novel, have all been developed since Plato composed his dialogues. And can you imagine Plato, who excluded poets from his Republic, giving admittance to novelists there?

FRANCIS: But the *Protagoras* and the *Symposium* could almost be called *contes philosophiques* like Voltaire's *Candide* or *Micromégas*, if not novels in dialogue form like Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste*. And must we not agree with Diderot that the *Apology*, the *Crito*, and the *Phaedo* are acts in a moving drama?

TEDESCO: Couldn't we say that the heritage of the dialogue form has been divided up among several descendants, and that only a meager share still remains for the dialogue strictly so-called? It has been reduced to the status of a poor relation. That learned historian of the genre, Rudolf Hirzel, deplored its fall from the lofty rank it once occupied, ruling like a king of literature, to the lowly position of a beggar that scarcely deserves a second glance! Hirzel's voluminous, if not thorough, survey has not been supplanted by any work of scholarship down to our own day. And it is noteworthy that out of nearly a thousand pages, he devoted only a few to modern writers, whether Bruno, Galileo, or Leibniz.

FRANCIS: Doesn't Hirzel ever reach Joseph de Maistre or Ernest Renan? I realize that he wrote too early to discuss Paul Valéry.

TEDESCO: He was aware of Renan, of course, but his plan did not include more recent times.



LANGLEY: There was a survey of the dialogue in English literature published by Elizabeth Merrill before the First World War that added a good deal to what Hirzel had done. It was pretty comprehensive down to that time, but she omitted American literature. Of course I can recall only Oliver Wendell Holmes's Breakfast Table series in that area. Those are mostly monologues, however, with the Autocrat or the Professor in complete control.

FRANCIS: We ought not forget that Edgar Allan Poe composed several dialogues, such as *Monos and Una*.

LANGLEY: You would remember that! Wasn't Poe more important for French literature than for English, I won't dare say for American? I know that Valéry, whom you just mentioned, took him quite seriously.

FRANCIS: I think Valéry was more struck by Poe's short dialogue entitled *The Power of Words*. It was Charles Maurras, prior to founding his Action Française movement, who admired the anti-democratic sentiments expressed in *Monos and Una*. Besides the two mentioned, Poe wrote another, *The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion*. They are all dialogues of the dead, or rather, dialogues of the recently deceased. Thus they don't fall into the category invented by Lucian, for their speakers are neither historical or legendary. Moreover, these dialogues are not satirical.

TEDESCO: Most of Lucian's are indeed satirical, but some have a philosophical bearing. Therefore we cannot exclude them.

FRANCIS: Certainly not, for then we should have to exclude Fontenelle's *Dialogues des morts*, not to mention Valéry's *Eupalinos*.

LANGLEY: Evidently we are going to talk mostly about philosophical dialogues. But before that, shouldn't we try to define the types that exist? We can then concentrate on the types that most interest us and avoid drifting from one to another. *An Imaginary Conversation* by Landor draws a line between conversation and dialogue: "In Conversation, as in the country, variety is pleasant and expected. . . . In Conversation we ought not to be didactic, in Dialogue we may be: Galileo has done it. There are other authorities but none so great." Elizabeth Merrill's book distinguished the philosophical, the satirical, the polemical, and the expository. Sir Herbert Read found three types: the dialogue of ideas, the dialogue of wit, and the dialogue whose purpose is to exhibit character and personality. These three have Plato, Lucian, and Landor, respectively, as their exemplars.

FRANCIS: That division would serve for content. Your quotation from Landor reminds me of similar stylistic distinctions. Such a

classification was suggested by Joseph de Maistre in *Les Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg*. Actually it is the speaker designated as “le Chevalier” who proposes the classification. There are, first, conversations, formless and random by their very nature, unadapted for publication. More formal but still issuing from real-life discussions are the *entretiens*, exemplified by the *Soirées*, which “le Chevalier” proposes to publish, despite the raillery of his friends. The *entretien*, for dramatic reasons, must not have more than three speakers, just the number in the *Soirées*. The third type is the dialogue which is purely artificial, a literary composition like any other, which issues fully formed, like *Minerva*, from the brain of the author. This type includes the *dialogues des morts*.

TEDESCO: That is all very interesting, but won't be useful for us. *Entretien* is too hard to translate.

LANGLEY: I agree. Since Merrill's survey, there has been renewed interest in English dialogues of the dead. Frederick Keener's recent book contains a critical history and an anthology. Incidentally, the historian Peter Gay has written a book-length dialogue featuring Lucian, Erasmus, and Voltaire entitled *The Bridge of Criticism*. An older and more famous twentieth-century example is George Santayana's *Dialogues in Limbo*.

TEDESCO: Nevertheless dialogues of the dead are probably still more dead today than philosophical dialogues in general. This special type depends on conventional belief in an afterlife. In Lucian's time one could still picture philosophers and heroes meeting for chats in the Elysian Fields. After Fontenelle, the Shades would become the shadows of shadows.

LANGLEY: That is Keener's point: “The dead were not so remote then [1760] as they later became.”

FRANCIS: The form itself may be outmoded, but certain elements of the genre survive under other names. For example, there is a well-known work of Jean-Paul Sartre which might belong with dialogues of the dead. That is *Huis-clos*. At various points in the play one is reminded of Lucian; I mean the conversations of Menippus with Tantalus or Chiron, of Hercules with Diogenes. And if we compare *Huis-clos* with its analogue, Ferencz Molnar's *Liliom*, this feature becomes even more conspicuous; Molnar's play is more dramatic and less philosophical than Sartre's play. The mawkishness of *Liliom* is carried further in the musical *Carousel*, which was derived from it. It is amusing to make these comparisons with the irony and the austerity of Sartre's *Huis-clos*. Its characters are not allowed to return to earth. That is part of

the philosophical message. Yet Sartre used precisely this element of a return to life in his filmscript *Les Jeux sont faits*, which is therefore closer to the *Liliom* that he and Simone de Beauvoir perhaps saw performed, as they certainly did in the case of a similar play that was less well-known, Sutton Vane's *Outward Bound*.

LANGLEY: Now you remind me of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, and also Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology*, which is not a play, of course. These are directions that can be taken by bastard forms of the genre. Thus the dialogue of the dead is reincarnated in other shapes.

TEDESCO: One direction had already been taken by Orpheus. The pathos of the theme is much more effective in the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. But that is not a dialogue of the dead.

FRANCIS: There is a danger of contamination that the dialogue of the dead is subject to, and that is perhaps another reason for the rarity of the type nowadays. In *Huis-clos* the characters cannot forget their personal lives. Garcin, for example, is interested in what is happening among the living only if their memory of him is involved. Pierre and Eve in *Les Jeux sont faits* are interested in the fate of their friends and intimates, but their intervention does not alter this fate. Yet how can they remain interested if they can accomplish nothing in the world of their survivors? That is a reflection one cannot avoid making while reading such a lengthy dialogue as Maurice Joly's *Dialogue aux enfers entre Machiavel et Montesquieu*. How can these speakers be so engrossed in current politics when they can do nothing to affect the situation? In the much shorter dialogues of Lucian and Fontenelle it is not a problem. But in reading Joly we tend to forget that the speakers are dead, and that is what saves the dialogue for us.

TEDESCO: Isn't the dialogue saved rather by the fact that the ideas associated with those names are alive? These ideas involve vital political issues. The names provide handy labels for the ideas.

LANGLEY: If contamination is a danger, it's because you wish to set up a pure type of dialogue somehow distinct from drama and narrative. I don't think we have to be worried about contamination if the dialogue has merits which please us, as in the case of certain *Imaginary Conversations* of Landor.

FRANCIS: Valéry's *Eupalinos* is free from the sort of contamination that I object to. In this work, Socrates illustrates the pathos of lost opportunities, choosing the path of thought rather than action in

his earthly life, but this choice was itself a philosophical, not a tactical one.

TEDESCO: That doesn't sound like the Socrates I know, whose thought was certainly a form of action.

LANGLEY: One of the possible defects in dialogues of the dead is such distortion of the figures known to us from history. That may be a fault of Landor's *Diogenes and Plato*: Plato is caricatured and Diogenes beautified. Matthew Prior's *Locke and Montaigne* is much fairer to Montaigne than to Locke, while Richard Hurd's *Uses of Foreign Travel* makes both Locke and Shaftesbury seem trivial. Locke in his bluff xenophobia sounds like Colonel Blimp.

FRANCIS: That is the challenge that the *dialogue des morts* offers to the writer. The great thinkers and heroes so often seem diminished to us, if we know enough about them beforehand. A horrible example is *Montaigne, Bayle and Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, by the eighteenth-century writer La Dixmerie. He makes Montaigne into a pettifogging critic of Rousseau, resentful of not being properly honored by his alleged plagiarist. And the author has Bayle, of all people, reproach Rousseau for exhausting his reader and his subject. Bayle quotes: "Le secret d'ennuyer, est celui de tout dire." He is not being ironical about Bayle, we can be sure.

TEDESCO: Lest you say more about La Dixmerie, let's get back to the mainstream, to that point made by Hirzel about the decline of dialogue. A noble species it was. Socrates's death left a tragic aura about the genre that persisted in some way through the ages. Of course there is no close connection between the dialogues of Seneca or Cicero and the pathos of their final fate. Nor can I claim that the tragic aura covers those who wrote in a lighter vein in Greek, Plutarch and Lucian. But later on, there is Boethius's *Consolations of Philosophy*, the memorial of a man imprisoned and condemned by the government to die for his religious affiliation. Admittedly, the dialogue between Boethius and his "nurse Philosophy" contains little interplay of ideas. It is made up entirely of his briefly worded assents to her discourses on perfection and sovereign goodness.

At the dawn of modern times, the martyrdom of Giordano Bruno gave to his *Dialoghi* a heroic dimension. To some degree, this might also be said of Vanini, burned at the stake in Toulouse. And Galileo's trial was a later act in a drama which began with his *Dialogues on the Two World Systems*.

The genre is associated with danger. Prior to Bruno and Galileo, in 1492 of ambivalent memory, the Lisbonese Leo Hebraeus had to flee Seville for Naples. As Leone Ebreo he was to write his *Dialogues of Love* in Italian. A few decades later, two descendants of *conversos*, the brothers Juan and Alfonso de Valdés also found Italy a little safer than Spain. Yet even there, Alfonso's two books of dialogues were placed on the *Index*. I refer to his *Diálogos de la cosas ocurridas en Roma* and his *Diálogo de Mercurio y Carón*, both on political subjects. Juan produced his *Diálogo de la lengua* on a somewhat less touchy matter.

LANGLEY: The Renaissance was notable for the large number of authors who used the form. Merely because of the odds, it may be expected that some dialogue writers would risk their peace and safety at one time or another. It was a period of strife and danger. Still, Leon Battista Alberti, Lorenzo Valla, and even Erasmus were not persecuted on account of their dialogues. The *Colloquies* of Erasmus were Latin readers, not fighting dialogues.

TEDESCO: That's not entirely correct. I can think of one modeled on Lucian which attacked warmongers. But it is true that many dialogues were neither polemic nor philosophical. For example, in sixteenth-century Venice, there appeared one by G. B. Vimercato on sundials! But Erasmus's English friend, Sir Thomas More, wrote a well-known dialogue connected, I believe, with his struggle with Henry VIII.

LANGLEY: You are right. It is a long one, composed in prison before his martyrdom, entitled *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*. Its aim was to strengthen religious faith against the threat of suffering and death. One section has particularly been praised by literary historians as something that Socrates might have envied. It is the conversation between the old prisoner, Anthony and his nephew Vincent in which Anthony demonstrates that his captivity is not totally different from the condition of men outside. The world is a prison, and all men are condemned to die.

FRANCIS: A thought expressed eloquently by Pascal. As for polemic dialogues, in sixteenth-century France, one might ask whether we have to wait until the *philosophes* put real fighting spirit into the genre. I concur that the heroic annals of French dialogue owe very little to such figures as Pontus de Tyard and Jacques Tahureau, with all due respect to them. But we cannot overlook Bonaventure des Périers's *Cymbalum mundi* nor Jean Bodin's *Heptaplomeres*. It is true that Bodin did not put his book into print. For a genuinely combative spirit long before the

*philosophes* came on to the scene, we could look into Pascal's *Provincial Letters*. Through the intermediary of Louis de Montalte, Pascal treats the Jesuits as Plato does the Sophists through the intermediary of Socrates. Pascal does it with more animus and with more *esprit*, if not with more spirit. The first ten letters are all in dialogue. They express the tenacity of a beleaguered sect. The annals of Port-Royal will be annals of defeat, to be sure, regardless of Pascal's triumphs in college courses on French literature,—a Pyrrhic victory indeed!

TEDESCO: I think it would be interesting to examine more closely the writings referred to, as human documents and as dramatizations of vital issues, from the Age of the Renaissance and the Reformation to the Age of the Enlightenment and after. In fact, I'd like to propose that we set aside an evening for just such a discussion.

LANGLEY: If we have time we could carry the survey down to the present day. I suppose we'll find less and less as we proceed.

TEDESCO: There may be more dialogues than we assume offhand and excellent ones too. And how many are planned and never get finished? This question occurred to me while reading Georg Lukacs's foreword to his *Theory of the Novel*. He describes his state of mind during the First World War. The young Hungarian was deeply troubled by the war and strongly opposed to it. It was in this frame of mind that he first conceived the book. In the beginning, he thought of preparing a series of dialogues. The speakers would have been a group of young men trying to escape from the prevailing war psychosis, like the storytellers of the *Decameron* trying to escape the plague. Their conversations were to have led them gradually to the problems treated in the book, from the perspective of a Dostoyevskian world view. But thinking it over, he gave up this plan and wrote the book as we have it. I wish we could invite him here to explain just why he abandoned the dialogue for the treatise. It would have countered Boileau's *Dialogue des héros de roman*.

FRANCIS: That's the first time I ever heard Boileau mentioned with Lukacs! I fail to see any resemblance. I suppose you mean that whereas in the time of Boileau it was natural to utilize dialogue for the topic, for Lukacs it had become impossible.

TEDESCO: That's really all I meant. But there is another theme we should not lose sight of when we consider why the genre declined in importance, and I should hope that you gentlemen would assent to devoting still another evening or afternoon to this sub-

ject. I have in mind something like this. With Plato, the dialogue form engendered dialectic. It was his instrument for seeking truth through the intercourse of minds. Socrates was the midwife for the delivery of this wisdom from the brains of his disciples. As Minerva was born from the head of Jupiter; the truth was born from the mind of Phaedo, of Phaedrus, of Meno's slave-boy. Thus, it was precisely in and through the dialogue that Plato philosophized. Later philosophers did not compose dialogues, or if they did, it was with other purposes in mind. It was not to discover truth but only to present their conceptions of truth in a persuasive way that Leibniz, Malebranche, Berkeley, and Hume chose the dialogue form. Now it seems to me worthwhile to ascertain whether, in fact, the Platonic dialogue really came to an end with Plato. I recall that Galileo, for example, has his spokesman Salviati proceed with Simplicio almost like Socrates with Meno's slave. Salviati interrogates Simplicio about a stone held on a swinging stick. How will the stone move when it is released? With his questions Salviati clears up the phenomenon for Simplicio, who really knows but doesn't know he knows!

LANGLEY: I am fascinated by the idea of such a discussion. As we have other things to do this afternoon, why don't we get together tonight in Tedesco's comfortable study and resume the conversation, if the shade of Joseph de Maistre does not object to the use of the word?

TEDESCO: You see how awkward it is to follow any of the classifications mentioned. The philosophical dialogue falls in naturally, but the satirical and polemical types must be taken together. How may we utilize the dialogues that have been produced through the centuries to illustrate the fundamental religious, cultural, or political issues of successive periods? We could all pool our intellectual resources. We might even go so far as to prepare ourselves in advance, so that our discussions may prove mutually instructive. Or would you agree to risk falling into the pedantry that this might involve?

LANGLEY: Since pedantry seems to be the only danger, I'm game!

TEDESCO: I propose we plan to meet next week for that. We can set the details tonight.

FRANCIS: I take it that we're all in agreement. We'll meet tonight as philosophers. And next week as historians.

LANGLEY: That's a large order! Ah, to be Bertrand Russell or Hegel for an hour!

TEDESCO: Oh, be content to be yourself!

## 2. The Philosophical Dialogue

Evening in Tedesco's study.  
Tedesco, Langley, Francis are present.

TEDESCO: I have been struck by the frequency of the word seminar nowadays. It's like dialogue. It's become a catchword for almost any gathering for the purpose of distributing information or of sharing random thoughts. As seminaries become less influential, seminars become more common. But the catchword is perhaps an unconscious tribute to Socrates since a little bit of maieutics makes for a successful seminar.

LANGLEY: Perhaps even the popularity in certain circles of brainstorming is also a tribute to Socrates. Isn't brainstorming an aberrant form of maieutics? By the way, Francis, how would they say that in the language of Descartes and Voltaire?

FRANCIS: I have heard the expression *remue-méninges*, but I doubt Descartes would have approved of it. If brainstorming suggests barnstorming, *remue-méninges* springs from *remue-ménage*. Valéry might have enjoyed the coinage.

LANGLEY: Thank you, Francis. Now Tedesco, I wish you would explain what you were saying about Galileo's Simplicio and the stone thrown from a swinging stick.

TEDESCO: Well it concerns the angle of motion and angular momentum. On the second day of their dialogue, Salviati remarks to Simplicio: "You yourself know that it cannot turn out otherwise: although you pretend or try to pretend that you do not know. But I am such a good midwife of brains that I'd make you confess it by force." As long as people could believe that dialogue might bring out new truths, the genre of dialogue could thrive in philosophy. But when it became clear that science needed observation and experiment, not to speak of mathematics, the philosophical dialogue began to decline in importance. Galileo stands at a climacteric point in the history of thought.



LANGLEY: But surely observation and experiment had been used by Aristotle and his Lyceum, and mathematics by the Pythagoreans and by the Academy.

TEDESCO: Long before Galileo, what was once vital in that tradition had become ossified. Scholars preferred the authority of Aristotle to the very practice of observation that Aristotle had pursued himself to become "il maestro di color che sanno."

FRANCIS: I have found in a Paris dissertation on Cicero a very apt statement of the problem of Platonic dialogue. "Socratic discourse, of which the purest example is the *Phaedrus*, was something unique of its kind and had of necessity to become exhausted eventually. Getting farther away from life, Plato approached the dogmatic manner of the school, and the first sign of this transformation was the abandonment of maieutics in favor of *diairesis*, the analysis of the concept, that is, the substitution of consecutive discourse for the series of questions and responses. Plato saved only the form of the dialogue . . . but the fiction is broken, Socrates would express himself sometimes as if he knew the subject of his investigation in advance." Indeed, in *Theaetetus* Socrates laid down limits for the maieutic method. It was natural that Aristotle should break with what had become a mere fiction. Hirzel was perhaps wrong to conclude that there was an aesthetic decadence in the genre. It was the transformation of the old philosophical spirit that caused a break with the old form. The evolution is very clearly to be seen in Cicero's imitations of Greek philosophical dialogue.

TEDESCO: Cicero probably did not understand the maieutic method and hence could not convey its essence to readers who depended more on him than on the original works of Plato to gain their conception of Socrates the thinker. Cicero's dialogues, such as *The Orator*, fall into separate orations delivered by successive speakers. There is little opportunity for Socratic interchange to arise. His *Republic* and his *Laws* suggest their models, but they are more like the model of the latter than that of the former.

FRANCIS: French writers like Montaigne and La Mothe Le Vayer saw Socrates not as the midwife of ideas but as the sage. That view would be in accord with Cicero.

LANGLEY: None of the outstanding thinkers after Galileo and down to Leibniz seems to have used the dialogue. Isaac Newton, for example, had apparently little use for dialogue, except with himself, if we are to accept Wordsworth's conception of him. Referring to his statue and silent face, the poet wrote, as you

recall:

The marble index of a mind forever  
Voyaging through strange seas of thought, alone.

Doubtless a modern like Bertrand Russell would have considered that a highly romantic idea of what a mathematician does. Still, the more abstract reaches of mathematics must be too difficult to be treated in dialogue.

FRANCIS: Could you, Langley, tell us whether Russell discussed this?

LANGLEY: Yes, as I am sure Tedesco also knows, Russell comments on the Socratic method in his *History of Philosophy*. He declares that empirical science is unsuitable for treatment in this way. But mathematics is not specifically mentioned in the passage which runs as follows: "When in the *Phaedo* and in the *Meno*, [Socrates] applies his method to empirical problems, he has to ask leading questions which any judge would disallow. The method is in harmony with the doctrine of reminiscence, according to which we learn by remembering what we knew in a former existence. As against this view, consider any discovery that has been made by means of the microscope . . . it can hardly be maintained that such knowledge can be elicited from a previously ignorant person by the method of question and answer."

FRANCIS: Doesn't Russell grant it some usefulness in other respects?

LANGLEY: He goes on to say: "The matters that are suitable for treatment by the Socratic method are those as to which we have already enough knowledge to come to a right conclusion, but have failed through confusion of thought or lack of analysis to make the best logical use of what we know. A question such as 'What is justice?' is eminently suited for discussion in a Platonic dialogue. . . . But when our inquiry is concluded, we have made only a linguistic discovery, not a discovery in ethics."

TEDESCO: I believe that Russell is highly critical of Plato throughout his account. He even suggests that Socrates would not have been so brave in facing death had he not believed in immortality.

FRANCIS: I cannot help but think of how certain celebrated free-thinkers, or atheists, for that matter, have faced death for their acts or their opinions, Vanini, for example. As for fictional figures, there is Brotteaux des Ilettes of Anatole France's novel dealing with the French Revolution, *Les Dieux ont soif*. Brotteaux pauses to contemplate the pretty features of the girl Athénaïs

before saying farewell to life. At a corresponding moment, Socrates strokes the fair locks of Phaedo. Socrates perhaps expected to see him again, not so Brotteaux after the guillotine. The motif reminds me of Albert Camus's stranger Meursault and his evaluation of his girlfriend's hair as against the spurious hope of an afterlife, spurious for him that is.

LANGLEY: We shouldn't get sidetracked here. It strikes me that the case of Vanini would more appropriately come up at our next discussion, since it involved religious issues. Going back to Russell, at least he values the Socratic method as a means of eliminating prejudice and misunderstanding. But is that still the Socratic method? It becomes something much more general, a meeting of minds rather than a seeding of minds, if you will excuse the expression.

TEDESCO: Certainly we owe much credit to Socrates for the ideal of free, unfettered discussion, free from outside pressure, unfettered by chains of any sort. But insofar as there was method to it, Socratic discussion was not free; he was there to guide it in his unassuming, if not imperceptible, way. When discussion becomes free even from guidance, it is called conversation. The Socratic method stops short of free association.

FRANCIS: Aren't there other values to the method which even disbelievers in anamnesis would acknowledge? By the way, did Bertrand Russell write any dialogues?

LANGLEY: Oh, he wrote a philosophical tale called "The Perplexities of John Forstice," but it's only partly in dialogue. We could go back to an earlier British philosopher who did write dialogue, and who outlined several valuable uses for it.

FRANCIS: Bishop Berkeley? But Berkeley was Irish, not English.

LANGLEY: No, I have in mind David Hume, who wasn't English either, but Scottish. In justifying his choice of the form in his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, Hume adduces two advantages possessed by the procedure for this topic in particular: "To deliver a SYSTEM in conversation scarcely seems natural," he remarks, perhaps in allusion to Berkeley. "There are some subjects, however, to which dialogue-writing is peculiarly adapted. . . . Any point of doctrine which is so *obvious*, that it scarcely admits of dispute, but at the same time so important, that it cannot be too often inculcated . . . where the vivacity of conversation may enforce the precept." But this method is evidently not Socratic, it is simply didactic. Hume did offer another use of dialogue: "Any question of philosophy . . . which is so

*obscure* and *uncertain*, that human reason can reach no fixed determination with regard to it; if it should be treated at all; seems to lead us naturally into the style of dialogue.” Socrates, you recall, already said in the *Philebus* that the theory of Ideas will probably always continue to be a theme for the ingenuity of young dialecticians. Hume’s sentence ends with a note we can hope will always be in harmony with our own conversations here: dialogue “unites the two greatest and purest pleasures of human life, study and society.” The topic of natural religion combines these circumstances. What truth so obvious, so important, yet so obscure as the Being of God? How could the skeptic Hume make this statement? Well, at the end of the discourse, he declares: “To be a philosophical Sceptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian.”

FRANCIS: How like Pascal, yet how different the tone!

LANGLEY: Could we now summarize the several uses of the philosophical dialogue mentioned? First, the maieutic, which I presume only Platonists would allow, or try to apply.

TEDESCO: Hold on, I don’t think you should dismiss it so hastily. There must be more to it than that. And how can you say “*only* Platonists”? That’s a lot of people.

LANGLEY: Perhaps I was hasty. But for the sake of clarity, maybe we should defer discussion of that point until later, and finish with an outline of uses. The second use of dialogue is for unfettered discussion, which, we may agree with Russell, helps to eliminate prejudice and the uncritical acceptance of comfortable but contradictory beliefs. Third, as Hume suggested, to give a fresh turn to trite but important truths. And fourth, again following Hume, for the discussion of obscure and uncertain philosophical questions.

FRANCIS: That seems to be a good outline. Yet I suspect that we might find still other uses, if we tried. Now, however, I’d like to ask Tedesco whether Hegel had anything pertinent to say on the subject.

TEDESCO: Here is what he stated in his *History of Philosophy*: “The dialogue seems to be the form best suited for representing an argument, because it sways hither and thither; the different sides are allotted to different persons, and thus the argument is made more animated. The dialogue has, however, this disadvantage, that it seems to be carried on arbitrarily, so that at the end the feeling always remains that the matter might have turned out differently. . . . Just as in the Catechism the answers are pre-

scribed to the questions asked, so it is in these dialogues, for they who answer have to say what the author pleases.”

LANGLEY: Hegel seems to disapprove of Plato as much as Russell does.

TEDESCO: No, not entirely. For his next sentence reads: “The question is so framed that quite a simple answer is alone possible, and thanks to the artistic beauty and power of the dialogues, such an answer appears at the same time perfectly natural.” I confess that this is, in a way, damning with high praise, for such art may be deceptive. Our consultation of Hegel reminds me that his remarks on anamnesis are even more interesting, and we should bring them in when we take up the question of maieutics later on. But may I ask Francis what other uses of dialogue he was hinting at just now?

FRANCIS: What I meant was that there may be another motive for writing dialogue, and one which actuated Hume, although he did not specify it. I mean, in order to avoid trouble in the presentation of controversial ideas.

LANGLEY: Ah, but he left this book to be published only after his death; whereas he published bolder works himself during his lifetime that were not in dialogue, like his *Essay on Miracles*.

FRANCIS: Well, if prudence was not a motive for Hume, it certainly must have been for others. It must have been the case in less tolerant intellectual climates. Instances would be the *Cymbalum mundi* and the *Heptaplomeres* in sixteenth-century France or seventeenth-century *libertins* like La Mothe Le Vayer with his mouthpieces Orasius Tubero and Tubertus Ocella.

TEDESCO: Quite so! In fact Albert Einstein surmised that it was the motive for Galileo’s choice of the dialogue form.

FRANCIS: But that didn’t help him! And it had helped Giordano Bruno even less!

LANGLEY: Perhaps because it was too obvious what their maneuver was.

FRANCIS: There is another use of dialogue which occurs to me. It is for intellectual sport.

TEDESCO: Do you mean what Huizinga says about it in his book *Homo ludens*?

FRANCIS: I think his treatment is too sweeping. The concept of play is not a master key that opens all locks. To state that every activity can be reduced to play leaves play as something so general that little is really explained. However, what he writes about “play-forms in philosophy” fits our lock very well.

TEDESCO: Or, to divert Kant's phrase to another context:  
*Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck?*

FRANCIS: That may be it indeed. The dialogues of Ernest Renan are good examples of "play-forms in philosophy." Renan was once held to be the very model of a dilettante of ideas. Nevertheless, his attitude was not purely frivolous. In the preface to his *Dialogues philosophiques* he wrote that he chose the dialogue form to state his philosophy because the form is not dogmatic and permits presenting successively the different aspects of the problem without the obligation to come to a conclusion. As he put it: "The problems treated are those we never cease thinking of, even while knowing very well that we'll never solve them."

LANGLEY: But that's precisely one of the functions designated by Hume: "Any question of philosophy . . . which is so obscure and uncertain that we can reach no fixed determination with regard to it . . . seems to lead us naturally into the style of dialogue."

FRANCIS: There is a more personal and, may I say, playful, note in Renan's description of the procedure: "These are the peaceful dialogues to which the separate lobes of my brain customarily devote themselves, when I allow them to digress in complete freedom."

TEDESCO: How does that differ essentially from Plato's description in *The Sophist* of thought and discourse: "It is the interior voiceless converse of a soul with itself to which we have given this particular name, *thought*."

FRANCIS: The difference consists in that complete freedom Renan emphasized. Later examples in French of the playful style are provided by Anatole France, Remy de Gourmont, and even Paul Valéry. Their forerunner was Diderot, with his pleasantries in *Le Neveu de Rameau*: "Mes pensées sont mes catins," echoed perhaps in Valéry's poem "Aurore": "Maîtresses de l'âme, Idées, Courtisanes par ennui?"

TEDESCO: In a very different spirit, didn't Martin Luther call Reason: *diese Hure*?

LANGLEY: I must say that I find more elegant those phrases of Diderot and Valéry about ideas being like ladies of the night. Yet I think they're all on the wrong track. Maieutics involves thinking that produces results as against thinking as an end in itself, a mere pleasure. Renan and the others like him seem to be intellectual voluptuaries, condemned, willingly it would seem, to sterility.

TEDESCO: You can't say that they haven't had a lot of descendants.

Just look around us.

FRANCIS: It seems to me that we are being cavalier with Renan. His playful remark about his dialogues being the diversion of the lobes of his brain should be taken in conjunction with other things. As he wrote in his introduction, many ideas in the dialogues were the brain children born from the conversations he had held through the years with his friend, the chemist Marcelin Berthelot. In his *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse*, Renan describes their friendship, which started in early manhood, as a sort of common fermentation of ideas. It was an intellectual friendship consisting in what they learned together.

LANGLEY: I realize that Renan accomplished a great deal of real work as a historian and philologist. What I said about him applies only to his dialogues. Yet it seems to me that this attitude of his led him to a distorted view of Plato's dialogues also. I quote Renan's opinion given by Paul Shorey in *Platonism Ancient and Modern*: "Plato is an incomparable philosopher. I only regret the wrong that has been done him in exposing him to the rather pedantic admiration of young disciples who have undertaken to discover a fixed and systematic body of doctrine in the delightful philosophic fantasies that this rare mind has left us."

TEDESCO: Renan perhaps saw Plato too much in his own image.

FRANCIS: I am inclined to agree. One who was of Renan's lineage in a way, André Maurois, echoes Renan's phrases to a different purpose. In his *Portrait d'un ami qui s'appelait moi*, he wrote: "Monologue is not my strong point, whether it is in a novel or in essay, my instinct goes straight to dialogue. . . . I feel an imperious need of impartiality, a need to retouch and correct my focus. Dialogue lends itself to that. . . . I am in turn each of the two interlocutors that I put on the scene. That does not imply lack of will. There comes the moment for decision, for imposing silence on the two interlocutors—for action. But until then, methodical doubt and dialogue of 'the two lobes of my brain.'"

LANGLEY: Maurois makes me think of Hamlet. There seems to be little connection between his philosophical speculations and his decisions to act. He cuts his own Gordian knot.

TEDESCO: Perhaps we are on a rather superficial level with Maurois. Suppose we go back to Hegel's observations on the method of Socrates. That brings us to grips with the doctrine of anamnesis. Hegel did not believe that Plato's concept of recollection should be taken literally. In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* he states: "When Plato speaks of knowledge as of a

recollection, he knows all the time that this is only putting the matter in similes and metaphors; he did not ask, as the theologians used gravely to do, whether the soul had existed before its birth, and, if so, in what particular place. It cannot be said of Plato that he had any such belief. . . . But what Plato expressed as the truth is that consciousness in the individual is in reason the divine reality and life; that man perceives and recognizes it in pure thought, and that this knowledge is itself the heavenly abode and movement. . . . learning is only a recollection, and this implies that the soul is already implicitly what it becomes. We must not think that the bald conception of innate ideas is hereby indicated—such an expression implies the existence of ideas by nature.”

Hegel remarks further: “In one sense recollection [*Erinnerung*] is certainly an unfortunate expression in the sense that an idea is reproduced which has already existed at another time.” It is here that Hegel’s German is clearer than the English translation: “Aber Erinnerung hat auch einen anderen Sinn, den die Etymologie giebt, — den: Sichinnerlichmachen, Insichgehen; diess ist der Tiefe Gedankensinn des Wortes.” (But recollection has another sense, which is given by its etymology, namely that of making oneself inward, going inward, and this is the profound thought embodied in the word.) I proceed, quoting from the translation: “Plato represents the implicit existence of mind in the form of a pre-existence in time, as if the truth had already been for us in another time. But . . . we must remark that he does not propound this as a philosophical doctrine, but in the form of a saying received from priests and priestesses who comprehend what is divine . . . an Egyptian idea.”

LANGLEY: You’ve served up something there that takes some chewing. It reminds me of Jerome Eckstein’s words on the *Meno* in his book *The Platonic Method*: “I believe that Plato intends his slave-boy ‘demonstration’ to be taken as a farce and not as a paradigm of teaching.”

TEDESCO: Hegel denied that Plato believed in recollection as a philosophical doctrine, but he didn’t call it a farce.

FRANCIS: I imagine both Hegel and Plato were serious about it, although the Athenian could be playful at the same time. *Farce* certainly doesn’t seem to be the *mot juste*.

TEDESCO: May we go back for a moment to the Renaissance, to the Platonists of that time? There is Marsilio Ficino, whose *Commentary on the Symposium* bears the words: “That the soul is born



endowed with truth. . . . That is what Socrates proved to children like Phaedo, Theaetetus, and Meno, and he taught that children could give true replies in all arts, if one questioned them judiciously, for they are endowed by nature with the reasons of all arts and disciplines.” And there is Peter Ramus, who discussed the *Meno* at some length, in his *Dialectique*. They didn’t take it for a farce.

FRANCIS: You remind me of Guy de Brués’s *Dialogues*, and also of Antoine d’Urfé’s pious words in *his* dialogue: “God having endowed our mind naturally with the seeds of all truth.”

TEDESCO: We may mention Galileo’s unhappy contemporary, Vanini, who wrote in a dialogue: “The human soul possesses in itself the knowledge of all things, the knowledge of all tongues, for it is of celestial origin and partakes of the divine essence: but it finds in deploying its forces the same resistance that a burning coal does that is covered with ashes; thus the fires of our mind need to be excited in order to dispel the thick humors that cover it and in order to shine with a pure and resplendent light; thus did Plato say that our science is but a reminiscence.” In another dialogue, however, he quotes Cardan, who questions its validity as an argument for immortality. How can a newborn babe possess a memory of a prior existence? Vanini denies that the hypothesis could even be tested.

LANGLEY: I have been troubled all along by what seems to me to be a confusion between the two concepts of anamnesis and maieutics. For Socrates and Plato, they went together, no doubt, whatever precise meaning we adopt for them. Nevertheless, they can be distinguished, and I think they should be when we examine some of the examples that have been produced. For all these authors did not understand them to be integrally connected, perhaps because certain authors were using one or both of these terms as mere catchwords which would serve to prove that the notions themselves were indeed obsolescent.

TEDESCO: In order to avoid the confusion, we could speak of maieutics as the method and of reminiscence as the basis of the method. The first belongs to epistemology, the second to ontology. Our whole argument comes down to determining whether they must stand or fall together. Perhaps they’re not even dependent on each other in Plato. Jowett inferred that the *Theaetetus* was of later date because the doctrine of recollection is absent from it. Yet this dialogue, along with the earlier *Meno*, is a prime source for the concept of maieutics.

FRANCIS: That doesn't disprove that there was a connection, that is, a genetic, not necessarily a logical connection.

TEDESCO: I imagine the history of ideas contains other examples of the parent notion dying and the offspring surviving. But I believe Langley wanted to say something that I interrupted.

LANGLEY: I wanted to introduce Shaftesbury, who, by the way, also wrote dialogue. In *The Moralists*, he refers to both anamnesis and maieutics, but in separate passages, speculating about the first while embracing the second. Toward the beginning of the dialogues, Theocles exhorts his friend Philocles, who has expressed his skepticism about the value of life: "Now to be assured that we can never be concerned in anything hereafter, we must . . . truly know ourselves, and in what this self of ours consists. We must determine against pre-existence, and give a better reason for our never having been concerned in aught before our birth than merely 'because we remember not, nor are conscious.' For in many things we have been concerned to no purpose, of which we have now no memory or consciousness remaining. And thus we may happen to be again and again to perpetuity, for any reason we can show to the contrary." It is an exhortation to his friend to reflect that life may indeed be a less indifferent thing than he imagines. But whereas the hypothesis of pre-existence is mentioned, the notion of anamnesis is not positively entertained. Furthermore, there is no direct connection with a much later passage which elaborately develops the metaphor of the birth of ideas. Allow me to read a few pertinent excerpts: "'Tis you, Theocles, must help my labouring mind, and be as it were the midwife to those conceptions; which else, I fear, will prove abortive." Theocles replies: "You do well . . . to give me the midwife's part only; for the mind conceiving of itself, can only be, as you say, assisted in the birth. Its pregnancy is from its nature." Philocles asks: "Do you maintain . . . that these mental children, the notions of fair, just, and honest, with the rest of these ideas, are innate?" Theocles's answer indorses innate ideas, while stopping short of anamnesis: "Anatomists tell us that the eggs, which are the principles in body, are innate, being formed already in the foetus before the birth. But when it is, whether before, or at, or after the birth, or at what time after, that either these or other principles, organs of sensation, or sensations themselves, are first formed in us, is a matter, doubtless, of curious speculation, but of no great importance." Thus Shaftesbury dispenses with anamnesis, while retaining maieutics.

FRANCIS: The conclusion of Voltaire's "Dialogues entre Lucrèce et Posidonius" is almost an echo of that. Lucretius asks Posidonius if ideas were created at the moment of conception of the animal body, or were they created before? Do they wait for bodies before entering them or do they lodge there only when the animal is ready to receive them? Finally, is it in the Supreme Being that each animated creature sees the ideas of things? Posidonius avows his ignorance almost like Theocles, declaring his belief in deism to be enough for him. But Voltaire doesn't mention midwives.

TEDESCO: Without embracing the notion of anamnesis, unless his pre-established harmony is a version of it, Leibniz did adopt the maieutic concept. In the *Nouveaux Essais*, Théophile cites the *Meno*: "All arithmetic and all geometry are innate and within us in a virtual manner, so that we can find them by considering attentively what we have in our minds, without using any fact learned by experience or from tradition, as Plato showed in a dialogue where he presents Socrates leading a child to abstruse truths merely by asking questions without telling him anything."

FRANCIS: Leibniz's contemporary Malebranche is perhaps an even more striking example. He employed a sort of maieutic method in his dialogues. His *Conversations chrétiennes* presents three speakers discussing the question "That there is a God and it is only He who truly acts within us." Théodore leads the discussion and serves as midwife for the young Eraste, almost like Socrates in the *Meno*. Eraste is guided into finding the truth of the proposition in his own mind. Théodore calls upon the third speaker, Aristarque, to bear witness to the process: "You, Aristarque, have you observed how he proceeds? He consults the master who teaches him in the secret places of his reason. He answers only in accord with himself; he certifies only what he sees: and that's why I challenge you to derive directly any false consequence from his replies." Theodore underlines the point: "See, Aristarque, when it's God who speaks, when it's the Inner Truth that replies, there is no creature that doesn't lead us to the Creator." Aristarque seems almost convinced as he answers: "I cannot express to you the joy that I feel in this new way of philosophizing. I rejoice to see that children and ignorant people are the most capable of true wisdom, and I am charmed to learn from Eraste truths I had never thought of." But oddly enough, Théodore senses no irony in these remarks. Malebranche's Théodore anticipates

Wordsworth: "The youth . . . still is Nature's priest . . . Thou best philosopher."

The exchange between Théodore and his friends is amusing in a way that perhaps Malebranche had not intended. Eraste thinks it is self-evident that a corporal thing cannot act of itself. There had to be a Creator who established certain general laws to regulate the movement of bodies. Aristarque protests that Eraste is going too fast and is losing himself. But Théodore denies that, and asks Eraste for confirmation: "Do you understand, Eraste?" And Eraste replies that he does. Whereupon Théodore brushes aside Aristarque's objections. It is true that Malebranche makes the latter appear to be in the wrong, and he lends himself to this maneuver. Yet his objections do have some pertinence he is not allowed to pursue.

The editor of one critical edition, L. Bridet, is quite convinced, however, by Théodore, and concludes: "Théodore excels in the practice of maieutics with his auditors. Thus he demonstrates, or rather has them discover, the existence of God."

LANGLEY: That is quite similar to a passage in Berkeley's *Alciphron*.

Let me see if I can locate it. Yes, Alciphron says: "For my part, I have no interest in denying a God. Any man may believe or not believe a God, as he pleases. But after all, Euphranor must allow me to stare a little at his conclusions." Euphranor answers: "The conclusions are yours as much as mine, for you were led to them by your own concessions. . . . You, it seems, stare to find that God is not far from every one of us."

FRANCIS: By the way, is there anything to the story of Berkeley's visit to Malebranche and the argument that excited the latter so much that it led to his death? It is reported by Thomas De Quincey in "Murder as a Fine Art."

LANGLEY: That anecdote must have been invented by some London wits.

TEDESCO: Plato believed that ideas have their source in some kind of recollection, whereas Malebranche, after Descartes, believed that true ideas come from God, who would not deceive. Would you agree that Berkeley was close to Malebranche in this respect?

LANGLEY: It has been said that Malebranche's conception of seeing all things in God was at the back of the Berkeleyan *idea*. Malebranche's dialogues have not been favored with the praise accorded to Berkeley's. G. Dawes Hicks said of the *Entretiens sur la métaphysique, sur la religion et sur la mort*: "The *Entretiens* do not

have the artistic charm of *Alciphron*, although they may be compared . . . with *Hylas and Philonous* . . . the dramatic setting is not without its attractiveness, and one derives from it a fairly clear impression of the kind of atmosphere in the midst of which Malebranche's life was lived."

FRANCIS: Hippolyte Taine denies there was any real-life background to them. In an essay on Plato's young men, Taine drags in Malebranche by the hem of his cassock. Nor does he forget Leibniz: "Plato is the only philosopher who has been able to give life to dissertations. Malebranche's Théotime, Leibniz's Philalèthe are abstractions under the names of men. . . . The dialogue is only a borrowed ornament, added to hide the dryness of subject. . . . On the other hand, if Plato writes dialogues, it's because he listens to them." I don't quite agree with Taine. I'd agree rather with your Mr. Hicks. Malebranche might well have modeled parts of his dialogues on seminary debates. It is true that we sometimes catch sight of his hand moving his marionettes. Plato's hand is not so visible, although we suspect he occasionally distorts those real-life models bearing the names of Protagoras or Gorgias. And we cannot identify Malebranche's models so easily, except in the case of his obvious mouthpieces.

FRANCIS: I can produce an example of so-called maieutics of the period.

TEDESCO: I'd like to hear it.

FRANCIS: It is from Fontenelle. In the *dialogue des morts* between Socrates and Montaigne, the two are heard debating one of Fontenelle's favorite topics, the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns. Montaigne believes men have degenerated since antiquity, whereas Socrates expects that they can only have improved. Montaigne is obliged to admit that men never change much through the ages, and Socrates seizes on this admission to prove that Montaigne erred in assuming the Moderns were worse than the Ancients. Montaigne exclaims that Socrates had misled him into saying what he hadn't intended to say, "here I am delivered of a proposition quite contrary to what I set forth." Yet the exchange of remarks hardly justifies this construction. Montaigne had made his admission inadvertently, not prompted by Socrates, who really has not been given enough time by Fontenelle to perform any obstetrics. If Fontenelle was being subtle, his irony would be lost on most readers. I refer here to the effort by an editor of the dialogue to explain Fontenelle's purpose: "In the conversation where Socrates convicts Montaigne of being il-

logical, the dialectic gains an illusory success. Montaigne, floored, doubtless is laudatory of maieutics. . . . But the eulogy is so extreme that irony is born from the excess of praise . . . regarding the reputedly invincible dialectic. Considering the difficulty over which it triumphs, one is led to doubt that the triumph is worth such praise. A little common sense would suffice. Socrates . . . has the air of a sleight-of-hand performer. . . . Fontenelle copies the procedure, in order to parody it." The editor sees the irony as exposing maieutics to be an overrated method. But what if Fontenelle simply failed to understand the method? Fontenelle himself was to confess the weakness of this dialogue in his *Jugement de Pluton*. He has Montaigne make this avowal: "I am caught and I give birth stupidly. . . . I assure you that if I had to do it again, I would give my midwife a lot more trouble; for I who claim that the Ages have degenerated, can I then say that all men have the same dispositions, the same penchants? My defeat should be a little more difficult, if only for the greater glory of Socrates." Pluto's judgment follows: "Let not Socrates employ his familiar Demon in disputes to divine the thoughts of others, and let not Montaigne bear offspring so easily."

It seems evident that Fontenelle acknowledged that his dialogue was superficial. In other words, his presentation of the Socratic method was somewhat frivolous and irresponsible, and not subtly ironic. This is not the only time in his *Jugement de Pluton* that Fontenelle made amends to Socrates or Plato!

TEDESCO: With respect to his use of irony, as well as his philosophical position, Fontenelle seems closer to Lucian than to Plato.

FRANCIS: His position is the relativism of the *honnête homme* of the beginning of the French Enlightenment. This can be seen in some other dialogues, where his Anacreon opposes Aristotle, his "False Demetrius" opposes the traditional Descartes, just as Lycinus opposes the philosophers in the *Hermotimus*. In fact, in the dialogue with the "False Demetrius," Descartes turns even against himself, that is, against the historical Descartes.

TEDESCO: I am glad that you agree with me that in these dialogues Fontenelle follows Lucian rather than Plato. It brings us here to the distinction we should establish between irony and maieutics. Socratic irony is understood as being apparent self-denigration with the aim of exposing the fallacies of the adversary. It may lead the adversary to stumble through overconfidence. Facing a Sophist, Socrates might use this maneuver, just as Pascal's Mon-

talte does in confronting the Jesuit. But this is not maieutics. The irony is used against the Sophist in order that Socrates's disciple and Plato's reader may see the truth. The irony thus serves the maieutic purpose, but is not to be confused with it. Now Lucian's satires may utilize such irony against the philosophers, but they are not maieutic dialogues. Lucian is thus a touchstone enabling us to distinguish the later uses of Socratic irony. In the didactic dialogues of Cicero, there is little irony—there is no maieutic either. In Erasmus's *Colloquies* there is Lucianic irony rather than Socratic, despite the worshipful admiration Erasmus felt for Socrates.

LANGLEY: Webster defines irony as “pretended ignorance, with the intention of irritating or perplexing an opponent in dispute.” However, Socrates sought truth not only against but also with his opponent.

TEDESCO: Now may we look at anamnesis from another angle, for example, from an evolutionist angle? We knew things before we were born because our ancestors' survival depended on their adaptation to the external world. It could be called the survival of the fittest beliefs about space, time, weight, volume, and so forth.

FRANCIS: That would imply the inheritance of patterns of thought.

LANGLEY: Yes, of innate ideas. And Locke refuted those!

FRANCIS: Evidently not to Leibniz's satisfaction. The point brings us to Leibniz's dialogues, which he entitled *Nouveaux Essais sur l'entendement humain* precisely in rejoinder to Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding*. As I need not remind you, he replied to Locke's scholastic slogan “Nihil in intellectu quod non prius in sensu” with “Nothing but the Intellect itself!”

TEDESCO: Leibniz was a Platonist in his way, believing in his own version of innate ideas. It is unfortunate for our purpose that he did not write dialogues like Plato, allowing the antagonist that chance for give-and-take in an actual clash of opinions. Leibniz's work is not much more than Descartes's replies to the objections to his *Meditations*, for Descartes also quoted the objections quite fully before rebutting them.

LANGLEY: That is another illustration of how difficult genuine Socratic dialogue has become since Plato.

FRANCIS: And we have already noted that Plato himself abandoned it in his later dialogues.

LANGLEY: It would be valuable to have Aristotle's lost dialogues, if only to check whether Aristotle also did that, before adopting the

treatise and the lecture for conveying his thoughts and discoveries.

TEDESCO: Before we get too far away from what I ventured about anamnesis in the light of evolution, I'd like to try to clarify it. I was thinking that the geometry lesson in Plato's *Meno* has antecedents in the descent of man. Research in the evolution of intelligence might even help to clear up the problem of innate ideas.

FRANCIS: Obviously you mean the descent of man in the Darwinian sense, and not in the sense of the neo-Platonists who thought of man as a sort of fallen god!

LANGLEY: I have sometimes wondered if Darwin would have had less opposition if he had entitled his book *The Ascent of Man*, like Jacob Bronowski.

FRANCIS: I don't think that that would have helped at all! Besides, Bronowski's title is obviously an echo of Darwin's.

TEDESCO: What I have in mind is the coordination through evolution of all the senses involved in space and location, sight and touch, and the kinesthetic sense.

LANGLEY: Why not go farther and seek a forerunner to Meno's slave in the salmon finding its way upstream to its home pool for breeding.

FRANCIS: Now I would say that that analogy is pretty fishy! There was no Socratic salmon prompting the fish's ancestors.

TEDESCO: Nevertheless, there might have been in the evolution of that species a phase where learned behavior of a rudimentary sort became fixed in instinct. I found a fascinating treatment of another species of fish in a recent book on *The Evolution of Intelligence* by David Stenhouse. He refers to the goby living in tidal pools which has "such an accurate knowledge of the relevant spatial relationships that at low tide, when the pools are separated by dry areas of rock, the fish can leap from pool to pool without much risk of missing the target."

LANGLEY: I have the impression that pursuing this particular line of thought would require getting extremely technical. I confess that I would find myself out of my depth in those pools, shallow as they may be!

FRANCIS: Certainly maieutics cannot be part of the salmon's or goby's equipment! There have, however, been writers who see in animal behavior a proof of the doctrine of innate ideas, Joseph de Maistre, for example.

TEDESCO: Well, suppose we approach the subject from another



direction—the past of the human race understood as a repository of ancient knowledge, which can be drawn upon for the good of mankind if we have the proper means. Here we enter the domain of comparative mythology, which Jung sought to clarify with his concept of the collective unconscious. As Mircea Eliade put it: “The world of the archetypes of Jung somewhat resembles the world of Platonic Ideas: the archetypes are transpersonal and do not partake of the historical Time of the individual, but of the Time of the species, indeed of Organic Life.”

LANGLEY: That sounds a little like your quotation of Hegel in which he termed Platonic reminiscence an Egyptian idea. We could thus go even farther and by way of the Pythagoreans get as far as India, where it is said Buddha remembered all his previous existences, not just one, as in the disputed case of Plato.

TEDESCO: We should perhaps stick to Plato and his tradition. In this respect, the German romantic Friedrich Schlegel follows the current. He provides a background of Hegel. Do we not read in Shlegel's *Philosophy of History* these remarks on reminiscence? “By this doctrine of reminiscence, which is the fundamental tenet of the Platonic system, this philosophy has a strong coincidence or affinity with the Indian doctrine of Metempsychosis, by the supposition it involves of the prior existence of the human soul. . . . If we would understand this notion in a more spiritual sense—as the awakening of the consciousness of the divine image implanted in our souls—as the soul's perception of that image, this theory would then perfectly coincide with the Christian doctrine. . . .” Another example is that of the romantic philosopher Friedrich Schelling, contemporary and rival of Hegel. Here are a few extracts from his writings which show how persistent the belief in some form of anemnesis has been in modern thought: “What we call knowledge is just striving after conscious recollection.” He also said, “We struggle and strive for that knowledge just because it ought to be within us, because it belongs to our nature. Plato already set up the doctrine—and, of course, even as a tradition from a still older time—that all true knowledge is only reminiscence. . . . In knowledge we only strive toward where we were, i.e., where what is essentially human in us was before.”

LANGLEY: How does that fit in with what you said about archetypes?

TEDESCO: Well, Schelling discusses them in the very same passage: “. . . this archetype of things slumbers in the soul like an obscured and forgotten, even if not completely obliterated, im-

age. Perhaps it would never awaken again, if the divining and yearning toward discernment did not lie in that same dark region."

FRANCIS: How suggestive of Marcel Proust's own quest for essence!

TEDESCO: Schelling's statement is interesting for another reason for he deals with the very subject of philosophical dialogue that we are trying to clear up. I cite only the sentence that is especially relevant: "This separation, this duplication of ourselves, this secret intercourse in which there are two essences, an asking one and an answering one, an ignorant one which, however, seeks knowledge, and a knowing one which, however, does not know its knowledge—this silent dialogue, this inner art of conversation, the peculiar secret of the philosopher, is that of which the external, therefore called dialectic, is the imitation. . . . Thus, according to its nature, everything known is retold. The known, however, is not something lying finished and ready to hand from the beginning but something always first arising from within." Schelling is, perhaps, not too far from Hegel here. And Plato referred to that inner art of conversation in *The Sophist*.

FRANCIS: Joseph de Maistre has something along this line. His main spokesman is the Count, a believer in innate ideas. He declares: "although there are original notions common to all men, without which they would not be men, and which are consequently accessible, or rather, natural, to all men, nevertheless, these ideas are not all accessible to the same degree. There are, on the contrary, some ideas which are more or less *dormant*, and others more or less dominant in each mind." This is strikingly like what you quoted from Vanini. The Count also reminds us of Ficino: "The essence of intelligence is to know and to love. The limits of its knowledge are those of its nature. The immortal being does not learn anything: it knows by essence all that it is to know . . . . This need, this hunger for knowledge, which stirs man, is but the natural tendency of his being that bears him toward his primordial state and gives the evidence to him of what he is."

TEDESCO: I'm glad you reminded us of Vanini and of the ashes covering that divine spark within us. Since I have just mentioned Schlegel, may I produce a passage from his *Dialogue on Poetry*? "We can perceive the music of the universe and the beauty of the poem because . . . a spark of the poet's creative spirit lives in us, glowing with secret strength under the ashes of our self-induced unreason."

LANGLEY: I still don't get the connection with Jung's archetypes.

TEDESCO: Mircea Eliade may help us on this point. In *Aspects of Myth*, he wrote: "It is not a question of forgetting previous existences—that is, the sum of personal experience, of 'history'—but of forgetting the transpersonal and eternal truths, the Ideas." That is by now very familiar to us. Where Eliade offers us something quite new is in the concept of *historiographic anamnesis*, which is the effort of modern Western thinkers to resuscitate the total past of mankind by a joint enterprise of comparative mythology and history, as well as psychology.

LANGLEY: And here I thought that anamnesis was an obsolescent, if not an obsolete, idea!

TEDESCO: Aside from Jung and Eliade, it is amazing how often it is still invoked by thinkers of divergent schools of thought. I have even encountered it in a book called *The Far Side of Madness* by the psychiatrist J. W. Perry. And it is simply in the medical sense, found also in Freud, where one might think the term case history would be just as apt.

LANGLEY: But that would lack the aura of mystery. On this line, we may add the theological usage. In Christian communion, the congregation is said to share by anamnesis in the Passion of the Lord.

FRANCIS: Platonic reminiscence certainly preserves a poetic value, as Tedesco indicated in connection with Schlegel. The French poet St. John Perse declaims in his long poetic work *Vents*: "Mais si tout m'est connu, vivre n'est-il que revoir? . . . Et tout nous est reconnaissance. Et toujours, ô mémoire, vous nous devancerez, en terres nouvelles où nous n'avions encore vécu." The rest of the passage casts a strange light on archeology:

et les signes qu'aux murs retrace l'ombre remuée des  
feuilles en tous lieux, nous les avons déjà tracés.

TEDESCO: That is quite suggestive of Jung's archetypes.

LANGLEY: I think the authors of such passages depend not only on the Platonic notion of Reminiscence but also on our reminiscences of our cultural heritage. These passages are resonant with echoes of *déjà vu*, a psychological phenomenon of memory, of "the shock of recognition," perhaps of the theological usage I mentioned before, and of such religious phrases as Pascal's "You would not seek me if you hadn't already found me." We have here a confusion of echoes from which it would be impossible to

isolate a clear idea still useful for modern thought or for scientific inquiry. Take the word "reconnaissance" in Perse's poem. Isn't it perfectly ambiguous? Contaminated, in fact?

FRANCIS: It is true that the French means not only recognition, but also gratitude.

LANGLEY: Not only that, but doesn't it also imply reconnaissance, in other words, scouting, exploration? Anamnesis may be richly suggestive, poetically, but not a pregnant scientific concept.

TEDESCO: Ah . . . are we back to maieutics again?

LANGLEY: I grant that our use of the word pregnant owes something to the concept. Still, maieutics is not a common term in English. In spite of Shaftesbury, even the metaphor of the midwife seems queer. Just as an example, take Emerson's phrase: "Socrates' profession of obstetric art is good philosophy."

FRANCIS: Yet I remember reading an article in the *Times Literary Supplement* entitled "A portrait of the artist as a midwife." To be sure, it was about a French writer, the late Lucien Goldmann. It is curious that the analogy is so much more common in French. At least it would seem so, for I have noticed several examples in recent years. The scholar Jacques Schérer used the expression in his study of Diderot's dialogues entitled *Le Cardinal et l'orang-outang*. The popular novelist Jean d'Ormesson in his novel *Au plaisir de Dieu* presents a family tutor as follows: "Jean-Christophe Comte . . . as a true disciple of Socrates, claimed he taught us nothing. He simply revealed what we bore within ourselves. We bore a world in us, but we didn't know it. The instrument of this discovery, which I can truthfully say shook up our lives, this instrument was books. M. Comte accomplished perhaps only one thing, but it was decisive: he taught us how to read." Writers for the newspaper *Le Monde* seem especially addicted to the word. During just this year of 1975, the philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch was headlined as "a Socrates who delivers himself." And the critic and editor Jean Paulhan was described as a "Socratic midwife of talents who was not in favor of painless childbirth." A much more ambitious effort has been that of Doctor Jacques Ménétrier, the author of philosophical dialogues called *Mon Socrate* and *De la mesure de soi*. His term for his eschatological speculations is "maïeutique intime." In the second of these books his mouthpiece says to his friend: "So you propose that I should recast *My Socrates* applying maieutics to my own examination of conscience." As one may suspect, several of these examples are somewhat irresponsible, perhaps heralding the day when self-

respecting writers will avoid slipshod use of the expression.

LANGLEY: I quite agree with you. The expression has become a catchword, often without any clearer meaning than the word dialogue we started out to discuss.

FRANCIS: There is a different metaphor in Jean Piaget's *Sagesse et illusions de la philosophie*, which for the sake of variety might be proposed instead of midwifery. It is symbiosis, for the human being never succeeds in producing anything except "in symbiosis with another, even in the solitude of internal work."

TEDESCO: The analogy would certainly be more suitable for us, since not one of us has really been performing as a midwife here.

FRANCIS: Before we finish, I have another example I'd like to bring up. It is the religious existentialist Gabriel Marcel. Yes, Tedesco?

TEDESCO: How could I have forgotten that other religious existentialist Martin Buber with his principal theme of *ich und du*. However, first please permit me to cite one of the recent developments in Italian thought. It concerns Guido Calogero. I'd like to think that once again the dialogue form is taking on a renewed life in Italy, after the great age of the Renaissance and following the later examples of Galileo and then of Leopardi. Calogero's writings perhaps may prove that philosophical dialogue is not dead. The dialogue inserted in his *Logo e dialogo* is a gem. The author's spokesman Filotele confronts the dogmatist Eudeme and the skeptic Sofisomene. Filotele proves the necessity of dialogue by facing Eudeme with a dilemma: "Do not listen to me, for I have gone mad!" By obeying, Eudeme would be disobeying. Sofisomene confronts him with another dilemma: "Suppose that I have had a revelation that allows no doubt and that I announce that I will convey it to you in one hundred words, no more and no less, after which I no longer wish to be listened to whatever I say." The two dilemmas, widely as they differ, lead to the same conclusion. In each case Eudeme will continue to listen! The principle is summarized in these words: Nothing should be beyond discussion except the need for discussion itself.

LANGLEY: But as Maurois remarked, there comes a moment when discussion yields to action. Francis gave us that reference the other day.

FRANCIS: I don't suppose Calogero wants discussions to be interminable.

TEDESCO: In order that this one won't be, may I add just a little to that? Dialogue is the foundation of Calogero's thought as it was

for Plato, although he is not a Platonist in metaphysics. Dialogue is methodological for him as doubt was for Descartes. And if one has a message to deliver, one must understand his interlocutor. One must not only speak but listen.

FRANCIS: I'm reminded of Sartre's "Dialogue psychanalytique."

TEDESCO: Calogero explained his point in his article "Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Dialogue in Italy." The term "dialogue" is often used simply to indicate that certain people are, or should be, on "speaking terms" with each other. His philosophy is more than that. In a debate with a compatriot, V. Spirito, he defended his conception of the basic importance of "the rule of dialogue" against Spirito's argument that the supreme rule is provided by "science," which by its hypothetical and experimental approach to all problems of life is already "unifying the world" beyond all contrasting philosophies.

LANGLEY: Spirito is like Bertrand Russell.

FRANCIS: And like Bacon, as Diderot described him.

TEDESCO: As far as public affairs are concerned, Calogero follows the tradition of free discussion of Diderot and Russell. Speaking in Belgium, nearly twenty years back, he commented: "I have the impression that one doesn't run the risk in Belgium that one does in Italy when one speaks of *dialogue*, of being taken for the advocate of a certain politics of rapprochement [between Catholics and Communists]. . . . The law of dialogue determines the very ideal of democracy." Calogero takes the liberal socialist path in politics. Philosophically he differs from the Marxist for whom dialogue has been transformed via Hegel into the dialectic. The Marxist dialectic—the negation of the negation—is dialogistic on a different level.

FRANCIS: The dialogue between Communists and Catholics was engaged in France. Roger Garaudy was one leading Communist interlocutor. But I hear he has returned to religious faith.

TEDESCO: I suppose Calogero would say that that is the risk one must take, if it's true dialogue!

LANGLEY: Speaking of religion, doesn't the Jewish thinker Martin Buber also have what he calls a philosophy of dialogue?

TEDESCO: That is true. It would be interesting to compare Buber and Calogero. One is a religious existentialist; the other is a liberal rationalist. The style of the one is oracular and often obscure; the style of the other is perfectly lucid. The central role of dialogue in the philosophy of Buber is indicated by one of his admirers: "From Buber's basic premise: 'As I become, I say

Thou,' it follows that our belief in the reality of the external world comes from our relationship to other selves." The same writer states in another context that Buber leads those "who see dialogue, communication, and the I-Thou relationship . . . as the reality in which the self comes into being." Among those cited are Gabriel Marcel and Albert Camus.

FRANCIS: Perhaps it is relevant that Gabriel Marcel is treated in a survey of French philosophy under the title "Le Socratisme chrétien de Gabriel Marcel."

LANGLEY: I hope that's more than an echo of your Guez de Balzac's *Socrate chrétien*!

FRANCIS: It is not just an echo, as we can see from a passage of *Présence et immortalité*: "The function of the philosopher consists in bringing to the light of reflection, by a new type of maieutic, the implications of the life of thought, or rather of the life of faith . . . the term . . . brings out very well the Socratic aspect of my thought." Tedesco associated Buber with Marcel. Now Marcel recognized Buber as a fellow spirit, though he read Buber's *Ich und Du* long after developing his own conception of dialogue. I might add in connection with Socrates that the philosopher Paul Ricoeur observed in a conversation with Marcel that his colleague was Socratic, but not Platonic, "if Platonism means being carried off to an "elsewhere" or to an "over there." Still, Marcel was certainly a Platonist in another sense, as his *Journal métaphysique* indicates in these words: "Intelligibility itself transcends all principles and forms of a [certain] kind; it cannot be defined other than by an appeal to the very life of thought (which is what Plato saw better than anyone)."

TEDESCO: How near that is to Buber's remarks on Plato—on thinking as "a voiceless colloquy of the soul with itself." Buber tries to clarify the process in this way: "the first trying and testing of the thought . . . before the 'inner' court, in the platonic sense the stage of monologue, has besides the familiar form of its appearance another form in which dialogue plays a great part, well-known to Plato if to anyone." I could go on at length quoting from Buber. The term "dialogue" is found upon almost every page of certain of his works. Still, I must avoid becoming involved in a discussion of the theological ideas of Buber, for that's where more quoting would lead.

FRANCIS: Just as I must refrain from going into the theology of Gabriel Marcel. I believe we have established the importance of

the principle of dialogue in both thinkers, insofar as this can be done briefly.

LANGLEY: Apparently they both wrote a good deal about the principle, but did they practice it? I realize that they conversed a lot, but did they write any dialogues at all? Unless you can produce some, I don't grant that you have proved your case beyond question.

FRANCIS: I concede that Marcel wrote essays and philosophical dramas, but not dialogues.

TEDESCO: As for Martin Buber, his only dialogue known to me, *Daniel*, was published in 1913, years before his dialogistic philosophy culminated in *Ich und Du*. *Daniel* is divided into five parts in which the spokesman delivers his eloquent utterances on unity and self-realization to different listeners in each case. The beauty of the conversations cannot be denied. Yet there is no "vortex of dialectic" as with Santayana, little dialectic tension as in Calogero's exemplary piece. In fact, there is ambiguity in the very use of the term dialogue. At least I find it ambiguous to say, as Daniel does, "All poetry is dialogue, because all poetry is the shaping of polarity." He assigns this attribute to lyrical, epic, as well as dramatic poetry. It may be true, but it sounds too vague.

LANGLEY: I might, therefore, infer that neither Gabriel Marcel nor Martin Buber quite succeeded in using dialogue to present their views, in spite of their "dialogistic" philosophy and that Calogero used it only once, if in a very significant way. The questionable, or at any rate problematic, nature of the genre in our century could perhaps receive no better demonstration.

FRANCIS: I'll try to think of an answer to that. But it seems to be getting late. You recall that we had planned to arrange for our next evening at the end of our conversation tonight. However, before our discussion of dialogue as a weapon in religious and political controversy, there remains something incomplete with respect to Platonic dialogue. That is the question of Platonic love. It happens that day after tomorrow we are to join our wives to attend a performance of Congreve's *Way of the World* by the university players. Wouldn't we have time before they return from their luncheon to discuss the subject?

LANGLEY: So we'll meet for that purpose in our apartment.



### 3. The Dialogue of Love

Afternoon in Langley's apartment.  
Present are Langley, Tedesco, Francis,  
joined later by Mrs. Langley and Mrs. Tedesco.

TEDESCO: The other evening some passages of our conversation brought us close to the question of Platonic love, but we never really undertook to explain it. We should try to clarify the sexual implications, especially the association with a special kind of love that has not been openly discussed in our culture until recent times. It is a topic not easy to discuss impartially, although we should be able to do so. It is not surprising that there has been so much confusion about Platonic love from the very beginning, when the dialogues *Phaedrus* and *The Symposium* leave such an ambivalent impression. Plato seems to condemn boy-love as a debasement, to recommend it as a stage toward a higher stage of love of beauty in the Absolute, and to ridicule its vulgar forms. Socrates is made to distinguish the types and grade them according to their degrees of refinement; yet does he clearly repudiate even the vulgar types? The confusion seems to be reflected throughout the entire course of Platonism down to modern times.

LANGLEY: It is reflected in the very title of Giordano Bruno's *Eroici furori*, which suggests both erotic and heroic. In his translation of *The Heroic Frenzies* Paul E. Memmo encountered this problem. He wrote in the introduction that Bruno meant by the phrase to identify that species of intellectual aspiration Plato describes in *The Symposium*, "which partakes of the highest nobility, erotic in character, heroic in dignity, the fourth of the divine madnesses of Plato." In the *Cratylus*, Socrates sees in the word heroes only a slight alteration of Eros, "from whom the heroes sprang."

TEDESCO: Kierkegaard has something similar in his book *The Concept of Irony with constant reference to Socrates*. After comparing Socrates to Christ with respect to the emancipation of the latent powers of the individual, Kierkegaard goes on to say: "this . . .

calls to mind that species of love which Plato everywhere attributes to Socrates: 'pederasty' naturally with reference to the initial awakening of youth from the slumber of childhood and the coming to self that ensues." Kierkegaard quotes from *The Symposium*: "For they love not boys, but intelligent beings whose reason is beginning to be developed, much about the time when their beards begin to grow."

LANGLEY: There may be a parallel with a scoutmaster and his troop or with a priest preparing a child for a communion, but that involves an earlier age of the child.

FRANCIS: In Rousseau's *Emile*, the age for religious initiation corresponds approximately, like the age for baptism of certain Christian sects or the rite of passage for certain tribes. However, I'd like to go back to the point about the misunderstanding of Platonic love through the ages. The two extremes of misunderstanding in France might be represented by Antoine d'Urfé and Nicolas Boileau. D'Urfé's brother, by the way, was the author of the Platonizing pastoral romance *L'Astrée*. In Antoine d'Urfé's dialogue on "La Vaillance," his spokesman Uranophile declares: "Always remember above all that the true means of acquiring valor is to separate and divert the soul from that too vile love which binds it to the body—in order to convert it to a loftier love, one worthier of its celestial origins." D'Urfé, nevertheless, did not misunderstand Plato as egregiously as did Boileau in the opposite direction. Boileau wrote in his twelfth satire, *Sur l'équivoque*: "What was Socrates, honor of profane Greece, if more closely examined, but a mortal drawn to evil, and despite the virtue he paraded, a most equivocal friend of the young Alcibiades?"

LANGLEY: Isn't the most egregious error of all the one enshrined in François Villon's *Ballade*? I mean the line which changes the sex of the young friend:

Dictes-moy où, n'en quel pays,  
Est Flora, la belle Rommaine:  
Archipiada, ne Thais  
Qui fut sa cousine germaine;

FRANCIS: Evidently that transvestism was not of Villon's making. Various mediaeval writers thought the handsome Greek was a woman.

TEDESCO: I have another example of transsexual translation, so to speak, in the shift between the passage on sexual attraction in *The*

*Republic* and a similar passage in Lucretius. In Shorey's version, Socrates speaks as follows to Glaucon: "all adolescents in some sort sting and stir the amorous lover of youth and appear to him desirable. . . . One, because his nose is tip-tilted, you will praise as piquant, the beak of another you will pronounce right royal . . . the swarthy are of manly aspect, the white are children of the gods divinely fair . . . some lover . . . can feel no distaste for sallowness when it accompanies the blooming time of youth." Apparently a strong libido will find a suitable target in any young person. Lucretius changes the sex of the love object, but he also adds the notion of sexual selection, the notion of differing tastes. Here are a few phrases from Munro's old translation: "men . . . blinded by passion, attribute to the beloved those advantages which are not really theirs. . . . the stringy and wizened [is] a gazelle; the dumpy and dwarfish is one of the graces . . . the big and overgrown is full of dignity." You get the idea: the boys have been replaced by girls.

FRANCIS: Why, that's just the passage that Molière did little more than set it into neat alexandrines.

TEDESCO: Yes, the significant change took place between Plato and Lucretius.

LANGLEY: A deep cultural change or merely a change in tolerated attitudes?

FRANCIS: More a matter of what was no longer openly tolerated, I imagine. The prominent apologist André Gide, in his dialogue *Corydon*, chides the old French translators of bucolic poetry for changing the homosexual episodes into heterosexual ones. There were conscious efforts by early writers to make Socrates acceptable. The erudite *libertin* of the seventeenth century La Mothe Le Vayer undertook to defend him in *De la vertu des payens* against the charges of drunkenness and pederasty leveled by early Christian writers. According to La Mothe, his love for Alcibiades was just Platonic in the ideal sense. He wished to inspire in the youth the love of virtue and guide him in a quest for "cette belle Philosophie" which would give him knowledge of one sole God. La Mothe then goes on: "that is why Xenophon has Socrates pride himself on being an excellent go-between, which must be understood in a spiritual sense." La Mothe's next remark is just as ingenuous: "Plato has him say with the same boldness that all he knows is about love. If we must justify him by other evidence, everyone knows that besides his Xanthippe, he had still another wife: this may show that his affections did not offend nature."

This work of La Mothe's is not a dialogue, unlike many of his compositions.

LANGLEY: So La Mothe Le Vayer composed Platonic dialogues?

FRANCIS: Indeed he did, even a "Banquet sceptique" that recalls *The Symposium* in a rough way. Here, however, he does not discourse on Platonic love. The dialogue is a grab bag of reports of curious sexual customs he'd read about in miscellaneous travel accounts. There is no clash of opinions in it, no Socratic irony either.

TEDESCO: Socrates and Plato do turn up in the strangest shapes in some of the modern writers.

FRANCIS: One of the oddest is that in which Plato appears in Fontenelle's dialogue pitting him against Margaret of Scotland. This Plato is like the womanizer Hircan of another Margaret's *Heptameron*: his love is for the physical realities. Margaret, on the other hand, is like Parlamente in the *Heptameron*. She has addressed herself to the wrong consultant if she expects him to defend ideal love against lust. Fontenelle was aware of the distortion, and made partial amends in his *Jugement de Pluton*, where the real Plato complains that Margaret is made to speak like a platonist, whereas he is made to speak as perhaps Margaret would have done: "I am no longer the divine Plato in that Dialogue." He is no longer a homosexual either. I waive the question whether the historical Plato ever was one in reality.

LANGLEY: This reminds one of the bowdlerizing of Shakespeare, except that there it was sexuality that was expurgated, not the aberrant forms. It would interest a sociologist of literature to trace the full extent of this expurgation of Platonic love. Much of it was unconscious, I am sure. This idea is suggested by the ambiguity of the term itself. It may be of interest to note how Shelley, who certainly knew what the words meant, handled the passages of Pausanias's speech in the *Symposium* which refer to the practice of love. In his translation, Shelley omitted some parts and translated other references in such a way that the sex of the persons who are the objects of love and desire is difficult to guess. I shall give only one sentence of Shelley's translation: "The votaries of this deity (Venus Pandemos) seek the body rather than the soul, and the ignorant rather than the wise, disdaining all that is honorable and lovely, and considering how they shall best satisfy their sensual necessities." It may be compared with Jowett's version which runs: "The love who is the offspring of the common Aphrodite is essentially common, and has no discrimi-

nation, being such as the meaner sort of men feel, and is apt to be of women as well as of youths."

TEDESCO: How can you be sure that Shelley deliberately neutralized the passage?

LANGLEY: Well, the essay on this dialogue, which he left unfinished, shows clearly that he was embarrassed by the subject and torn between his admiration for the Greek genius and his reprobation of certain practices.

FRANCIS: The case of Hippolyte Taine is rather curious in this connection. I can scarcely believe that he did not know what he was doing when he wrote his essay on "Les Jeunes Gens de Platon," first dated 1855, when he was twenty-seven. An uninformed reader would never suspect that the friendships described might contain homosexual features. Taine describes Lysis and Menxenus in these words: "That is generous and charming. . . . What I like here is that it is so natural. These children let themselves go; it is nature that does everything in them. How far are we from that! We have been deformed, not formed, by our education. Twenty centuries of precepts weigh on our festivals." Regarding Socrates and Alcibiades, Taine gives no hint as to their relationship. He could hardly have been unmindful of the ambivalence of the following passage: "I would call attention to the statue of Charmides in the museum. The beauty of the body is marvelous, slender and strong, exquisitely proportioned. These sculptors would never have shaped that massive Venus, nor the three fleshy Graces of Raphael." Was Taine unconscious of his own feelings?

TEDESCO: Nietzsche was not so naive. In *Gotterdämmerung*, under the caption "The Problem of Socrates," he calls him a great "erotic." In the same book, he writes: "Philosophy in the manner of Plato should rather be defined as an erotic contest, as a further development and inward intensification of the old agonal gymnastics . . . . What finally emerged from this was a new artistic form of the Greek agon, dialectics."

LANGLEY: You have already quoted for us the remarks of Kierkegaard in the same vein. It is evidently from Nietzsche that Huizinga derived his concept of the play element in philosophy.

TEDESCO: I do believe that it was more than a game for Nietzsche. It became a war!

LANGLEY: It is interesting that a writer like D. H. Lawrence has one of the characters in *The First Lady Chatterley* reflect on Socrates and Plato in the way that he does. He is struck by the excitement

which they got out of argument, reason, and thought. "They're awfully like little boys who have just discovered that they can think and are beside themselves about it. They're so thrilled that nothing else matters, only thinking and knowledge." It's as if Lawrence considered thinking to be an adolescent activity.

FRANCIS: Allow me to throw in this document from the correspondence of Marcel Proust. He wrote at the age of seventeen to a friend: "I'd like to talk to you about two Masters of fine wisdom who in their lives gathered only the flower, Socrates and Montaigne. They permit very young men to 'amuse themselves' so as to learn about all pleasures and to release the surplus of their tender feelings. They believed that these sensuous and intellectual friendships are better than liaisons with foolish and depraved women when one is young, yet has a vivid sense of beauty, as well as 'senses!'" Notwithstanding, young Proust insisted that he disagreed with these masters of delicate wisdom. "I don't consider myself a pederast. The very idea gives me pain. Morally I endeavor, were it only for the sake of elegance, to remain pure." One can imagine with what alacrity the author of *Corydon* would have seized upon this! Unlike Gide, Proust would never be free from a sense of guilt. Perhaps that's why his portrayal of the subject in his great book is so much more powerful than that of Gide in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*.

TEDESCO: Isn't Proust's reference to Montaigne one more example of the propensity of homosexuals to coopt figures of the past, who cannot defend themselves?

FRANCIS: It appears that Proust later realized that he had been mistaken in pairing Montaigne with Socrates.

LANGLEY: What the young Proust said about wishing to remain pure shows the force of social pressure. This had a similar effect, and often a more lasting one, on others besides Proust. Perhaps the gentle skeptic Santayana might recognize himself here. At a rather advanced age, he wrote to a friend that he had begun to realize that he was basically homosexual. Could it have been Proust's book that opened his eyes, eyes that had so many times and through so many years pored over the pages of Plato? He read *A la recherche du temps perdu* in the 1920s, when he was about sixty. The three dialogues he later added to his *Dialogues in Limbo* present aspects of the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades not emphasized in the earlier writings. His *Platonism and the Spiritual Life* fits well in the idealizing tradition that includes Emerson and Walter Pater. John Jay Chapman made fun of the

Loeb translation of Lucian, which reenforces that tradition. For example, where Socrates calls himself a pederast in Greek, in English he calls himself simply a lover. A brain-washed reader will take that to mean a lover of the Ideal, of Absolute Beauty and all that! One suspects, however, more ambiguity if not equivocation, in the case of Pater.

FRANCIS: Reminding us again of Boileau's satire *Sur l'équivoque!*

TEDESCO: There has always been that contrary tradition, though much weaker, a tradition that made mock of Plato. Your allusion suggests we might add more about Lucian, whom Chapman regarded as a more wholesome teacher than Plato. This is Lucian as the satirist of boy-love and of the Greek philosophers. A typical passage occurs in his *Dialogues of Courtesans*: "This Aristenaitos loves boys. Under scientific pretexts, he lives with the prettiest youths. He has already held strange conversations with Clinias and promised to make him equal with the Gods. And he even reads with him the dialogues of love of the old philosophers with their disciples."

FRANCIS: A friend of Gide, Pierre Louÿs, translated that dialogue. Perhaps he belongs in that minor tradition. The author of *Aphrodite* knew which sex was the fair one. Gide, in fact, reproached him on this score.

LANGLEY: One feature of Plato's dialogues, and indeed of almost all dialogues ever since, becomes a glaring lack today. It is the absence of women.

FRANCIS: I don't see any here either!

TEDESCO: We are following a perhaps regrettable precedent.

LANGLEY: Let me finish my point! Lucian's segregation of the *Dialogues of Courtesans* highlights the sexual discrimination involved. If Socrates quotes Diotima, it is not like having a woman participate directly.

TEDESCO: Who was it who said of the highly vaunted ancient Greek civilization: It produced only three famous women:—a courtesan, a lesbian, and a shrew? Certainly Socrates did not accept Xanthippe as an equal, even on the eve of his death. He consigned her to the kitchen, even then.

LANGLEY: I know of Sappho, but who was the famous courtesan?

TEDESCO: I suppose it was Aspasia, the mistress of Pericles.

FRANCIS: It must be conceded that the French eighteenth century, despite the importance of the *salons*, was hardly more guiltless in that respect. And in the preceding century, Mademoiselle de Scudéry had to write her own conversations. There was, of

course, one celebrated hostess of a *salon*, Julie de Lespinasse, in Diderot's *Rêve de D'Alembert*.

TEDESCO: Isn't the reason a perfectly simple one, that doesn't require invoking sex discrimination? The presence of women will inevitably change the dialogue into drama. Perhaps Landor's "Epicurus, Leontion and Ternissa" is an exception to this rule. Usually the genre cannot support the tensions which are bound to develop.

FRANCIS: It will split apart, if not explode into violence like Ionesco's *Leçon*! But if that were all, how could these tensions not have distorted the Platonic dialogues, for there the sensual factor was present, at least potentially? In fact, it does introduce a certain degree of tension in *The Symposium*.

TEDESCO: There Socrates remains the master of the situation throughout and doesn't allow the tension to get out of hand.

FRANCIS: At the beginning of the eighteenth century, a dialogue was produced which brought together Agathon and Aspasia in a discussion of love. It's by Rémond le Grec, entitled *Agathon dialogue sur la volupté*. A special meaning is given to *volupté* by Aspasia, who tells Agathon that it is "ce goût de l'esprit, c'est cette réflexion qui distingue la volupté d'avec la débauche." In another place, Rémond distinguishes *volupté* from *plaisir*. The former belongs to the soul, the latter only to the senses. A soul capable of *volupté* must have purified itself from the passions which involve pleasure alone. Most startling, perhaps, is the proposition stated by Aspasia that "Provided the reason maintains control, anything is permitted." Of course, Aspasia is rather unique.

TEDESCO: As for women in dialogues, didn't you, Francis, mention Margaret of Scotland, in Fontenelle?

FRANCIS: That's true, I did. And one can find several others in his *Dialogues des morts*. They're all historical personages, usually members of royalty, except for the Marchioness of his *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*. She is like Julie in Diderot's *Rêve de D'Alembert*, there to be instructed, not like Aspasia in Rémond le Grec, who was a professor herself. In any case, none of Fontenelle's ladies entered in upon any profound analysis of ideas like the protagonists of the Socratic dialogues.

LANGLEY: You might say that there was no Socratic irony involved, only the irony of the *salon*.

TEDESCO: And there was certainly no philosophical midwifery.

FRANCIS: Renan thought that philosophical dialogue had declined



because there were too many women around. He had but recently left his seminary.

TEDESCO: Yet we exaggerated when we said that sexual tensions are bound to arise if women take part in dialogue. Certainly, Francis, you were overdramatizing with your reference to Ionesco's play, where a tutorial session ends in the sadistic murder of the girl student at the hands of her teacher. What you said about Aspasia brings one back to the Lyonesse Renaissance, when Louise Labé wrote sensual sonnets and a dialogue entitled *Débat de folie et d'amour*. One also recalls the women who discuss the tales told in the *Heptameron*, as well as the ladies who have the functions of hostess or mistress of ceremonies in Castiglione's *Cortegiano*. I also think we were too hasty in dismissing Plato's Diotima. Langley's remark should have reminded me of the role of women given this name in German literature. Diotima is more than a symbol for Hemsterhuis, for Friedrich Schlegel, and for Hölderlin in his novel *Hyperion*. The Dutch Hemsterhuis wrote dialogues in French, which were read by Novalis, F. Jacobi, and Schlegel. For Hemsterhuis, Diotima represents, not that of Plato, but the friend of Hemsterhuis and Jacobi, Princess Gallitzin. Jacobi translated Hemsterhuis's dialogue *Alexis*. Incidentally, Schlegel presents women in prominent speaking roles in his *Dialogue on Poetry*. There is also Schelling's philosophical dialogue *Clara*, perhaps a tribute to his wife, Caroline. In an essay on Diotima, Schlegel celebrated the woman who is neither courtesan nor housewife, in other words, neither Aspasia nor Mme Jourdain of Molière's *Bourgeois-Gentilhomme*. Schlegel declared: "Women are treated as unjustly in poetry as in life. The feminine ones are not idealistic, and the idealistic, not feminine."

FRANCIS: Quite so, women are not found discussing high philosophy. Their subject is not metaphysics nor epistemology, but love and marriage. In Castiglione, the topics discussed are courtesy and behavior, except for Bembo's disquisition on Platonism.

LANGLEY: Speaking of women engaged in philosophical dialogue, I wonder why Francis didn't mention Molière's *Femmes savantes*. As I recall, they are made the butts of satire. Henriette is the only one who is not made fun of by the playwright for she accepts her traditional role of future wife and mother and doesn't aspire like her sister and the other women to be an intellectual.

FRANCIS: That is true enough, although Molière also makes fun of masculine pedants and snobs. I suppose Fontenelle marks some progress toward enlightenment, in this regard, in his *Entretiens*

*sur la pluralité des mondes*. But he is perhaps a little condescending, nevertheless. Fontenelle thinks a garden under a starry sky is just the place for gallant converse with the attractive marquise. His explanations of Copernicus and his speculations on inhabited worlds beyond are put forth as lightheartedly as is his comparison of the charms of blondes and brunettes. Incidentally, the gentleman, Fontenelle, also prefers blondes. Here is a typical example of his wit. The lady begs to be reassured regarding the movement of the Earth: Is there nothing to fear on this pirouetting top? "Well," replies her friend, "let's have the Earth borne by four elephants as they think in India." She approves of the idea: "I'll wager that if they thought that the Earth was in the least danger of moving, they'd double the elephants." Her friend agrees: "One should not spare the elephants if one wishes to sleep in security." The second evening they discuss the Moon. In a striking comparison, he evokes the amazement of the American natives upon seeing the Spaniards arrive. How with their frail canoes could they imagine ships able to cross the ocean? "Then one fine day there appear huge hulks flying over the sea, that vomit flame and throw onto the shore unknown beings, armored in iron and brandishing lightning in their hands. Where could they have come from? Who placed fire at their command? Are they children of the Sun? For assuredly they are not men. After that, one cannot swear that there won't some day be travel between the Moon and the Earth. It's true one will have to cross that great expanse of air and sky. But did the wide ocean seem easier to cross to the American natives? . . . And now people are already beginning to fly a little." She counters, with some vexation: "So, might the Moon-folk have already been here?" In their conversations, the fanciful, otherworldly aspect sometimes prevails over the presumably scientific aspect. At one point the pastoral world of Honoré d'Urfé's *L'Astrée* looms into view as seen from Jupiter or Mars. Amorous persiflage comes in naturally when Venus is considered: "No doubt the little nations of Venus are made up only of Céladons and Silvandres." At other times the reader may imagine he has strayed into Cyrano's book of fantastic travels, only to return again to factual topics. The subglacial cold of Saturn makes the marquise shiver after the fierce heat of Mercury. With preciousity, Fontenelle draws a parallel between mathematics and love. "A fixed star is self-luminous like the Sun; therefore it must be the center and heart of a world and have planets circling around it." The marquise questions the

necessity, and her friend replies: “The steps of mathematical reasoning are like those of love. You cannot concede ever so little to a lover without his requiring more, and that can lead pretty far. Likewise, grant a mathematician the slightest postulate, and he will derive from it a consequence that you must allow, and from this still another and another to a result that will amaze you. . . . the Moon must be inhabited because it resembles the Earth, and the other planets because they resemble the Moon.”

TEDESCO: If our wives were here, they’d teach you soon enough that that sort of gallantry doesn’t work any more, if it ever did!

FRANCIS: Oh, I doubt that Fontenelle’s speaker had any such designs. His astronomy lessons were fittingly described by Auguste Comte to the lady listener in the *Catéchisme positiviste*: “One of the most eminent precursors of positivism, the wise Fontenelle, explained admirably to your sex the philosophical bearing of the movements of the Earth to the extent suitable for that time, in his charming little work. Its apparent frivolity did not deprive it of its just immortality.”

I will admit, as I think back on Fontenelle, that putting women into philosophical dialogue will not necessarily cause it to break up. For there are the other possibilities: the way of Molière and also the way of Fontenelle and Marivaux, the way of refined coquetry.

LANGLEY: Or *The Way of the World* of William Congreve. I expect we’ll be off to that matinee when our wives get here.

TEDESCO: Here they come now. (Enter Mrs. Tedesco and Mrs. Langley.)

HELEN TEDESCO: Jane Francis will meet us at the college theater.

## 4. The Dialogue of Controversy

**After dinner at Francis's house.  
Present, the Francises, the Tedescos, and the Castles.**

FRANCIS: It's too bad that the Langleys couldn't be here.

JANE FRANCIS: They had to go to that reception at the Saxons' place. You know it's for Professor Norman and his wife.

HELEN TEDESCO: Oh yes, the man that's expected to head the English department.

TEDESCO: We had agreed to discuss the dialogue in religious and political controversy. I wonder if Langley, after all, was glad to stay away out of fear of pedantry.

FRANCIS: No, I'm sure that was not the case. When he told us about the conflict in dates, he offered to take part by proxy, as it were. To be exact, he was going to prepare a little essay on the topic for us to read, to start off the discussion. But he didn't deliver it to me. Did he perhaps give it to one of you?

TEDESCO: He gave it to the Castles, I believe, to bring over. He was not reluctant, apparently, to submit us to pedantry, while being safe from retaliation.

ISABEL CASTLE: I don't think his essay is too pedantic at all. I even enjoyed looking it over and was glad to have an opportunity to see what you people, or rather you men, have been up to while we've been away in Spain. If you don't mind, then, I'll read it to you.

### Langley's Essay

Since we won't be enjoying dinner with you at this time, I thought I at least might be able to share it vicariously if I began by recalling the long-standing relationship between dinner and dialogue, from the Table Talks of Plutarch to those of Martin

Luther and since, down to those of Immanuel Kant and beyond. No doubt the Table Talk of George Sedley is not in dialogue, while the talk at Oliver Wendell Holmes's Breakfast Table is mostly monologue, whether by the Autocrat or the Professor. The title is used by Archibald Henderson for his "conversations on things in general between George Bernard Shaw and his biographer." But no dinner is ever served. Even the celebrated wit of GBS fails to raise these conversations much above the ephemeral level. Such, and worse, will be the fate of all those recorded conversations that radio and television have been providing for us in recent decades.

For all that, the connection with the table supplies a handy way of separating the type called dialogues of the dead, for the speakers there are no longer distracted by thoughts of dinner, whether just consumed or yet to come. Despite all the leisure they presumably enjoy, most of their conversations are mercifully brief. The Lucianic convention of brevity was too strongly established. Such is not, to be sure, the attribute of the *Imaginary Conversations* of Walter Savage Landor, where most of the speakers are presented as still living. Rudolf Hirzel showed that ever since the *Symposiums* of Plato and Xenophon, dinner and after-dinner conversations have formed almost a literary genre in themselves. Hirzel also pointed out their normal place as a part of early Jewish and Christian customs, in which eating together included planned and guided religious conversations. The polar opposites, no doubt, are provided by the *salons* and literary cafés, and perhaps by our own gathering here tonight, where I expect that there will be very little piety displayed.

One might think of the *Cena trimalchionis* of Petronius as deriving from the *Symposium*, not to mention the satires of Juvenal or the *Saturnalia* of Macrobius, or that endless stag party in *Le Moyen de parvenir* of Béroalde de Verville. Some of these productions have been simply listed as miscellanies. Northrop Frye surveys the territory along different lines, assigning such works to the type of the Menippean satire, with many compositions having little or no dialogue at all. It is noteworthy that he sees Shaw's comedy tending toward a symposium form. He finds a modern development in the country-house weekends of the novels of Thomas Love Peacock and Aldous Huxley. I would include *The New Republic* of W. H. Mallock.

In our conversations I have been cast as the skeptic, if not the scoffer, in regard to the importance to be accorded to the

dialogue form in literature, and especially in regard to the viability of the maieutic method. And I am not going to step out of character now. The references I have made to symposia and table talk indicate that we are dealing with a false genre, or at best an intermediate one. Unless the writer is someone like Plato or Lucian, someone original and resourceful, the lines of force tend to throw these productions into the adjacent, more magnetic genres of social comedy or novel. I take the statement of Northrop Frye as lending support to my opinion. If there is a genre here it is the Menippean satire, which overlaps dialogue and envelops it as merely a subordinate procedure. Perhaps Francis would agree that Boileau's Third Satire is another proof of the point I wish to make. Another example is the *Satire Ménippée*, a collection of separate speeches or harangues without interplay among themselves. These discourses express the viewpoint of the "politicals" who strove to find a middle position in the religious strife of the late sixteenth century between the Holy League, led by the House of Guise, and the Huguenots, under Henry of Navarre. Clearly the collection is an important historical document, but it is not a dialogue. The same might be said of most of the Martin Marprelate papers of a corresponding period in England.

If you wish to document political, social, or religious history by means of dialogues, you will find them insufficient. They serve to supplement other documents, often to dramatize them, but more than that they cannot do. Elizabeth Merrill's survey of the dialogue in English literature is revealing. Her chapter on polemic dialogue would afford a highly fragmentary view of English history, and it is not her fault. It is for lack of dialogues to represent the adversaries in the crucial issues that divided the nation during the various periods. Neither in Britain nor in America can we discover enough significant examples to illuminate the march of history even by flickering fits and starts.

There is, however, one juncture in which dialogue played an important part, and it is in the realm of thought rather than that of action. It is the philosophical controversy which brought Berkeley, the third earl of Shaftesbury, and Bernard Mandeville into conflict. Here we can indeed speak of a battle of dialogues involving profound ethical questions. Admittedly, it lacked the heroics that Tedesco noted in the case of Bruno, or the tragic aspect under which he saw Galileo's *Dialoghi* or Pascal's *Provincial Letters*. Shaftesbury's dialogue *The Moralists* was the first, appearing in

1709 as part of his *Characteristics*. Berkeley's *Three Dialogues of Hylas and Philonous*, published in 1713, don't belong to this story. Mandeville, the author of *The Fable of the Bees* (1714), added six dialogues in 1729 to this work attacking Shaftesbury's optimistic doctrines. The illustrious Berkeley satirized both Shaftesbury and Mandeville in his lengthy *Alciphron*. Mandeville replied with his *Letter to Dion*, in which he protested that Berkeley's dialogue was an unjust caricature. Shaftesbury, the target of both these writers, could not defend himself, for he had died in 1713.

We have already touched on Shaftesbury's espousal of innate ideas. Despite being tutored by Locke, he was close to the Cambridge Platonists in this respect. In his *Characteristics*, he appeals to readers of various schools of opinion, including freethinkers, but excepting Hobbesians, and offends only the orthodox believers in revelation. It is not merely in *The Moralists* that this enthusiast sets forth his belief in an inborn sense of justice. So when I speak of a battle of dialogues, I am stretching the point. The replies of Mandeville and Berkeley are addressed to the *Characteristics* as a whole.

There is no doubt about the main topic of Mandeville's dialogues. It is the views of Shaftesbury. What contributes to the suspense is the question of just what is the author's own position. Before that becomes clear, the reader is kept guessing. By the way, harking back to what we said about the rarity of women in philosophical dialogue, there is one in the first dialogue. The manner in which the author disposes of her is significant. Fulvia engages briefly in conversation with Cleomenes and Horatio, but she becomes impatient with their intellectual debate, which she pretends to be above her head. So she leaves them to seek people on her own level. She never rejoins their oversubtle discussions. (How over-subtle may be seen from the following.) Cleomenes, who really agrees with *The Fable of the Bees*, affects to outdo Shaftesbury in altruistic optimism, by this means reducing him to absurdity. But at what point does Mandeville leave satire behind? Cleomenes is made to be too devious by far in his parody of the excesses of Shaftesbury's rhetoric. It has been said that Mandeville was to the optimism of Shaftesbury what Voltaire was to that of Leibniz. However, we know what to make of Pangloss and Candide; we don't always know where we are with Cleomenes. Nor indeed does Horatio, who declares at one point: "He talks so diametrically opposite to the opinion which he is known everywhere to defend of late that I don't know what to make of

him. Cleomenes must have some Design in overacting the part he pretends to have chosen." Previously, Cleomenes had believed no man really virtuous. Now he affects to have come around to Shaftesbury's benevolent view of mankind. It's as if he had been converted from Mandeville to Shaftesbury. In fact, all along he has been maneuvering to lead Horatio into a discussion with him on a subject Horatio finds repugnant. And what is this subject? Nothing less than *The Fable of the Bees*, which he had understood to be an odious book, one no gentleman would wish to read. Cleomenes, by his stratagem, involves Horatio in a discussion that before the end of the sixth dialogue has won Horatio over to the doctrine propounded in the *Fable*.

Horatio concedes: "I am your Convert, and shall henceforth look upon the *Fable of the Bees* very differently from what I did; for tho' in the *Characteristicks* the Language and the Diction are better, the system of Man's Sociableness is more lovely and more plausible, and Things are set off with more Art and Learning; yet in the other there is certainly more Truth, and Nature is more faithfully copied in it, almost everywhere." Cleomenes pursues the lesson he has been teaching Horatio: "My Friend, the Author of the *Fable*, to engage and keep his Readers in good Humour, seems to be very merry, and to do something else, whilst he detects the Corruption of our Nature; and points indirectly at the Necessity, not only of Revelation and Believing, but likewise of the Practice of Christianity." This puzzles Horatio who says: "I have not observ'd that: Which Way has he done it indirectly?" Cleomenes explains: "By exposing . . . the Vanity of the World . . . and the Insufficiency of Human Reason and Heathen Virtue to procure real Felicity." He summarizes his judgment of Shaftesbury: "I agree with you, that he was a Man of Erudition, and a very polite Writer; he has display'd a copious Imagination, and a fine Turn of Thinking . . . But the Ideas he had form'd of the Goodness and Excellency of our Nature, were as romantick and chimerical as they are beautiful and amiable; that he labour'd hard to unite two Contraries that can never be reconciled together, Innocence of Manners and worldly Greatness; that to compass this End he favour'd Deism, and under Pretence of lashing Priestcraft and Supersition, attack'd the Bible itself; and lastly, that by ridiculing many Passages of Holy Writ, he seems to have endeavour'd to sap the Foundation of all Reveal'd Religion, with Design of establishing Heathen Virtue on the Ruins of Christianity."



A reader of Mandeville is already too well-schooled in his paradoxical methods, in what in our day has been called, in another connection, Aesopian language, to take at full value the last statement of Cleomenes. It sounds rather too much like the attacks of orthodox churchmen on his own *Fable of the Bees*. Two words may epitomize Mandeville's procedure: paradox and parody. To thread one's way through them may be as intriguing as finding one's way through the subtleties of that play of Congreve's we saw, nearly contemporary indeed. Perhaps Francis may allow me to allude also to another near contemporary: Marivaux.

After Berkeley's *Alciphron* came out, Mandeville wrote in his *Letter to Dion*: "Your Crito and Euphranor are very good Characters, but what I admire most in them, is the consummate patience in keeping Company and bearing for a whole Week together, with two such insupportable, out of the way Rascals, as you have represented Alciphron and Lysicles to be." The character of Alciphron is more kindly presented than that of Lysicles, who appears as an arrant cynic. Some readers might have felt that the mocking style of the *Fable* was not very different from Lysicles's cocky immoralism. Shaftesbury would perhaps have had more reason to complain, despite the gentlemanly demeanor attributed to Alciphron by the author. Not only because Alciphron represents a caricature of his thought, but also because Alciphron's atheism or agnosticism is remote from Shaftesbury's enthusiastic deism and belief in an inner moral sense. Shaftesbury might also have decried being made into a boon companion of the "rascal" Lysicles.

If we can forget that Alciphron and Lysicles were designed as satires of Shaftesbury and Mandeville, we can sincerely admire the art with which Berkeley put together the elaborate structure of argument and counter argument of the seven dialogues of which the work is composed. Euphranor and Crito are country gentlemen who receive the visit of the big-city wits Alciphron and Lysicles. The opening somewhat resembles that of Pascal's *Provincial Letters*. Euphranor expresses curiosity about the "new" sect of freethinkers in the same way that Louis de Montalte does in respect to the Jesuits. The reader rather expects that Alciphron will serve a function like that of the Jesuit Father. But Berkeley's dialogues proceed quite otherwise. The subtitle of the work is *The Minute Philosopher*. It refers to a type of superficial "philoso-

pher" Berkeley saw spreading as a result of the writings of Anthony Collins, Shaftesbury, and Mandeville.

The freethinkers are forced to yield step-by-step, and Anglican Christianity triumphs completely. A reader may object that Crito and Euphranor are on the same side, although of different temperaments, and that it might not be entirely sportsmanlike to pit them against Alciphron and Lysicles separately. For the latter do not cooperate effectively, in fact they could hardly do so, since their views do not coincide. (See the fifth dialogue, for an example of dramatic conflict provoked between them by Crito.) Instead of answering Crito, Lysicles turns upon Alciphron, whom he thinks too conciliatory. At this moment Crito smilingly glances at Euphranor and the silent narrator, obviously soliciting the connivance of the reader. In the same dialogue, Crito retorts to a bantering remark of Lysicles: "If you have a mind to argue we will argue; if you have more mind to jest, we will laugh with you." The rejoinder is typical of Crito's caustic temper. The four interlocutors are clearly delineated: Euphranor, courteous and a little naive; Crito, critical and aggressive; Lysicles, presumptuous and superficial; Alciphron, well-meaning and inclined to yield, not always because he is refuted, but in order, it seems, to avoid acrimony. Berkeley deserves credit for presenting him thus. Lysicles, on the other hand, qualifies for the role of the philosophical *alazon*. Euphranor is not exactly an *ieron*. Crito comes the closest to this role, but he is not consistent.

A modern reader will remember such curious matters as one that is offered in the sixth dialogue. Euphranor and Crito scoff at the claims of the Egyptians and the Chinese to great antiquity, while failing to apply the same critical standards to the Hebrews. To be sure, the future Bishop of Cloyne accepts Bishop Usher's date of 4004 B.C. for the Creation.

In the conclusion, the spokesman for orthodox doctrine summarizes cogently the course and upshot of the discussion: "Sceptic as you are, you own it probable there is a God, certain that the Christian Religion is useful, possible it may be true, certain that, if it be, the Minute Philosophers are in a bad way. . . . A Minute Philosopher, therefore, that would act a consistent part, should have the Diffidence, the Modesty . . . as well as the Doubts of a Sceptic; not pretend to an Ocean of Light, and then lead us to an Abyss of Darkness." The lesson here is not very different from that of Pascal in some of his *Pensées*. Moreover, it prefigures,

though in another spirit, what Hume will write in a passage of his *Dialogues on Natural Religion* on the value of skepticism as preparation for embracing religion. It is the passage I quoted in our second conversation: "To be a philosophical Sceptic, is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian." Hume's work was much too late, of course, to be part of the battle of the dialogues.

One cannot dispute the importance of the dialogue form for philosophical controversy in the English Enlightenment. It is true that the thoughts of Shaftesbury, Mandeville, Berkeley, and Hume were also set forth in essay and treatise. Only a part of the *Characteristics* is in dialogue, hardly any of *The Fable of the Bees* as such. Berkeley's and Hume's other works were enough to establish their place in English philosophy, but neither thinker would have been so attractive to the common reader had they not written their dialogues.

FRANCIS: Thank you, Mrs. Castle, from all of us, for reading Langley's essay so graciously and gracefully.

JANE FRANCIS: Before you begin your discussion, I'll bring in some more tea and coffee.

ISABEL CASTLE: Oh, excuse me! There is something written here that I had not noticed before. It is a note Langley must have intended to insert somewhere in his essay. It reads like this:

Although Hume's dialogue is later than the others, I cannot help but think that it is closely related to them, not only in subject, the question of deism, but also in regard to the point we were discussing earlier. The problem of the dialogue form itself, its appropriateness and validity for modern times, these are topics that concerned both Shaftesbury and Hume. And it is perhaps not out of place to mention that David Hume acquired his copy of the *Characteristics* at the susceptible age of fifteen. I examined this copy when I was visiting the University of Nebraska library recently. Unfortunately, except for a cross or an underlined word here and there, I detected no trace of feedback. But that he read it seems evident. The last printed page is missing from the dialogue *The Moralists*, and the same hand that inscribed the signature "David Home" [sic] on the backs of the front covers of the three volumes seems to have supplied the missing sentence.

TEDESCO: I'm glad you read that note. It is an indication of a certain degree of continuity preserved by the dialogue form

through time. We can even trace this thread into eighteenth century Germany. Students of the German *Aufklärung* are aware of Shaftesbury's influence on the Grecian hedonism of Wieland, himself a dialogue writer. Shaftesbury's notion of the poet as Prometheus will inspire the thoughts on genius of pre-romantics such as Herder. Schiller will combine Kant's concept of moral duty with Shaftesbury's concept of moral beauty,—if you will excuse my rhyme! But for dialogue in the controversial mode we must look to others. We do find Herder, along with Jacobi and Moses Mendelssohn, using the form but not so much to further the Enlightenment as to combat it, at least in respect to freethinkers and agnostics. In his *Conversations on God*, Herder forcefully expresses his dissatisfaction with simple deism, while Jacobi takes issue with Hume's skepticism in his *David Hume on Belief or Idealism and Realism*. Indeed Jacobi's dialogue is a little like Leibniz's against Locke. Jacobi's epigraph is taken from Pascal: "La nature confond les Pyrrhoniens, et la raison confond les Dogmatistes. Nous avons une impuissance à prouver, invincible à tout le Dogmatisme. Nous avons une idée de la vérité, invincible à tout le Pyrrhonisme." The example of Moses Mendelssohn is even more relevant to our discussion. It is related that he was inspired to select the dialogue form by a reading of Shaftesbury's *Moralists*, which Lessing lent to him. Lessing asked him how he liked it, and he replied: "Very much, but this sort of thing I can do myself." Lessing's response was: "So, go ahead and do it!" The result was Mendelssohn's first book, his *Philosophical Dialogues*. It is a defense of Spinoza and a critique of Leibniz. Mendelssohn's unfinished translation of *The Moralists* was another result. It is almost as if Shaftesbury brought him back to Plato. As he said to a friend: "Plato has a manner of writing that combines all the merits of Shaftesbury's style with an inimitable ease of phrasing. . . . I never read Plato without feeling ashamed at ever having put pen to paper." Nevertheless, he was not satisfied with Plato's proofs to immortality and tried to supply better ones in his own *Phaedon*. Mendelssohn wanted to write in Hebrew to escape completely from the sway of Plato.

The story of Socrates in eighteenth-century literature beyond the Rhine is an extremely interesting one. It apparently even involves the myth of the transmigration of souls, for it is alleged that the Dutch writer Hemsterhuis imagined himself to be a reincarnation of Plato's teacher. However, let's leave aside such eccentricities! Following the guidance of various scholars, we can

see how the model of rationalist enlightenment was transformed, in a process that led from Hemsterhuis through Hamann and Herder, into an exemplar of religious mysticism. Thus, a renewed meaning was given to Erasmus's famous invocation: "Saint Socrates, pray for us!"

FRANCIS: Perhaps the Germans were more convincing than Jean Louis Guez de Balzac in his *Socrate chrétien* over a century earlier, or than Lamartine in his *Mort de Socrate*, in which the French romantic poet seeks to make of Socrates a precursor of Christianity. Considering only the form, Balzac's *Socrate chrétien* is certainly less Socratic than Pascal's *Entretien avec M. de Saci* and the first ten of the *Provincial Letters*. Balzac's series of discourses are hardly different from sermons delivered by a lay preacher. Otherwise, Balzac might be mentioned as one who prepared the way to the *Entretien avec M. de Saci*, with his assertion of the superiority of Christianity over pagan thought. In a minor way, Balzac anticipated a famous remark of Pascal concerning the Eleventh Letter. Pascal apologized for its length, explaining that he had lacked the time to make it shorter. Balzac had written: "It was said at Paris when I was there that a certain man wrote a big book because he didn't have the leisure to write a little one." So it was doubtless a common expression that Pascal made his own.

Having read Balzac's work, we willingly agree with Sainte-Beuve, who referred in *Port-Royal* to this "Socrate ou plutôt à cet Isocrate chrétien." Sainte-Beuve found there "pure declamations in which the rhetorician insists again and again that one must not be rhetorical." The critic considered Balzac's Christianity to be shallow. How narrow-minded and cruel-spirited a Christian he was can be judged from his callous, if not gleeful, report of the death of Vanini at the stake, which is included in this same *Socrate chrétien*.

One turns with pleasure, if not always approval, to Pascal's *Provincial Letters*. Here one may quote Sainte-Beuve again, in his eulogy of the first part of the work: "If Pascal seems to revive the form of the Socratic dialogues, he recalls them also in his aim and in his effect. He serves as a genuine Christian Socrates, reestablishing and avenging true morality to the shame of the casuists, these modern Sophists who falsify it." What Sainte-Beuve does not say here is that like the Greek Sophists, the Jesuits anticipated the modern liberalism and relativism of which he himself was really a follower.

TEDESCO: Before you go on with Pascal, I'd like to introduce Her-

der's passage on Vanini, in his *Conversations on God*. Theophron quotes Vanini's Latin poem *Deo*, marveling that it could have been composed by an atheist who was burned at the stake: "When he was at the place of execution, he took up a straw and said that if he was so unfortunate as to have no other proof of the existence of God than this straw, then it would be enough for him.—Philolaus: And he was burned nevertheless? Perhaps it was for some other heresy?—Theophron: He was a vain young man of many abilities and with a great passion for glory. He wanted to become a Julius Caesar in philosophy and became its tragic victim."

FRANCIS: Apparently his real name was Julio Cesare, although people called him Lucilio. Perhaps he did suffer from delusions of grandeur. The persecution was not a delusion. As for that vainglory, consider this passage from the dialogue quoted last week: "I shall not do as did Thomas More, who, upon hearing Erasmus speak but not knowing who he was, exclaimed: 'Either you are a demon, or you are Erasmus!' But I'll say in regard to your wisdom: Either you are a God, or you are Vanini!" Pierre Bayle cited Vanini as one of atheism's martyrs. If that was true, it was in spite of such statements as this one from Vanini's *Amphithéâtre de l'éternelle providence*: "Of all the philosophers of antiquity, Diagoras of Melos alone was called an atheist by common agreement, and rightly so, for he dared, infected by some stupid and hollow notion, to deny divine providence, as Cicero informs us in his treatise on the Nature of the Gods." It's as if Vanini's judges and executioners took him for Diagoras!

HELEN TEDESCO: Whereas it would seem that Vanini took himself for a god!

JANE FRANCIS: Like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, who proclaimed: "If there were gods, how could I endure not being one!"

CASTLE: Clearly J. C. Vanini was a victim of *hubris* as well as injustice.

TEDESCO: Didn't we concur earlier that Montalte's maneuvers in the *Provincial Letters* are not exactly Socratic? The *Letters* are indictments, if not exposés in the journalistic sense of today. Do you really agree, Francis, with Sainte-Beuve when he compares them with Plato's *Dialogues*?

FRANCIS: I'd agree with you that the *Letters* are not exercises in maieutics, but they do display the Socratic irony noted by Sainte-Beuve, the skillful performance of the *eirōn* at the expense of the *alazōn*, as today's scholars would have it.

Just about every kind of stratagem, of debater's trick, can be found in the *Letters*. There is a progression from the First to the Fifth Letter. In the first, the issue is not yet joined; the adversaries do not yet confront each other. In the Fourth, the contest really starts, and the adversary procedure begins to take form. The Fifth Letter is outstanding for its brilliance, quickness of repartee, and brio. The comic element prominent here continues to prevail in the Sixth, less so in the Seventh. The affected naïveté of Montalte is displaced by indignation; the irony turns into sarcasm. After the Tenth, the Letters are no longer in dialogue, but are directly addressed to the Jesuit Fathers.

Montalte is clearly the *eirōn* in the exchanges, the Jesuit being the *alazōn*. Perhaps Pascal even has Montalte overstep the bounds of what Socrates allowed himself with the Sophists. For in the First Letter Montalte declares outright: "I pretended to be very much on their side." This in order to be welcomed by the Jesuits. In the Fifth Letter, within the space of a few pages, the Jesuit Father falls repeatedly into the traps set by his visitor, notably on the question of what were called "probable opinions." For example, Ponce and Sanchez have contrary opinions on certain moral issues, but because they are both learned doctors each renders his opinion probable. Not only that, the ingenuous Jesuit is led to assert that it may be permitted to follow the less probable alternative in certain cases. The irony depends here, in part, on a play on words. Toward the end of the letter, the long list of authorities cited by the Jesuit provides a note of high burlesque, calling to mind not Plato but some of those comic catalogues of words and names in Rabelais. Montalte can well wonder if the bearers of these barbarous-sounding appellatives could really be Christians!

Some readers have found Pascal superior even to Plato in vivacity and concision. If this is true, it is because their aims and methods differed. The key to the difference is precisely that presence or absence of the maieutic procedure. I concede Tedesco's point on this. Socrates does not only try to defeat his opponent, he hopes to persuade him. To persuade his adversary was not possible for Pascal—things had gone too far.

ISABEL CASTLE: Did the Jesuits reply to Pascal in dialogues?

FRANCIS: Pascal was not answered with dialogues; he was answered with the *Index*! Only much later, when Port-Royal had been destroyed as an institution, did Père Gabriel Daniel reply in his *Entretiens de Cléandre et d'Eudoxe*. Père Daniel protested against

the caricature of the Jesuit Father: "But gradually this Jesuit, who is presented at first as merely naive, is made into a fool, an idiot of the last degree; one laughs in his face, one makes fun of him, one mocks him in the most obvious manner, without his noticing it; he falls into the crudest traps: the greatest nonsense is put into his mouth. And with all that, he is a man who speaks in the name of the whole Society." The Pyrrhic victory of the defeated Jansenists stuck in his craw! But one who was not a partisan of either side was Fénelon, who wrote in 1714 in his *Instruction pastorale en forme de dialogues*: "If one doubts the great power of the art of dialogue over men, one has only to recall the profound and dangerous impression made on the public by the *Provincial Letters*. The author used the give-and-take of dialogue to convey the gravest bias to the reader. He gave to an appalling error a kind of charm and grace."

ISABEL CASTLE: Weren't there any other controversial dialogues produced during the seventeenth century in France? It was, after all, the Age of Reason.

FRANCIS: It was the Age of Reason; it was not perhaps the Age of Argument, a term that could be applied to both the preceding and the succeeding century.

HELEN TEDESCO: I have heard about the so-called *libertins* of the mid-seventeenth century, Cyrano de Bergerac and La Mothe Le Vayer. Didn't they go in for this genre in the defence of their opinions?

FRANCIS: One can discover some interesting conversations in Cyrano's *L'Autre Monde ou les états et empires de la lune et du soleil*. These philosophical conversations are hardly detachable from the narrative and descriptive structure of the imaginary voyages. Many of the more audaciously subversive passages were omitted from the edition published after the author's death and were only rediscovered over two centuries later. Even Charles Nodier did not know the work in its entirety and was able to write in 1831 that Cyrano never offended religion or moral conventions in his writings. Moreover, the second voyage was left incomplete by the author, thus depriving us of what might have been a memorable meeting between Campanella and Descartes, promised for us in the "Kingdom of Philosophers," which is Cyrano's destination in the Empire of the Sun.

La Mothe Le Vayer might better qualify as a writer of controversial dialogues, for his dialogues do deal with controversial concepts, but they lack the bite of Cyrano's work. It's as if La



Mothe Le Vayer had himself pulled their teeth. His style is one that defuses his ideas before they can have any explosive effect. The most erudite of the historians, who have bent over the mass of pages compiled by the erudite *libertin*, came to this conclusion: "So as not to rouse persecutors, Le Vayer warded off disciples." An American scholar differs strongly from general French opinion and considers him a Christian fideist, not an atheist or much of a freethinker. This judgment is founded on passages that remind us of what Langley quoted from Berkeley and Hume. Nevertheless, La Mothe was certainly closer to the skepticism of Hume than to the religion of Berkeley, despite what we read in his defence of Socrates: "It seems that one may in some sense call Socrates the first martyr of the Messiah to come, as we know that Saint Stephen was gloriously the first martyr of the same Messiah already come." He goes on to blame Erasmus for the invocation to Socrates: *Sancte Socrate, ora pro nobis*. Le Vayer regards these words as too bold. In his Dialogue on Divinity, there is a declaration which anticipates Hume: "Skepticism can be called a perfect introduction to Christianity." His spokesman Orasius Tubero expatiates on the theme at length in lectures. He is approved admiringly by his listener, Orontes, who never really contests his statements. Orontes acknowledges that not only does skepticism bring no prejudice to holy theology, but also suspension of judgment properly understood can serve as a happy evangelical preparation. The knowledge of God cannot come from rationalist arguments. Except for the absence of vigor in Le Vayer's style, the reader might imagine himself back in Montaigne's essay on Raymond de Sebonde. Then the reader may wonder whether the pages on atheism which follow are included merely as curious examples of the multiplicity of opinions and customs related to the subject of religion. The speaker describes the mandarins who govern China and maintain the populace in the religion of the country without believing for their part in any God but Nature, any life but this one, any hell but prison, or any Paradise but that of having the office of mandarin. Le Vayer borrowed all this humor from Joseph Acosta. Another passage on atheism is referred to Bacon's Essays: "Atheism leaves to mankind sense, philosophy, natural piety, laws, reputation, and everything that may serve as guide to virtue: but superstition destroys all these things and erects for itself an absolute tyranny over human understanding." But most representative, perhaps, of the skeptical spirit of Le Vayer is his use of the allegory of

Icarus: "That foolhardy Icarus, because he tried to rise too high toward heaven, was shamefully and calamitously thrown down into a sea of confusion and error, that immense Ocean of the sciences." The dialogue closes with these words from the Spanish: "De la cosas mas seguras La mas segura es dudar." The dialogue of controversy requires conviction, and Le Vayer appears to take pride in lacking it. I should not, for all that, wish to cite Yeats in his behalf: "The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity." The first part of this may not apply to Le Vayer, but there were plenty of persecutors on the watch to whom the second part could, such as the ineffable Père Garasse, the pursuer of Théophile de Viau. And Le Vayer was old enough to hear of Bruno, Vanini, and Galileo, whose tragedies occurred during his youth and early manhood.

ISABEL CASTLE: If the subject of this evening is the dialogue of controversy, La Mothe Le Vayer seems to be a rather negative example of it. I had likewise gained the impression from Tedesco's speech that the dialogue in the hands of the Germans lost something of the spirit of combat that was displayed by Shaftesbury, Berkeley, and Mandeville, and also by Pascal.

JANE FRANCIS: As well as by Voltaire and Diderot!

TEDESCO: One could find plenty of belligerence if one went back to the German Reformation period, whether in the *Karsthans*, the works of Hans Sachs, or Ulrich von Hutten. It is said that von Hutten's *Gesprächbüchlein* was almost as important in the campaign against the Pope as Luther's treatises of 1520. But apparently the spate of Protestant satirical dialogues ended in a few years.

CASTLE: I believe that the situation in the so-called Latin countries was quite different. The sixteenth century has been called the century of dialogue *par excellence*. It was by no means concerned only with religious controversy, there were also the language controversies. Think of all those dialogues on language in Italian: Machiavelli, Pietro Bembo, Sperone Speroni, and Torquato Tasso; in Spanish: Juan de Valdés; in French: Etienne Dolet, Henri Estienne, and Peletier du Mans. Except for Peletier du Mans, who wanted to simplify French spelling, all argued on behalf of their vernaculars.

The *Diálogo de la lengua* of Juan de Valdés is not limited to an affirmation of the values of Castilian. The conversation on the distinction between *ingenio* and *juicio*, genius and judgment, might suggest a transition to the eighteenth-century discussions

of genius, and the comments on the expression *no sé qué* might prelude the French seventeenth-century reflections on the *je ne sais quoi* like those of the Abbé Bouhours in his *Entretiens d'Ariste et d'Eugène*. But no doubt you would prefer something more vital than these bloodless armchair controversies. Like the *Coloquios satíricos* of Antonio de Torquemada. This was not the inquisitor Tomás de Torquemada, of course, who belongs to the fifteenth century. The *Coloquios Satíricos* attack the conventional notion of honor, a thing of show and a snare of Satan, contrasting it with true honor, which is Christian virtue and humility.

Or you might appreciate the two dialogues by Alfonso, the brother of Juan de Valdés. Marcel Bataillon presented them both as outstanding Spanish Erasmians. Alfonso's works were more controversial than a dialogue on Christian doctrine composed by his brother. The *Diálogo de las cosas ocurridas en Roma* took the part of Emperor Charles V against Pope Clement VII, blaming the latter for the Sack of Rome. The piece is an indictment of a war-making pope, unfaithful to his divine mission. By the way, it was Castiglione who tried to get Alfonso to keep it out of circulation and later to get it consigned to the flames! Alfonso's second dialogue presents Mercury and Charon and takes the part of Charles V against Francis I. It is more than an ephemeral political pamphlet; it is inspired by Erasmus's *Charon*, the eloquent denunciation of war. Mercurio speaks as an advocate of evangelical Christianity against the ecclesiastical institutions given over to the service of Mars and Mammon. He speaks also in support of a rather subversive ideal of a perfect Christian sovereign. Take these words addressed to a ruler: "If you don't do as you should to your subjects, they are no longer obliged to do their duty towards you." In a few years the current political relevance of the two dialogues faded away as events, and policy brought pope and emperor closer together. Both dialogues were placed on the *Index* much later for obscure reasons.

FRANCIS: You say that Mercurio is made out to be an Erasmian in Valdés's dialogue. Evidently the wing-shoed god was utilized for a very different purpose in the *Cymbalum mundi* of Bonaventure des Périers. This came about a decade later than Valdés's *Mercury and Charon*. Its real meaning has been the subject of much speculation. Writings on it exceed many times the number of pages, less than fifty, making up the four little dialogues. Yet its significance has remained a bone of contention. The author assumes the name of Thomas du Clever and addresses his work to Pierre

Tryocan. These are anagrams for Thomas l'Incrédule and Pierre Croyant. It is an audacious work in the Lucian manner, that has been read as a satire of the Gospel in the guise of the Book of Fate, Jesus as Mercury, true religion as the philosopher's stone, sought by men in vain. The nineteenth-century edition of the "bibliophile Jacob" refers to the second dialogue as "perhaps the most remarkable of the four, considering its boldness and violence of tone. The author ridicules all the known creeds of his time: Christ is presented as a rogue. Luther under the name of Rhetulus is satirized as is his rival Bucer under the name of Cumbercus. Another target, Drarig, is taken to be Erasmus. "Catholics and Protestants fall into the same sack." There are those commentators who deny that it was intended as a broad attack on religion. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. It was condemned by the Parlement, and the publisher was jailed. Calvin, Henri Estienne, and Etienne Pasquier denounced it as impious.

TEDESCO: I wonder if the commentators who deny the *Cymbalum mundi* as an attack on religion are not victims of overcompensation. Fearing to fall into the error of perspective of supposing writers like Bonaventure des Périers had modern radical views, they go to the opposite extreme of denying those writers were radicals even for their own period. A strange way of combatting the historian's malady of "precursoritis."

If I may change the subject.—I didn't catch your implication when you said the other day that my reference to Ramus reminded you of Guy de Brués. Could you explain it, since we are after all considering the sixteenth century at the moment?

FRANCIS: I was thinking of one of the more amusing moments in the first dialogue, where Ronsard is made to play Socrates to Baïf's Meno. It is an exchange of repartee parodying the maieutic procedure. Later Baïf will complain that Plato was inconsistent on the doctrine of reminiscence. It should be noted that they have nothing but their names in common with the famous members of the Pléiade. "Ronsard" represents a dogmatic position and his adversary a skeptical one, with respect to the powers of reason to attain knowledge. The wording of the title and the epigraph promises a controversial work: *Les Dialogues de Guy de Brués, contre les nouveaux académiciens*. "Que tout ne consiste point en opinion." The new Academicians suggest the skeptics. Brués was rather important as a source for Montaigne. Although Brués pretends to give the palm of victory to the rationalist side against the skeptics, the skeptical arguments are cogent and copious

enough to have contributed substantially to the Pyrrhonist element in Montaigne. There is a statement by his modern editor which I consider very meaningful, and I hope I may quote it here: “Even if Brués was not a crypto-sceptic trying by indirection to suggest a point of view, which, if expressed openly, would mean persecution and death for him, even if he actually sided in intention with the dogmatists, one suspects that he had been seriously troubled by this problem.”

CASTLE: You leave me at a loss, and no doubt our ladies too, for we did not enjoy the benefit of your earlier discussion.

TEDESCO: Excuse me, it was about Socrates the midwife and about the doctrine of knowledge being a form of recollection. We managed to go on about these topics at quite some length, though I suspect Langley, for one, remained doubtful about the value of the discussion.

CASTLE: Perhaps there will be an opportunity to return to the topic another time when Langley is with us.

ISABEL CASTLE: Are we ever going to get on to the eighteenth century and the *philosophes*? Or must we remain in the sixteenth indefinitely?

FRANCIS: One of the most curious sixteenth-century dialogues still remains to be described. It is a Latin manuscript entitled *Heptaplomeres*, written by Jean Bodin.

CASTLE: The author of *The Republic*?

FRANCIS: Exactly. A subtitle calls it a “Colloquy by seven learned men of varying opinions concerning hidden secrets of sublime matters.” Out of prudence no doubt, this long dialogue was never printed, although Bodin published another less subversive dialogue, *Universal Theatre of Nature*, which was placed on the *Index*. The *Heptaplomeres* contains enough arguments against orthodox Christian dogmas to satisfy any *philosophe* buff, if you can excuse the expression. But you must look for them either in the manuscript of nearly seven hundred pages in the Bibliothèque Nationale or in the partial French translation published early in our century. Not that the original was not passed from hand to hand, among those who handled it were Gabriel Naudé, Grotius, Ménage, and Leibniz.

The participants in the colloquium are a conforming Catholic, a Lutheran, a Calvinist, a former Christian converted to Islam, a Jew, a believer in natural religion, and a skeptic. The last two, the deist Toralba and the irreverent Senamus, offer some of the most telling arguments. The Protestant and Catholic defenders

of Christianity are more than once unhorsed in this gruelling tournament of doctrines. If Senamus and Toralba seem to be the most persuasive speakers, the Jew is also accorded some effective lines. Among the sallies of Senamus are such questions as "How can angels suffer if they are without nerves or cerebra?" Toralba perhaps speaks most often for the author. Thus he exclaims at one point: "Christ crucified to absolve the greatest sinners, and Aristides . . . Socrates . . . Plato . . . the Scipios and the Catos . . . should now burn in Hell like villains!" At another point he asks: "Who can believe that the Eternal God, after 600,000 centuries, indeed, after an infinite expanse of time, should but lately have thought of descending from heaven and remain nine months in the womb . . . and at the end of a few years be shamefully crucified and after being buried be resurrected and bear aloft into the skies that corporal substance?" The dialogue has been compared by modern readers to the *Cymbalum mundi* and to a dialogue of Voltaire *Le Dîner de Boulainvilliers*.

It would be interesting to trace the evolution of skepticism while restricting ourselves to writings in the form of dialogue. The history of the skeptic as a character might take account of Jean Fernel's Brutus, the "Curieux" of Pontus de Tyard, and the "Baif of Brués, Jacques Tahureau's Démocritic, Bodin's Senamus, Vainini's Julio Cesare, and La Mothe Le Vayer's almost interchangeable Oratius Tubero and Tubertus Ocella. Several of them I have had to skip. The importance of the dialogue form in this connection becomes no less as the seventeenth century turns into the eighteenth.

HELEN TEDESCO: Before I forget to ask, what was all that about in Langley's essay where he refers to the rarity of women in philosophical dialogue?

TEDESCO: Helen, we were talking about it just the other day. It was before you joined us to go the theatre.

JANE FRANCIS: There aren't any women either as authors or as participants in the dialogues you have been talking about, that's very plain. The closest thing to it is perhaps in the females discussing the stories related to the *Heptameron* and that was by a woman.

HELEN TEDESCO: It's as if the men were relegating us to the dialogue of the gossips in the *Caquets de l'accouchée!*

ISABEL CASTLE: Besides the *Heptameron*, Margaret of Navarre composed a sort of allegory in dialogue, her *Comédie jouée au Mont de Marsan*. The only characters are women, and the main

topic is love. The speakers are La Mondaine, La Superstitieuse, La Sage, and a shepherdess. La Sage reproaches the first for her sensuality, the second for her bigotry and prudishness. Thus La Sage reminds us of Parmentier. The shepherdess expresses a simple but mystical love of God that may reflect another aspect of the author.

FRANCIS: It seems that just as men excluded women from their dialogues, Margaret excluded men from hers!

CASTLE: There were exceptions, however, such as Castiglione's dialogue on courtesy. Still, the women there did not deliver long discourses. And as for Leon Ebreo's "Dialogue on Love," although the subject is love and the manner is erotic casuistry, the speakers Philo and Sophia are nearly sexless, or perhaps asexual. But I believe Isabel wanted to say something.

ISABEL CASTLE: Yes, women are partners in the debates on love composed by Loys Le Caron, *Claire, ou la beauté* and by Pontus de Tyard, *Le Solitaire*. Both women are adepts in the Platonic philosophy, the idealism of love.

HELEN TEDESCO: But apparently women were not allowed in the more serious areas where men discussed metaphysics and religion! When they ventured there, Molière and Boileau made fun of them!

ISABEL CASTLE: That's one reason I'd like to get on to the eighteenth century, when even women could talk about religion and free thought, without being treated as *précieuses* or as blue-stockings.

JANE FRANCIS: When they were accepted as almost equals by Voltaire and Diderot!

FRANCIS: Around the turn of the century, some Englishmen apparently imagined that Frenchwomen had become adepts at philosophy. I have found a work entitled *A Voyage to the World of Descartes*, allegedly translated by no less than Daniel Defoe. But the dedicatory epistle is signed T. Taylor. It reads: "The Author seems still to have kept his Eye on those two main ends, Pleasing and Instructing. Philosophy by this Method is become *a la mode* amongst the Women of greatest Quality in France, who pride themselves more in being accounted Partisans of a Sect, than Leaders in Dress and Fashion. And we may presume that the Power and Force of Imitation will reach the Minds of our English Ladies, when Learning shall be set off with the Allurements and Delight they meet in reading a Romance. To provoke them therefore I have adventur'd upon this Translation, notwithstanding

ing the Prohibition of French Commodities.” This was during one of those wars between Louis XIV and England. The author is Père Gabriel Daniel, whom we have met already. He wrote that dialogue against Pascal’s *Provincial Letters*. Here, by the way, are a few bits from his *Voyage to the World of Descartes*. From a conversation of the author with an old Cartesian, we learn that Descartes is not dead but retired into the indefinite Spaces and making preparations for the building of a world there like this one of ours. The author meets Father Mersenne, as well as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. There is on behalf of Aristotle a refutation of *The Discourse on Method* and the *Meditations* of Descartes. Socrates banter’s Cyrano de Bergerac. Accompanied by Mersenne and two followers of Aristotle, the author arrives at his awaited meeting with Descartes, who receives him more cordially than the Aristotelians had done.

JANE FRANCIS: But there are evidently no female speakers.

FRANCIS: Undoubtedly the *Entretiens spirituels* of Saint François de Sales would lend further support to your argument. The work is based on conversations with the nuns under his guidance. Two centuries later, Auguste Comte’s *Catéchisme positiviste* will not be so very different. The priest in this catechism is never contradicted by his female disciple, any more than in the case of Saint Francis, and this despite Comte’s peculiar form of Mariolatry.

CASTLE: Have we forgotten those colloquies of Erasmus in which women take the floor? The Spaniard Luján was indebted to him for his *Coloquios matrimoniales*, in which the speakers are largely women. By the way, Helen Tedesco’s allusion to the *Caquets de l’accouchée* calls to mind Erasmus’s dialogue on pregnancy. There is a vigorous exchange between the woman and the male interlocutor, who tries to extol his sex by invoking men’s services in war. Her rebuff of his militarist *machismo* is worthy of the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes: “There isn’t a single one of you who wouldn’t prefer the risks of battle many times over the risks and pains we suffer in childbirth!”

ISABEL CASTLE: That’s all very well deserved, but nevertheless the topic is still maternity and not lofty philosophy.

HELEN TEDESCO: If you think Voltaire and Diderot were so free from prejudice, you are easily satisfied! How important are the speaking roles of women in their dialogues? No more than in Fontenelle’s *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*. Naturally I am not concerned with the ladies in their lives, whether Mme du



Châtelet or Sophie Volland, nor with the women in their novels, whether Cunegonde or Suzanne Simonin. All that would be another story! I challenge someone to answer.

CASTLE: In Erasmus, a learned lady comes off pretty well in her dispute with an abbot. But I'll let Erasmus bow to Voltaire and Diderot.

FRANCIS: Should I take part of that assignment? We have mentioned Voltaire's *Dîner de Boulainvilliers* in connection with Bodin's *Heptaplomeres*. There are four characters, the Count, the Countess, a *philosophe* named Fréret, and the Abbé. All but the last are deists. The countess is by no means left out of the conversation, which is a free-for-all with the three against the Abbé. He tries patiently to ward off their attacks on such dogmas as Eternal Punishment. At the end he agrees he had been of their opinion all along! The piece is a late one in Voltaire's career. As early as 1751, he produced one on Mme de Maintenon and Ninon de l'Enclos. The former regrets the days before her elevation when she had lived with Ninon. Mme de Maintenon tries to persuade Ninon to come to stay with her at Versailles to relieve her boredom, but Ninon turns down the invitation since it would entail her becoming a hypocrite too. And Mme de Maintenon cannot bring herself to accept Ninon's invitation to come to stay at her house. Ninon surmises that it is not only disenchantment with grandeur but also advancing old age that concerns her friend. As for her, she finds contentment in her freedom, her friends, and her philosophy. A few years later, Voltaire produced a short dialogue favoring education for girls, a stand set forth by a young woman named Sophronie. Her position is a fairly moderate one. Voltaire produced another dialogue on a visit by Cicero's daughter Tullia to Mme de Pompadour's dressing room. They compare their dress and other customs, but Mme de Pompadour doesn't have much to say. A cultivated nobleman does most of the talking. His argument turns out to be in favor of a middle position in the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns.

CASTLE: Wasn't this rather late in time for that?

FRANCIS: It certainly was. But it serves to remind us that dialogues played a part in that Quarrel. There was Fontenelle's *dialogue des morts* between Socrates and Montaigne. Moreover, there are the long-winded conversations of Charles Perrault's *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes en ce qui regarde les arts et les sciences*. Gabriel Daniel's criticism of the *Provincial Letters* took off from Perrault's eulogy of Pascal in the *Parallèle*; I quoted from Daniel's *Entretiens*

*de Cléandre et d'Eudoxe* in that connection. Women are absent, however, from all of these.

TEDESCO: Women are more prominent in Diderot's dialogues. And I believe that those on D'Alembert and Julie de Lespinasse, and also the *Entretien avec la maréchale* are more important in Diderot's work than those dialogues you cited from Voltaire are in his. In fact, I'd call these mere bagatelles.

FRANCIS: The bagatelle on Ninon de l'Enclos I find charming, if superficial. But I'd be interested in hearing what you have to say about Diderot.

TEDESCO: I want to limit myself to those dialogues which fall clearly into the sphere of the polemic type. As you remember, that's what we had proposed to concentrate on during this evening. Since it's getting late, you'll all be glad to hear that. You recall what I said about Socrates and Diotima. Hemsterhuis was called the Dutch Plato. Well, Diderot also felt personally close to Socrates, without thinking he was Socrates reincarnate! He was fairly close to Hemsterhuis and Shaftesbury too, for he translated some of their work, though not their dialogues. It is said that Voltaire called him "Socrates." Yet it was also reported that toward the end of his life Voltaire, having met Diderot for the last time, declared: "One talent alone nature has refused him, and that is an essential one, that of dialogue." We don't know whether the story is true. Voltaire remained the deist he had almost always been, whereas Diderot had, in the course of a decade or more, moved from deism to atheism and materialism. In 1756, Voltaire's *Dialogues with Posidonius and Lucretius* pitted the deist Posidonius against Lucretius, thus anticipating the position he would take in his *A, B, C* a dozen years later. Diderot's *Entretiens* with D'Alembert is, in part, a reply to the *A, B, C*. The exchange takes the form of a philosophical debate that with only a little exaggeration could be called the Battle of Dialogues between Voltaire and Diderot, that is, if we can assume that *A* is Voltaire and *C* is Diderot and that D'Alembert in the *Entretiens* could stand for Voltaire.

FRANCIS: Only a little exaggeration, you think? I'd say your idea requires quite a lot. The battle was not so clear-cut between the two *philosophes*. Even if it were, the dialogues, while a necessary part, are hardly sufficient to express their views. Too many other writings, not in dialogue, would have to be included in order to give a complete picture. For example, Voltaire's reply to the "modern atheists" was in his *Questions* added to his *Dictionnaire*

*philosophique*. And Diderot wasn't the only one of them; in fact, Voltaire names only Maupertuis.

HELEN TEDESCO: Say! this promises to be exciting,—Voltaire versus my husband, and Diderot versus yours!

ISABEL CASTLE: Do you realize how late it is! We are not like Socrates,—we cannot stay up all night!

CASTLE: We certainly wouldn't wish to break up the symposium.

TEDESCO: Perhaps we can take up the battle another time?

FRANCIS: Especially because we haven't come near to even the last episode, that is, of the survey we had planned, down to our own time.

JANE FRANCIS: How about a little *medianoche* now?

ISABEL CASTLE: While we discuss getting together at our house, perhaps next week?

## 5. The Dialogue of Controversy (Sequel)

Evening at the Castles'.

Present, the Castles, the Tedescos, and Francis.

ISABEL CASTLE: I'm sorry Jane Francis and the Langleys could not be here. That leaves Helen and me facing you gentlemen.

HELEN TEDESCO: Oh, I don't think it'll come to a confrontation. They still have some issues to settle among themselves, at least Francis and my husband do.

TEDESCO: That's so. We left the Voltaire-Diderot debate up in the air.

FRANCIS: You were perhaps drawn by Langley's chain of dialogues to try the same thing with the *philosophes*. The debates of the French Enlightenment were not always duels so much as battles royal, not only Voltaire versus Diderot, but also Voltaire versus Rousseau, Rousseau versus Diderot and Hume, though these two did not retaliate, — when they all were not warding off Palissot, Fréron, or the *Journal de Trévoux*. But I agree with you to this extent: the dialogue was a weapon often wielded in the philosophical combats of this age. Thus the eighteenth century is indeed like the sixteenth, a real century of controversial dialogue, much more than the seventeenth, which had only one great example, the *Provincial Letters*.

CASTLE: This whole comparison evidently applies much more to France and Germany, judging from what you both said the other day, than to Spain and Italy. In the peninsulas, the sixteenth century was certainly outstanding in this respect, while the eighteenth suffered impoverishment. Besides, Galileo belonged to the early seventeenth.

TEDESCO: The analogy of the battle royal is no less farfetched than that of the duel. You yourself conceded that Diderot and Hume forbore answering Rousseau's charges in kind. And, as I recall, the playwright Palissot exempted Voltaire from his satire of the *philosophes*, of Diderot, Rousseau, and so forth.

FRANCIS: That's true enough.

ISABEL CASTLE: I was struck by the story that Voltaire found Diderot lacking in the talent for dialogue. If that remark is authentic, what on earth could he have meant by it?

TEDESCO: I cannot conceive what possible foundation there could be for such an allegation. Diderot, if anyone, was the exemplary man of dialogue. Think of the *moi* and the *lui* of his *Neveu de Rameau*, both so convincing and so different, the dialogues on drama and acting, and *Jacques le fataliste*, that philosophical picaresque novel. We've already mentioned the D'Alembert cycle and the *Entretien avec la maréchale*.

CASTLE: Voltaire could have meant that it was hard to get a word in edgewise when Diderot was in eruption.

HELEN TEDESCO: I imagine that could have been the case with Voltaire at times.

ISABEL CASTLE: And Diderot the talker was one thing, Diderot the writer something else.

CASTLE: Well, they were both remarkable dialogue writers. We haven't even touched on Voltaire's dozen dialogues of Euhemerus, or all those philosophical conversations dispersed throughout his tales and essays, such as the meeting with Socrates and then with Jesus in the *Questions* attached to his *Dictionnaire philosophique*. If anyone still reads Remy de Gourmont's *Une Nuit au Luxembourg*, Gourmont's debt to that scene with Jesus will not go unnoticed. But, about Diderot, weren't his dialogues usually between the halves of himself? The other interlocutor had to accept playing the part of one of these.

ISABEL CASTLE: The other two of the Big Four did not do so much in the genre, did they? Montesquieu and Rousseau, that is?

TEDESCO: If Diderot talked with himself, it was about subjects outside of himself; whereas Rousseau's dialogues with himself were exclusively about himself. I'm referring, of course, to *Dialogues: Rousseau Judge of Jean-Jacques*.

FRANCIS: Montesquieu's *dialogues des morts* of *Sulla and Eucrates* and of *Xanthippus and Xenocrates* are political portraits. They are neglected but not negligible. His advanced ideas are more memorably presented in his better-known writings. In the area of controversial dialogue, Fénelon's *Socrate et Alcibiade* is eloquent against wars of conquest. It was written for the Duc de Bourgogne, who did not live long enough to have an opportunity to apply its lessons. Different in nature were Fénelon's interminable dialogues on Jansenism, from which I quoted the criticism of

Pascal's *Provincial Letters*. Few are the readers who have remained through to the end of Fénelon's imaginary visit to the Jansenist M. Fremont.

HELEN TEDESCO: I take it that you are not one of the few.

FRANCIS: I confess I am not, though I did stay for quite a while.

But Fénelon did not carry out his promise, which he stated in this comment: "I am preparing seven or eight short letters, in the same form as the first letters of Pascal. I recount the disputes that I had with a Jansenist." There is a *dialogue des morts* by Vauvenargues which brings together Pascal and Fénelon. Apparently Vauvenargues did not know of Fénelon's criticism of Pascal, for his dialogue shows Fénelon praising him. The piece is related to the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns. Vauvenargues's Fénelon cites Boileau: "Despréaux said that you were equally above the ancients and the moderns, and many people of good judgment are persuaded that you had more genius for eloquence than Demosthenes." As for a dialogue that can be favorably compared with the portrait of the Jesuit in the *Provincial Letters*, I think the best example is by a freethinker, Saint-Evremond's *Conversation de M. le Maréchal d'Hocquincourt avec le Père Canaye*. The portrait of the marshal is even more striking than that of the ingenuous Jesuit. I translate one of his principal remarks: "I have loved philosophy only too much, but I've got over it and I'll never go back to it. A certain devil of a philosopher addled my brain so much with talk of our first parents, of apple, serpent, earthly paradise, and cherubim, that I had reached the point of not believing anything at all. The devil take me if I believed anything! But since that time, I'd let myself be crucified for religion. It's not that I see any more reason for it; on the contrary, less than ever: but all I can tell you is,—I'd let myself be crucified without knowing why!" It is a little masterpiece of satire and presents in short compass not just one character, like Pascal's work, but two. Actually, the Jesuit is not as ingenuous as I said, but he remains a comic figure with the martial pretensions he displays to the narrator: "I speak to you quite differently from the way I would to the marshal. I was purely the Jesuit with him, and I have the frankness of a military man with you." His frankness consisted in admitting that the controversy between the Jesuits and the Jansenists was not really one of principle: "What folly to imagine that we hate each other because we disagree on Grace! It's neither Grace nor the Five Propositions that have set us against each other: jealousy over the governance of con-

sciences is behind it all." Composed about 1656, the dialogue seems to belong to the eighteenth century in spirit. As a dialogue of character, it ranks with Diderot's *Neveu de Rameau* and the better *Imaginary Conversations* of Landor.

TEDESCO: When we were discussing women in dialogues that first time, you referred to Rémond le Grec's *Agathon*. It is interesting that Diderot's defense of the natural passions in his *Pensées philosophiques* and in the D'Alembert cycle was anticipated by Rémond le Grec, as well as by his brother, Rémond de Saint-Mard, who affirmed the same defense in his own *Nouveaux Dialogues des dieux*. Your Epicurean Saint-Evremond and his friends, Ninon de L'Enclos, the Earl of Hamilton, and the Count of Gramont, could probably be found in this background, as well as Shaftesbury, although I shouldn't imply that he was an Epicurean!

FRANCIS: At the opening of the century there was published a dialogue on the subject of pleasure that placed on opposite sides two well-known figures of the preceding period, Patru, a learned friend of La Fontaine and Boileau, and D'Abblancourt, the translator. They discuss a sermon they have heard that violently condemned all pleasure. Patru agrees that pleasures are pernicious, while his partner defends certain innocent forms. Patru indeed condemns them all in such extreme terms as to suggest a reduction to the absurd of the entire argument. "Christians shouldn't eat for enjoyment but only in order not to die of starvation." Even to enjoy the beauty of nature is frivolous. The dialogue is fictitious. It came under censorship and was suppressed, harmless though it seem to us.

HELEN TEDESCO: The establishment must have been very touchy!

TEDESCO: It is worth noting that dialogues give expression to one of the principal ideas of the age, that of the goodness of man in a "state of nature." The notion that natural passions are good is related to the primitivism set forth in Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*. There was a dialogue very early in the century which expressed similar views, that of the Baron de Lahontan. No doubt Voltaire remembered it when he wrote *l'Ingénu*. After the Huron Adario of Lahontan, Diderot introduced the Tahitian Orou as another example of the *good savage*. There is much on sexual customs in both works. There is no double standard of morality, nor a cult of virginity, and marriage is not a business transaction. Neither society is based on private property. The Huron states that there is no distinction of thine and mine, but he is reminded by Lahontan that he possesses slaves,

captured in war which contradicts somewhat his supposed simplicity of customs. Diderot's savages are freer from war. They are innocent and gentle wherever nothing troubles their repose and security. War is born of rival claims to the same property, the rules of sexual morality of civilized peoples are contrary to nature, and the tyranny of man has converted the possession of women into property. These are the lessons taught by Orou to the missionary.

Throughout the century, the contrast between the savage and the civilized was exploited, or should I say, rhetorically abused. An example of this is a dialogue by an anonymous Anglophobe entitled *Les Sauvages de l'Europe*. And who are these savages? The English, of course! In another Anglophobe satire, there is a conversation between a young Frenchman and an Englishman which becomes so acrimonious that the reader is almost disappointed that the altercation does not turn into a scuffle. The date of publication is, to be sure, 1780. The book is really something between a novel and a dialogue and mediocre wherever you place it. It is by a certain Robert Martin Lesuire, and it is called *Les Amants françois à Londres, or Les Délices de l'Angleterre*. Yet its place of publication seems to be London!

FRANCIS: Many dialogues hardly superior to your Lesuire's or to my La Dixmerie's must have been produced during the century. There are several volumes to *Le Spectacle de la nature* by Abbé Pluche, that naive believer in Final Causes, who might have posed for Voltaire's Pangloss better than Leibniz or Rousseau. His work is more didactic than polemic. Perhaps a place should be kept for Condillac's brother, Mably, who published his *Entretiens de Phocion* in 1763. The five discourses extol a rather hackneyed ideal of ancient virtue, which Mably found exemplified in Plutarch's Life of this Athenian general. Here are a few of the lessons taught by Phocion to his disciple Aristias: Politics is a science. Passions must be subordinated to reason. The main object of politics is to regulate morals and cultivate the virtues of temperance, love of work, and love of country. Toward the opening of the discussion, we learn that young Aristias had been in danger of becoming a complete cynic. Phocion remarks to the reporter: "You see with what teachings the minds of our youth are being poisoned. Hardly have they discovered that everything is not true than they laughably conclude that everything is false." Aristias soon learns better, exclaiming: "How wise Phocion is! His words have revived in my heart a taste for virtue



which wretchedly I had been striving to destroy.”

Whom could Mably have been aiming at here? It could not have been Rousseau, although there was bad blood between them. In a letter on Rousseau's *Lettre de la Montagne*, Mably offended Rousseau with words like “seditious” and “demagogue.” Rousseau wrote in this connection in his *Confessions*: “A little later appeared the *Dialogues of Phocion*, where I saw a mere compilation of my writings, put together without reserve or shame.” Apparently Mably did not forgive the author of *The Social Contract*. As for the *Entretiens de Phocion*, their style was too vague and stereotyped to compete with more vigorous works for the attention of the public.

CASTLE: Could we get down a little from that high-sounding level? A good example of getting down to earth is the Abbé Galiani's *Dialogues on the Corn Trade*, if I may translate the title into English. It certainly caused as much commotion as some of Voltaire's or Diderot's dialogues. This witty diplomat from Naples was the friend of many of your circle of *philosophes*. Diderot and Grimm helped him with the manuscript. He tried to conceal his authorship from all but close friends. The work is in nine parts and presents three speakers, the Chevalier Zanobi, the Président, and the Marquis, all having real-life models, and Galiani speaking through the Chevalier. The main speaker opposes the French government's policy of allowing wheat to be exported freely and without duty. The publication in 1770 coincided with a critical situation. Bread riots resulting from high prices had occurred in places like Rouen in 1768, and in 1770 the government reimposed restrictions on the grain trade. Turgot pleaded in vain against the new policy, which ran counter to the Physiocratic doctrine he favored. He and another *encyclopédiste*, the Abbé Morellet, argued that no book had caused more harm. To hear them, it was the sole cause of riots in Guyenne and Languedoc. But Galiani felt vindicated by the government's change of policy.

Having left Paris with much regret, Galiani continued to follow French economic developments. Writing to his good friend Mme d'Épinay, he explained the kind of information he wanted her to send him. I found this amusing passage, but I won't translate it because the plays on words cannot be retained in English: “je veux savoir, en gros aussi, si l'on *exporte*, ou si l'on *importe*, ou si l'on *transporte*, et si l'on *supporte*, et si l'on *s'emporte*, et à qui l'on

*rapporte* la cause du malheur: voilà tout. Vos tableaux économiques me donnent le spleen et emporte une demi-page précieuse.”

Turgot found the dialogues hard to refute because they were so witty. The opposition was outmatched. There was praise from Frederick the Great and from Catherine the Great. Voltaire added his own clever eulogy, telling Diderot: “It seems that Plato and Molière have joined to compose this work.” Here is a typical exchange: One speaker objects to the other’s light treatment of serious subjects. The latter replies: “That’s precisely what one must do in Paris. One must weigh down on minor things to give them emphasis and an importance they wouldn’t otherwise have. The serious matters must be made lighter, else they will be unmanageably heavy.”

ISABEL CASTLE: Wasn’t there another dialogue mentioned in Galiani’s letters?

CASTLE: There’s a rather superficial one joshing women.

ISABEL CASTLE: Oh, I don’t think that is worth bringing up! I mean Mme d’Epinay’s *Conversations d’Emilie*, a book on female education that even received an Academy prize. Emilie was the daughter of another of the Abbé’s correspondents and not, as one might suppose, a female counterpart to Rousseau’s *Emile*.

FRANCIS: It’s true that Rousseau had already groomed “Sophie” for that part.

CASTLE: Another pertinent fact about the witty abate is that he wrote in Italian the words to a comic opera called *The Imaginary Socrates*. It satirizes a contemporary, who imagines himself to be Socrates born again. To his misfortune, his Xanthippe is also reincarnated.

HELEN TEDESCO: Well, we’ve heard about many dialogues before the revolution. I should think that a tumultuous period like the revolution would have seen many polemic dialogues produced.

FRANCIS: Actually, it was not very productive in this respect, although, I can think of one *dialogue des morts* by the famed Condorcet. It is between Diogenes and Aristippus. In a manner that has become a conventional part of his legend, the Cynic represents honesty in opposition to the cynical opportunism of Aristippus, condemning his flattery of the tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse. He defends himself by saying that he only flatters the tyrant for the good of men: “I oppose to his natural ferocity his self-interest and his glory, and I cause happy and just laws to issue

from tyranny's womb." In conclusion, Aristippus tells Diogenes: "Yes, in spite of my love of food and drink, I like your witty sayings better than all the wines of Sicily."

I wonder, Tedesco, if you know of any German dialogues on politics written in the period just prior to the French Revolution?

TEDESCO: No, except perhaps for Lessing's Masonic dialogues. *Ernst und Falk* belongs to his very last years. He published the first three of them in 1778, the others are posthumous. They have one qualification that justifies their being mentioned here. There was some difficulty with the censorship. Ostensibly dealing with Freemasonry, the work transcends those sectarian confines for the discussion focusses on the evils of discrimination by rank, nationality, and religion. I would like to quote a passage of the second conversation, if I can lay my hands on it. Oh, here it is: "It is the total sum added together of the individual well-being of all members that constitutes the well-being of the State. Outside of this, there is none at all. Any other kind of well-being of the State that causes an individual member to suffer ever so little is a mantle for tyranny." To this speech by Falk, Ernst demurs as if out of prudence: "I wouldn't say that so loud." But then he agrees with Falk: "As if Nature valued more the welfare of any abstract concept—such as State, Fatherland, and so forth—than the welfare of the actual individual person." Ernst becomes somewhat disillusioned with the order of Masonry when he learns that the Freemasons do not practice complete equality. Thus he sighs in the fourth (posthumous) conversation: "If only that equality existed!" Ernst goes on: Let an enlightened Jew come and introduce himself. 'Oh,' they say, 'a Jew? A Freemason should at least be a Christian. It doesn't matter what kind.' We recognize here the author of *Nathan der Weise*, do we not?

In the fifth dialogue there is a curious and ambiguous allusion to the American Revolution then in progress. Ernst has been shocked by the uncouth behavior of a Freemason he met at a social gathering. Falk informs him that the man is one of those who fight in Europe for the American cause to which Ernst replies that would not be the worst thing about him. Falk explains that the man fancies that the Continental Congress is a Lodge and that the Freemasons will finally establish their own regime in America. Can there be such dreamers asks Ernst. When Falk disavows such plans in the name of the Masons, Ernst responds: "That's what I think also. Whatever costs bloodshed is certainly not worth bloodshed!"

ISABEL CASTLE: Evidently Lessing would not have agreed with Thomas Paine! I mean in regard to summer soldiers and sunshine patriots.

HELEN TEDESCO: Perhaps not with Benjamin Franklin either! I don't really know whether Lessing was hinting at Franklin, who was a member of the Nine Sisters, or Nine Muses, Lodge in Passy. Other American leaders, including Washington, Samuel Adams, Alexander Hamilton, Patrick Henry, John Marshall, and James Monroe were said to be Masons. In 1778, Franklin assisted at the initiation of Voltaire into his lodge and in the same year officiated at the Masonic funeral service for the famous man. About this time, Franklin wrote a brief "Dialogue between Britain, France, Spain, Holland, Saxony, and America." Britain pleads in vain to the European states not to supply arms to America. As a piece of art it is surpassed by the utterly unpolitical "Dialogue between Franklin and the Gout," an amusing bagatelle, written in French in 1780 for one of the French ladies he was trying to flirt with.

Since I am talking about Franklin, I may as well bring out the rest of my homework. Evidently Langley did not think it worth mentioning in his essay that as a young man, Franklin met Mandeville in London back in 1725. Having returned to Philadelphia in 1730, he composed two slight dialogues between Philocles and Horatio concerning virtue and pleasure. Philocles is the apostle of prudence in the enjoyment of pleasures, Horatio, the rake, who accepts his friend's advice with surprising promptness. There is nothing else here to surprise anyone who already knows *Poor Richard's Almanack*, but it is curious that the name, Philocles, comes from Shaftesbury's *Moralists* and the name Horatio from Mandeville's dialogues appended to *The Fable of the Bees*.

Well, to move a little closer to the historical period we were in; I'll also mention that in 1755 Franklin composed "A Dialogue between X, Y, and Z, concerning the present state of affairs in Pennsylvania." The object was to enlighten the public mind on his Militia Act and to promote the association necessary to form a militia. In his opinion it had "great effect." Typical of the dialogue is an exchange between Z, the strongest opponent, and X, the author's mouthpiece. Z declares: "For my part, I am no coward, but hang me if I'll fight to save the *Quakers*." X replies: "That is to say, you won't jump ship, because 'twill save the rats, as well as yourself."

CASTLE: Judging from that sample, it is a pity that Franklin didn't

write more dialogues!

FRANCIS: Isabel, your reference to Thomas Paine,—did that mean that you had something more to say about him? Did he write dialogues?

ISABEL CASTLE: Oh, I know of only one. It is “A Dialogue between the Ghost of General Montgomery Just Arrived from the Elysian Fields; and an American Delegate, in a Wood near Philadelphia,” published in 1776. It begins with the delegate welcoming the ghost; “If I mistake not, I now see the ghost of the brave General Montgomery.” The latter replies: “I am glad to see you. I still love liberty and America, and the contemplation of the future greatness of this Continent now forms a large share of my present happiness. I am sent here upon an important errand, to warn you against listening to terms of accommodations from the court of Britain.” The delegate is one of those inclined to accommodation with the King. The general calls the king a royal criminal who should be resisted by armed action by the colonists. The delegate fears the destruction brought by war, as well as the ruin of trade overseas. The general answers his objections. The destructive consequences of slavery would be worse than those of war, and more lasting. With independence, trade will flourish: “As I know that Divine Providence intends this Country to be the asylum of persecuted virtue from all quarters of the globe, so I think your trade will be the vehicle that will convey it to you.” As for the British people themselves, he argues: “Your dependance upon the crown is no advantage, but rather an injury, to the people of Britain, as it encreases the power and influence of the King.” The American asks: “Will not a declaration of independence lessen the number of our friends and encrease the rage of our enemies in Britain?” The answer is: “Your friends are . . . too few . . . your enemies have done their worst. Go then and awaken the Congress. You have no time to lose. France waits for nothing but a declaration of your independence to revenge the injuries they sustained from Britain in the last war.” Then he clears up the mystery of why he has come back to earth from the Elysian Fields: “The inhabitants of Heaven long to see the ark finished, in which all the liberty and true religion of the world are to be deposited.” He continues, “The day in which the Colonies declare their independence will be a jubilee to Hampden, Sidney . . . and all the other heroes who have offered themselves as sacrifices upon the altar of liberty.” The general’s personal interest in the outcome remains, however, somewhat obscure: “It was

no small mortification to me when I fell upon the plains of Abraham, to reflect that I did not expire like the brave General Wolfe, in the arms of victory. But I no longer envy him his glory. I would rather die in *attempting* to obtain permanent freedom for a handful of people, than survive a conquest which would serve only to extend the empire of despotism. A band of heroes now beckon to me. I can only add that America is the theatre where human nature will *soon* receive its greatest military—civil and literary honors,—Finis.” Don’t you find, as I do, that Paine’s use of these last two words, literary honors, is rather interesting? Literary honors have not been associated with the outcome of any of the subsequent military conflicts in which our country has engaged, on a level with the other honors!

CASTLE: Has Paine himself been accorded the literary honors he deserved? There seems to be a tradition in the United States to deny him the standing given to other revolutionary figures of less importance. Is it because this patriot was too much the cosmopolitan?

TEDESCO: People for whom patriotism meant conformism must have been irritated by his statement: “The world is my country and to do good is my religion.” He was one of the early do-gooders.

FRANCIS: In our earlier conversation on philosophical dialogue, we referred to certain famous last scenes, the death of Socrates, the death of the fictional character, Meursault, in Camus’s *L’Étranger*. I wonder if this is not a more common theme than has been recognized by literary scholars, a sort of dialogue *in extremis*. Something that takes place, for example, between a dying unbeliever and a chaplain who comes to administer the last sacrament. Such a dialogue can be a special form of the controversial dialogue—one situated precisely in a *Grenzsituation*, as Tedesco might say.

CASTLE: For that very reason the theme is not suitable for dialogue,—it is too dramatic, too emotional.

TEDESCO: Aren’t you thinking of moving narratives like Tolstoy’s *Death of Ivan Ilyich*? Aren’t there more purely intellectual treatments of the theme?

FRANCIS: There is the danger of falling into melodramatic propaganda like Victor Hugo’s *Dernier Jour d’un condamné*. Hugo was writing against capital punishment. For a more successful, a richer, portrayal, one may take the last days of Julien Sorel in *Le Rouge et le noir* by Stendhal. But I have just the example Tedesco

wanted, an almost purely intellectual treatment. It is the Marquis de Sade's *Dialogue entre un prêtre et un moribond*. Since the man is not condemned to die by the criminal code, that is, by a dominant social class, the dialogue with the priest is not as fraught with emotion, and shall I say, partisan feeling, as the similar scenes with Julien Sorel or Meursault.

ISABEL CASTLE: If you were looking for the opposite of a do-gooder, someone very different from Thomas Paine, you could hardly have found a better example than this contemporary of his.

HELEN TEDESCO: And someone almost as far from Mandeville, with his motto, Private Vices, Public Benefits. Couldn't the Divine Marquis's motto have been: Private Vices, Private Benefits, and the Devil take the Public?

FRANCIS: Sade's utter cynicism and his unabashed defense of the ego's rights over other egos develop in the various dialogues interspersed through the erotic scenes of his narratives, such as *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*. One might say that this insolent, sexual egotist stops short of solipsism only because the pleasures of cruelty would be impossible if solipsism were true. The dialogue I cite focuses on other topics pertinent to the controversial mode that we have been discussing. Written in Vincennes prison in 1782, it was not published until our century, so it could not have the contemporary impact of the breviary of atheism inserted in the *Histoire de Juliette*, published in 1797. The little work has the same merits of clarity and elegance of style that mark his stories. When the priest summons the dying man to repentance, he replies that his only regret is that he had let many pleasures slip by him: he had harvested only flowers when he could have reaped an ample harvest of fruits. As for the priest's argument that a God is needed to explain the world, he answers that it is possible that nature alone had made what is attributed to God, so why look for a second difficulty to explain the first? "Perfect your knowledge of nature . . . clear your reason, banish your prejudices, and you won't have need of your God." What seems out of character for the Marquis is the speech on crime he ascribes to his interlocutor: "God forbid that I should wish to encourage crime. . . . Reason itself and not false fears must teach us to shun crime. Reason, my friend, yes reason alone must warn us that harming our fellowmen can never make us happy, and our hearts must advise us that contributing to their happiness is the greatest felicity nature has granted us on earth. All human

moral philosophy is contained in this single word: Make others as happy as we wish to be ourselves, and never cause them more pain than we would wish to receive.” The last phrase is perhaps suggestive of sado-masochism! But let’s skip that! Toward the end of the conversation, the speaker exhorts the priest: “Give up the idea of another world, there is none; but don’t give up the pleasure of being happy, and making others so.” The reader can only be impressed by the intellectual vigor of a dying man. And the reader is even more amazed at his announcement that he has arranged for a half-dozen women to help him pass his final hours pleasantly. Cynically he invites the priest to share the joys. And like Diderot’s reluctant missionary in *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*, the priest succumbs. “The preacher became in the arms of the women a man corrupted by nature, for not having been able to explain what corrupted nature is.”

HELEN TEDESCO: There’s a male chauvinist for you!

FRANCIS: I have often thought that the Marquis de Sade does not really represent the cutting edge of the advancement of free thought that some modern readers seem to take him for. He has done little more than pick up the sword dropped ages before by Gilles de Retz, accompanying his gesture with some remarks picked up from the *philosophes*—not so much a figure of the Enlightenment as a spoiled aristocrat, like Don Juan, who was miscast by the *Zeitgeist*.

CASTLE: I’m sure you mean it was the marquis who was miscast and not Don Juan! The Burlador of the Bastille, the play director of Charenton, should not be confused with the Burlador of Seville!

FRANCIS: You have me there!

HELEN TEDESCO: There is a dialogue by the early American novelist Charles Brockden Brown urging equal rights for women. It was called *Alcuin* and published, in part, in 1798. In a section then left unpublished, there is a visit to an imaginary society where unisex clothing is the custom. I wish Brown’s style were more vigorous. It is so genteel.

ISABEL CASTLE: I imagine the great age of dialogue is over with the end of the eighteenth century.

TEDESCO: Once we have crossed the divide to the nineteenth century, we face a long period of sterility as far as the dialogue is concerned, for with the coming of romanticism the leading writers will mostly be monologists. They will cultivate self-expression rather than persuasion. A recent German writer on the genre discovered that, unlike the French with their penchant for



dialogue, the Germans tend toward monologue. Citing Lichtenberg, Kleist, Hölderlin, he affirms: "Dialogue is the fate of the French. Monologue is the destiny of the Germans." Well, the Germans placed a stronger stamp on the European movement of romanticism than did the French, hence the lesser importance of dialogue. Thus it is significant that in the *Conversations with Eckermann*, the reporter stands out much less than did Boswell, for example, with Johnson. Goethe holds the floor all the time. Still, we have already noted that the romantic philosopher Schelling composed dialogues, as did Fichte.

ISABEL CASTLE: I believe that George Santayana's wartime tract *Egoism in German Philosophy* expounds a view that is similar to your recent German writer's.

CASTLE: Wasn't the greatest writer of dialogues at that time an Italian, Leopardi? Of course, his *Operette morali* are disenchanting and philosophical, rather than polemical.

FRANCIS: Once a weapon of polemic in favor of progress, the dialogue in French fell into the hands of the reactionary Joseph de Maistre. We have already noted certain philosophical doctrines in his *Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg*. The subtitle indicates its political tendency: *Entretiens sur le gouvernement temporel de la providence*. His work is a sustained attack on the eighteenth-century philosophers in the light of the alleged consequences of their ideas in the revolution and its aftermath. Sainte-Beuve remarks, referring to his birth at Chambéry in 1753, that Voltaire at Ferney could not suspect that his formidable enemy, his sharpest mocker, was to come from not far away. De Maistre repudiates those optimistic views on the natural goodness of man and on the possibility of progress through reason. On the so-called noble savage, he insists that savages are degenerate forms of mankind, not primitives at all. Man was more perfect at the beginning; the myth of the Golden Age proves that. It is curious how he takes the opposite stand from Rousseau, while using some of Rousseau's own language. Discussing the origin of evil, he writes, "It is one of my favorite ideas that the upright man [*l'homme droit*] is commonly advised by an inner feeling of the falseness or truth of certain propositions before any examination, often without having carried out studies to prepare him to examine them in fullness of knowledge." No doubt this notion is related to his concept of Platonic recollection. He argues that, on the question of evil, one should not ask: Why does the just man suffer? but simply: Why does man suffer? It is self-evident and fitting that evil

should exist in the world, but God is not its author. Following Saint Thomas Aquinas, de Maistre believes that God is the author of the pain that punishes, not of the evil that corrupts. Like his admirers, the Action Française of a century later, he was more Catholic than the pope, and more royalist than the king.

CASTLE: It occurs to me that de Maistre's notion that savages are a degenerate variety of mankind could supply a rationalization for genocide.

FRANCIS: That is true. The Black Legend does not seem so legendary if you read de Maistre. He thinks the missionaries were too kind. His characterization of savages is really a caricature, a crude and cruel one. I must admit it is presented in a style of great vigor and pungency. Let me quote a rather long extract: [Besides the reports of the missionaries] "another source of false judgments of them is found in the philosophy of our age, which has used savages to support its vain and guilty declamations against social order, but the slightest attention suffices to make us beware of the errors of charity and of bad faith. One could not look for a moment at the savage without reading the curse written, I won't say only in his soul, but even on the external form of his body. He is a child, deformed, robust and fierce, in whom the flame of intelligence casts now no more than a pale and intermittent gleam. A formidable hand weighing down on these cursed races rubs out in them the two distinguishing marks of our greatness, foresight and capacity for improvement. The savage cuts the tree to pick its fruit; he unharnesses the ox that the missionaries have given him and cooks it over a fire made with the wood of the plough. For over three centuries he has not wanted to receive anything from us except the powder to kill his fellows and the alcohol to kill himself." I must skip the most heartless phrases of his diatribe.

HELEN TEDESCO: So much for Montaigne, Lahontan, and Diderot!

ISABEL CASTLE: Did Joseph de Maistre have any followers outside of that counterrevolutionary stream leading to the Action Française? Isn't there a connection between him and the positivist Auguste Comte?

TEDESCO: Would it not seem strange to find the messiah of the "religion of humanity" in the spiritual company of that last-ditch defender of the divine right of kings!

FRANCIS: It appears that Comte esteemed de Maistre's book *Du Pape*. In the *Catéchisme positiviste* he claims among his ancestors

Fontenelle, Diderot, Condorcet, and de Maistre. There's a gene pool for you! Whose genes were dominant and whose recessive would be an interesting question, but it would take us too far away from our theme. No doubt there is one side of Comte that could respond to de Maistre. It is the side indicated by the first word in his slogan Order and Progress. His other ancestors line up with the second of the two words. The philosopher Léon Brunschvicg put it concisely: "By creating the positivist religion on his own authority, in order to combat *the Occidental malady . . . the revolutionary principle that recognizes no other authority but the individual reason*, Comte remains faithful to the impulsion that was communicated to him by Joseph de Maistre. Through positivism as much as through catholicism, the pontifical spirit tended toward the complete possession of the nineteenth century."

Against that pontifical spirit resistance took various forms. One form is illustrated by a fairly long work in dialogue by a forgotten opponent of the Second Empire. Maurice Joly's *Dialogue aux enfers entre Machiavel et Montesquieu* was published anonymously in Brussels in 1864 and smuggled into France. The author could not get it published in his homeland for it was too obviously an attack on the regime of Napoleon III. The imperial police seized the contraband shipments, and the work was pretty successfully suppressed. The Machiavelli of the dialogue is inspired not only by the author of *The Prince* but also by Joseph de Maistre, as Montesquieu does not fail to remark. The work turns upon a remarkable literary device. Machiavelli takes up the challenge presented by Montesquieu's writings and expounds a system of governmental despotism which he dares Montesquieu to refute. The hypothetical description of this government gradually begins to seem more and more real and soon becomes almost identical with the political reality of 1864, in France, a fact recognizable to the reader but not to Montesquieu, who had ceased to follow events in France since 1847. The device is extremely effective, except at times when Machiavelli almost becomes his own dupe and speaks as if he actually were in the seat of government. The dialogue begins well, gets bogged down in detail in mid-course, but ends quite powerfully. The political mixture of violence and cunning described by Machiavelli is exactly the political mixture displayed by Louis Napoleon in his coup d'état and his establishment of power afterwards.

The author's foreword begins: "This book has features that may apply to all governments, but it has a precise aim: it per-

sonifies in particular a political system that has not varied a single day in its applications, since the fateful and already, alas, too long past date of its *enthronement*." The work is divided into twenty-five dialogues, without definite breaks between them in many cases. The two great minds meet in the realm of shades. Their discussion concerns the fate of their respective doctrines in the present world. Machiavelli addresses his colleague: "Your political principles reign over nearly half of Europe, and if anyone can be freed from fear in the somber passage leading to Hell or Heaven, who better than he who presents himself with such pure titles of glory before the Eternal Judge?" As for himself, he laments that despite his services to his country, he died poor and neglected and that his book was held responsible in the eyes of posterity for all tyranny. "Such was my life and such the crimes that brought me the ingratitude of my homeland and the hatred of posterity. Heaven perhaps will be more just toward me." Montesquieu is more content: "The division of powers has solved the problem of free societies, and if anything can lighten for me the anxiety preceding the Day of Judgment, it is the thought that my stay on earth had something to do with this great emancipation." They naturally choose France as the object of their attention, "that consecrated field of experimentation for political theories." Machiavelli announces that within a century the age of despotisms will return. He proceeds to explain how he would go about it to establish such a despotism in France: "Nowadays it is less a question of doing violence to men than disarming them, of suppressing their political passions than *erasing* them, of combating their instincts than fooling them, of outlawing their ideas than throwing them off the trail by appropriating these ideas." He envisions a state of affairs in which we might recognize Nazi Germany: "It must come about that there will be in the country only proletarians, a few millionaires, and some soldiers." Another sentence refers to France, but could with some alterations apply to Germany: "I won't ask you for more than twenty years to transform thoroughly the most intractable national character in Europe and make it as docile to tyranny as the merest Asiatic people." At one point Montesquieu objects that Machiavelli's procedures would come into conflict with the very charter he had instituted. Machiavelli retorts: "I'll just make another constitution, that's all." We can understand why such an anti-Gaullist as Jean-François Revel took pleasure in sponsoring the recent republication of the book.

Machiavelli specifies many other measures he would take in establishing his autocratic regime. I'll mention only one here. Throwing a sop to his people, he will maintain the suffrage, but to limit its risks, to avoid surprises, he will gerrymander the electoral districts.

ISABEL CASTLE: Like in the United States at one time!

FRANCIS: He hardly ever mentions the United States at all.

HELEN TEDESCO: Perhaps because mentioning it in 1864 might lead him way off the track. There was that Civil War!

TEDESCO: If you have a copy of that book, I'd like to read it!

FRANCIS: Well, I'll try to conclude my review with just a few more references. I remarked earlier that Machiavelli tends to become the dupe of his own visions. However, he also carries Montesquieu away, toward the end. Montesquieu cannot contain his indignation: "May my shade never meet you again, and may God erase from my memory the last trace of what I have heard!" In an allusion to the so-called liberal empire, Machiavelli propounds he has disarmed the hatred of factions. Montesquieu replies in disgust: "Ah! So you won't drop the mask of hypocrisy with which you have disguised crimes never described by human tongue. So you want me to come out of eternal night to denounce you! Ah! Machiavelli, you yourself had not taught how to degrade mankind to this point! You did not then conspire against conscience, you had not conceived the idea of making the human soul into a slime in which the Divine Creator Himself would no longer recognize anything. . . . Finish your speech, it will be the expiation for the rash act I committed in accepting this sacrilegious wager!"

ISABEL CASTLE: That sounds like an echo of Victor Hugo's poem *Expiation*, denouncing Louis Napoleon's coup d'état.

FRANCIS: The parallel with that poem becomes more striking a little later. The author ascribes delusions of grandeur to the tyrant, and Montesquieu sighs: "Will this frightful dream never end?" But it is not a dream. Machiavelli explains: "What I have just described to you exists and prospers." Montesquieu asks where, and Machiavelli hesitates to answer him as it would impose on him a second death. The whirlwind carries Machiavelli away, but Montesquieu has guessed. The final words pronounced by him and the final words of the dialogue are: "Eternal God, what have you permitted . . . !"

HELEN TEDESCO: That's a pretty bombastic piece of writing. I suppose that in French that passes for eloquence.

FRANCIS: Perhaps it's partly the fault of my translation. But it was a period when a grandiloquent style was common. Maurice Joly's manner of expression was not original with him.

TEDESCO: We can still be glad that his dialogue was rediscovered. And I still want to read it.

FRANCIS: The work is a curious instance of the phrase: *Habent sua fata libelli*. It seems that one copy of the original edition was rescued. Can you imagine what happened to it? It was used in the composition of the famous forgery *The Protocols of Zion*. Some passages in which Machiavelli describes how he will carry out his seizure of power were plagiarized by the forgers and attributed to the imaginary leaders of the alleged conspiracy!

CASTLE: The shade of Maurice Joly could hardly have rejoiced at that!

ISABEL CASTLE: Evidently he received amends in the republication of his work in the late Gaullist era!

FRANCIS: A contemporary, somewhat less forgotten than Maurice Joly, composed dialogues, of which at least one is comparable to his *Machiavel et Montesquieu*. A liberal and a Parnassian of sorts, Louis Ménard sets Socrates into a *dialogue des morts*. Socrates arrives before Minos, expecting to have his unjust indictment reversed. But Minos is not there to judge, he seeks to reconcile those who have hated each other during life. Socrates will be able to accuse his accusers; both he and they will be permitted to call the Future to witness. The one who admits to being wrong will submit himself to the Eumenides to be purified. But Socrates is appalled when he discovers the evils awaiting mankind in the ages to come, evils which would grow out of his teaching.

Another dialogue is entitled "Le gouvernement gratuit." It is an allegory in which Jacques Bonhomme represents the French people, and La Fée represents revolution. The time is after the Franco-Prussian War. The question at issue concerns the remuneration of government officials. Jacques Bonhomme is almost crushed under the burden. La Fée adduces the example of the Athenian democracy in which the executive gave services free out of duty. Since it is not possible to return to the example of the first democratic government, La Fée proposes at least a limitation on official salaries. This is, of course, a trifling proposal to come from the Spirit of Revolution. If the author wished to make the point that the nation feared to take the course of revolution, La Fée's suggestion is anticlimactic. The level of official salaries was certainly not the most crucial problem facing France in those

early years of the Third Republic. The confusion of Ménard's political liberalism was to bring him into the Boulangist camp along with antiparliamentarians, who did not share his democratic opinions.

A dialogue of greater merit is "Eschatologie," a conversation between man and a divinity of a nature somewhere between that of a guardian angel and a pagan god. Their topic is immortality. The god suggests various possibilities which have their drawbacks. Man agrees that it is better not to know what, if anything, comes after death. The discussion then proceeds to the question of evil. The god points out that without suffering there would be no heroes. What merit is there in being good if one is assured of reward? Does this bring to mind Joseph de Maistre's argument? Ménard lays a different emphasis upon it. Man agrees with the god that evil has its place in the universal scheme. The inquietude of hope is better than the security of faith. There is here a touch of heroic humanism that Camus, the author of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, might concur with. Ménard's philosophical dialogues, unlike his political one, possess qualities of richness of thought without heaviness that perhaps warrant according them a place between those of Ernest Renan and Anatole France.

TEDESCO: Yet it does appear that the nineteenth century was not a great one for dialogue, at least of the controversial type that we have been tracing through the ages.

ISABEL CASTLE: What's the title of Ménard's collection?

FRANCIS: *Rêveries d'un païen mystique*.

HELEN TEDESCO: I took the opportunity to look him up in the *Petit Larousse*. It says he was also a chemist, who invented collodion. This must have been some later application of the substance, for he was born in 1822. What kind of scientist was he?

FRANCIS: As for that, all I know is that he wrote in the book I have cited these sentimental words: "Claude Bernard's widow has opened a home for dogs to make amends for the crimes of experimental physiology. On Judgment Day, this offering will weigh more in the awesome balance than all the discoveries of her husband."

ISABEL CASTLE: Why did you mention Renan and Anatole France? I don't recall any militant dialogues by these skeptics. I do recall William James's review of Renan's *Dialogues et fragments philosophiques*. I thought we might talk about Renan, so I brought along this quotation: "This last production of a writer who at one time seemed, to say the least, the most exquisite literary genius of

France, is really sad reading for anyone who would gladly be assured that that country is robust and fertile still. [It is] . . . an example of mental ruin . . . insincerity and foppishness . . . priggishness rampant, an indescribable unmanliness of tone compounded of a sort of histrionically sentimental self-conceit, and a nerveless and loveless fear of what will become of the universe if 'l'homme vulgaire' is allowed to go on."

FRANCIS: William James was being rather tough-minded at the expense of that tender-minded Renan, wasn't he?

TEDESCO: I'd agree that the *Dialogues philosophiques* are, as people used to say, redolent of disenchantment. It's in certain of his *Drames philosophiques* that we find a more robust discussion of political issues. As for "l'homme vulgaire," the first title he planned for *Caliban* was "La réhabilitation de Caliban ou la suite de la tempête." And *L'Eau de jouvence, suite de Caliban*, is clearly optimistic as regards the potential political maturity of Caliban. The nature of the theme required that he depart from the Platonic genre to undertake something in the adjacent genre of the philosophical drama. He had difficulty making the transition since as he noted in a preface to his *Prêtre de Nemi*: "The essence of the dialogue being to put into play different opinions, and the essence of drama to oppose different types." Renan remained caught between Plato and Shakespeare.

FRANCIS: Now if I may put in a word in defense of Anatole France?

Readers of Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* perhaps remember only the slogan about Irony and Pity. Anatole France set some of his stimulating philosophical dialogues in novels like *Thaïs* and some of his most militant political dialogues in the chronicles of the contemporary history ending with *M. Bergeret à Paris*. Just as Maurice Barrès, who wrote a preface for Ménard's book, by the way, placed more vigorous dialogues in *Les Déracinés* than in *Huit Jours chez M. Renan*.

CASTLE: They were on opposite sides in the Dreyfus Case, were they not?

FRANCIS: Barrès composed polemics on the affair, but no dialogues like those of M. Bergeret. On the side of Dreyfus, Julien Benda composed *Dialogues à Byzance*. Remy de Gourmont was coldly neutral in his *Epilogues*, sequels to his *Dialogues des amateurs*. The *cause célèbre* may have made a socialist of the young literary critic Léon Blum, yet his *Nouvelles Conversations de Goethe avec Eckermann* are not, on the whole, Dreyfusard dialogues. They reflect other preoccupations. They are modern interviews



where there is little play of dialogue. As in the model, it is Goethe who discourses and Eckermann who approves, even where Goethe says that he is busy with a Third Faust in which Mephistopheles and Faust confront each other like Jules Guesde and Jean Jaurès, rival socialist leaders of that epoch. Jaurès had sought to rally socialists to the Dreyfus cause, while Guesde wished a plague on both the Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards, or rather on the bourgeois salons in which they assembled. Léon Blum took Jaurès's side against Guesde. One wishes he had pursued the idea of a Third Faust along these lines, so that it could be compared with what Paul Valéry did much later. There is, however, one brief conversation dealing with Dreyfus which I wish to summarize since it shows how anti-Dreyfusards invoked Goethe in the debate. The conversation is dated June 7, 1898. Goethe had been surprised by finding himself quoted by a newspaper opposed to reviewing the trial of Dreyfus. The newspaper article describes the tragic state of the country: "business at a standstill, political parties in disarray, Society prey to affliction—all that just for the sake of a single individual. . . . Zola, Scheurer-Kestner, and Picquart would have done well to reflect on the words of Goethe: Better an injustice than disorder." Léon Blum has Goethe correct the reference in contemporary terms: "What was I condemning by those words? I was condemning lynch law, which is a disorder in the sense that it omits the essential forms of justice. . . . But leaving Dreyfus in the prison camp, Dreyfus whom every impartial and sensible man knows to be innocent . . . it is very clear that that is a disorder." And he emphasizes: "Those who sent him or keep him on the island, they alone are acting as enemies of social order."

ISABEL CASTLE: I know that Léon Blum was later the Socialist prime minister of France. I believe that Julien Benda also became well known, did he not?

FRANCIS: Yes, as the author of the book *La Trahison des clercs* in the twenties. He condemned the intellectuals who became involved in politics. If this seems inconsistent with his stand on Dreyfus, Benda explained that defending Dreyfus was not a compromise with principle but an expression of principle, whereas the "clercs" he accused in the book violated their high calling by their partisanship. Several of these had been anti-Dreyfusards, by the way, like Maurice Barrès and Charles Maurras. Benda's position was perhaps not too different from that famous distinction made by Charles Péguy between the "mystique" and the "politique" of

Dreyfusism, except that Péguy applied it to his erstwhile partisans on the Dreyfus side. In the debate between [Machiavelli] and Montesquieu, Benda would have been with Montesquieu. To get back to his *Dialogues à Byzance*, the author's spokesman is Eleuthère. I'd like to quote an eloquent statement of his: "Isn't it sad to observe that mankind understands and acts in accordance with its interests only if this understanding and action satisfy at the same time its need to hate and its thirst for blood and that as soon as one tries to show men that by doing an apparently generous deed they are really working for their own happiness, one is immediately called a dreamer and lacking in a sense for the practical?" One of Eleuthère's antagonists is named M. Duval. Curiously enough, in 1953, Louis Aragon published dialogues entitled *Le Neveu de M. Duval*. Benda dealt with the Dreyfus case, Aragon with the Cold War. One Duval supports the French army, the nephew supports the American army! Aragon, of course, also had in mind Diderot's *Neveu de Rameau*. The copy of Julien Benda's *Dialogues à Byzance* which I have in my hand was presented by Benda to Robert Dreyfus, but I don't know whether this Dreyfus was related. If he were, I should imagine that the book would have been kept in the family. Benda was to write other dialogues later in his career, but none as long as these.

HELEN TEDESCO: I can't imagine how we could end this conversation on a stronger note than your quotation from Léon Blum. And since we have arrived at the end of the last century and the beginning of our own, I propose that we stop here.

TEDESCO: I'm really glad that you were able to correct that misconception of Goethe so appropriately.

FRANCIS: I am thinking of all the miscarriages of justice that the new century would bring, including one in which Léon Blum himself would be in the dock, accused of contributing to the defeat of his country by the descendants of the enemies of Dreyfus.

ISABEL CASTLE: Those dialogues would have to be sought in court records and not in literary compositions.

## 6. Dialogues as Literary Criticism

Late afternoon at Francis's. Jane Francis and Isabel Castle are present, soon joined by Francis and Langley.

JANE FRANCIS: Should we let our husbands hear the tapes?

ISABEL CASTLE: No, let's not tell them now. We'll let Langley tell them when they meet for their concluding session next week.

*Francis and Castle enter, then Langley.*

FRANCIS: What were you saying about our concluding session?

JANE FRANCIS: We were about to say that we won't be able to attend, but perhaps you'll tell us about it all later.

CASTLE: I'll have to miss it too. I'll be called away, unfortunately.

ISABEL CASTLE: With all that was said during the last conversations, there was one subject that didn't receive much attention.

FRANCIS: What was that?

ISABEL CASTLE: It's the use of the dialogue in literary criticism.

Nothing was said about John Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, or about T. S. Eliot's *Dialogue of Dramatic Poetry*.

CASTLE: Francis did mention Fénelon's and Perrault's comments on Pascal.

FRANCIS: That was in connection with religious controversy in the case of Fénelon and with the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns in the case of Perrault. To be sure, literary criticism enters there too.

CASTLE: It occurs to me that the very first literary criticism appears in several of Plato's works, in *The Republic* of course, but also in *Ion*, where the notion of poetic inspiration is presented.

LANGLEY: Plato was not so much a critic of particular literary works, as a critic of literature itself. I should imagine we wouldn't want to enter into that deep subject here and now.

CASTLE: Still, I consider it of capital importance that here too, in the subject of literary criticism, we must begin at least with the name of Plato, if not in his name.

JANE FRANCIS: Unless you began with Aristophanes who set Aeschylus and Euripides to debating in *The Frogs*!

FRANCIS: It would be better to start with modern times, when the literary critic as such began to emerge, as distinct from the philosopher or satirist.

CASTLE: The boundaries of our topic exclude Dante, whose essay on allegorical and other meanings of literature is called *The Convivio*. Only its title recalls *The Symposium*, not its form.

FRANCIS: A pretty fair idea of the evolution of critical attitudes in France can be gained from works in the dialogue form.

JANE FRANCIS: As I recall, one of the first great documents was Joachim du Bellay's *Défence et illustration de la langue française*. But it is not in the dialogue form, nor are any of the later literary manifestoes like Victor Hugo's *Preface to Cromwell* or Emile Zola's *Experimental Novel*.

LANGLEY: Neither is Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*.

FRANCIS: Naturally. But I'm not thinking of prefaces or manifestoes. These are likely to be in the first person singular or plural.

CASTLE: Incidentally, du Bellay's manifesto was partly based on the Italian dialogue of Sperone Speroni!

ISABEL CASTLE: I'd like to hear Francis attempt to demonstrate his idea.

FRANCIS: Well, I'll start with the seventeenth century, if you will allow me. Attitudes toward the Middle Ages are involved in the dialogues of Jean Chapelain and Jean-François Sarasin. Chapelain's piece *La Lecture des vieux romans* includes in its cast of characters this same Sarasin allied with Chapelain against the scholar Gilles Ménage. The latter is to be the model for the pedant Vadius in Molière's *Femmes savantes*. But he had positive qualities: Mme de Sévigné esteemed him. Chapelain's dialogue deals with the Arthurian romance of Lancelot. Although his defense is somewhat apologetic, he stresses the philological interest of its old language to an etymologist like Ménage but agrees with the critic that the work lacks artistic merit. He concedes that the plot development is weak. Like Sarasin, Chapelain emphasizes the moral virtues expressed in the story, the chivalry, courage, and loyalty to friends. Ménage is at length persuaded to grant some value to the romance, despite his disapproval of some of the behavior depicted. Chapelain's manuscript was addressed to Cardinal de Retz and published only much later. His future enemy, Boileau, does not treat Lancelot in his dialogue *Les Héros de roman*. Written in 1665, not published until after his death, this is a satire, in the style of Lucian, of Chapelain's epic *La Pucelle* and of the novels of the *précieuse* Mlle de Scudéry, whose works

present ancient warriors like Horatius and Cyrus transformed as pining lovers, much to the disgust of Pluto and the sarcastic amusement of Minos. *Préciosité* is also the target of Molière's *Critique de l'école des femmes*.

LANGLEY: Do you call that a dialogue?

FRANCIS: Molière and Voltaire did so! As you know, there is rather little dramatic action in the piece. It is more than a defence of *L'École des femmes* against the prudens and hypocrites who were attacking Molière, for it contains a moving defence of his conception of comedy by the playwright. His critics asserted that comedy was inferior to tragedy. Dorante, his mouthpiece, answers vigorously: "When you portray heroes, you do as you please . . . But when you depict men, you must make likenesses. . . . You have done nothing if the people of your time do not recognize themselves in your portraits. . . . And you must provide amusement; to make cultured people laugh is a difficult undertaking."

ISABEL CASTLE: Undoubtedly Molière was setting forth the views of many cultured people of his age, including Boileau. He wasn't speaking for La Fontaine, apparently, for La Fontaine's story of *Psyche and Cupid* contains a contrary view. This view is expressed in the dialogue of the four friends who have come together to hear the story and discuss it, almost like the devisants of Margaret of Navarre's *Heptameron*, by the way. Gélaste observes that there are very few good tragic poets today: "I don't mean that the last one died with Euripides or Sophocles; I mean only that there are hardly any. The difficulty is not so great in comedy, which is more likely to touch us, because its incidents are of such a nature that we can apply them to ourselves more readily."

LANGLEY: What can you say to that, Francis?

FRANCIS: Well, I'm really glad Isabel brought it up. For more than one reason. First, it is another example of a dialogue on a topic of literary criticism. Ariste, Acante, and Poliphile represent different shades of opinion, but all belong to the French classical age. Second, the contrast between Gélaste and Molière indicates that La Fontaine could not have modeled this character on Molière, as was once widely assumed in France. You recall that Ariste was supposed to be Boileau, Acante to be Racine, and Poliphile to be La Fontaine. None of these identifications is now accepted.

But I'd like to cite another idea from Molière's *Critique*. He has the pedant Lysidas wrongheadedly accuse him of violating the rules in his play. Dorante answers for him: "You amuse me with

your rules, with which you embarrass the ignorant and deafen us all the time. To listen to you, one would suppose the rules of the art to be the greatest mysteries in the world, and yet they are but natural observations of common sense. . . . I'd like to know whether the great rule of all rules is not to please." That is an aspect of French classicism that joins Molière to Boileau and Racine.

A contemporary, Gabriel Guéret, in *La Promenade de Saint-Cloud*, has Oronte and Cléante carry on interesting chats on Chapelain, Sarasin, Ménage, and others. Oronte favors Boileau; Cléante is critical of him, as is the first-person speaker. There are many pages pro and con on *Tartuffe*. The speakers also criticize sundry dialogues of the period. Another contemporary, le père Bouhours, composed two volumes of dialogues, including some on literary topics. The most famous is one on "Le je ne sais quoi," that mysterious quality that Boileau's rationalist doctrine perhaps failed to account for. Bouhours presents two interlocutors: Ariste offers a comparison between magnetism and the "je ne sais quoi," and Eugène adds learned references to Italian and Spanish usages.

CASTLE: Mentioning, I trust, Juan de Valdés's *Diálogo de la lengua!*

FRANCIS: Well, Bouhours is more interested in psychology, in the phenomena of sympathy and antipathy. In another piece on "Le Bel Esprit," he tries to clarify such things as enthusiasm, inspiration, and genius by means of a humoristic psychology. One critic is reminded of a diagnosis by a Molière doctor! In his second volume, Bouhours presents two friends in amiable conversation on the question of the Ancients versus the Moderns. Philanthe favors the modern Spaniards and Italians over the Greeks and Romans, but is gradually led toward Eudoxe's view. As his name implies, Eudoxe places good sense over the "faux bel esprit," exemplified by such writers as Tasso. Eudoxe is not quite as doctrinaire as Boileau, however. One of the significant notions attributed to him is this: "The figurative is not false, and the metaphor has its truth just as fiction has." Eudoxe and Philanthe really represent different points of view, although their differences generate no sparks. The interlocutors of the first volume, *Les Entretien d'Ariste et d'Eugène*, on the other hand, are virtually interchangeable, so little do they differ. Even for Eudoxe and Philanthe, we have to look elsewhere for more exciting episodes in the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns. I am thinking of Perrault's presentation of his poem at the French Academy and

Boileau's protest. There was no dialogue between Perrault and Boileau!

LANGLEY: *The Battle of the Books* by Swift has more exciting episodes. Of course, it's a burlesque combat and not a debate. The most important dialogue produced in England dealing with the controversy was certainly John Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesie*. Four men take a sail on the Thames and engage in discussion of contemporary events and literature. Their first topic is the Ancients and Moderns, and they pass from this to a comparison of French and English drama. With all Dryden's respect for Corneille, his mouthpiece Neander joins the majority against one speaker defending the French theatre. It is here that we read that famous praise of Shakespeare: "He was the man who of all Modern, and perhaps Ancient Poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul." As they continue their ride, they move on to another topic, the question of rhyme versus blank verse for tragedy. Neander expresses the author's preference for rhyme. Their conversation is interrupted by their arrival at Somerset-Stairs. No one can deny that the dialogue form is highly appropriate for the subject. In the words of one editor: "No other form would permit so much of the fictional give-and-take which mimes the theme of the discussion, drama." He notes, by the way, that T. S. Eliot's "Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry," imitating Dryden, "fails precisely because it lacks dramatic force."

JANE FRANCIS: What was Dryden's criticism of seventeenth-century French drama?

LANGLEY: He objected, for one thing, to the awkward way in which French dramatists handled their unities, notably the unity of place. They would have done better to abandon the artifice. Insistence on the *liaison des scènes* led to some pretty ridiculous situations. "If the act begins in a chamber, all the persons in the play must have some business or other to come hither, or else they are not to be shown in that act, and sometimes their characters are very unfitting to appear there: as, suppose it were the king's bed-chamber; yet the meanest man in the tragedy must come and dispatch his business there, rather than in the lobby or courtyard (which is fitter for him) for fear the stage should be cleared and the scenes broken." Other absurd situations are mentioned.

FRANCIS: On the topic of the Ancients and Moderns, Dryden's discussion dates a couple of decades before the issue was really joined, at least as far as Boileau and Perrault were involved.

Before taking up Perrault's *Parallèles*, one may cite Louis Petit's *Dialogues satyriques et moraux*. Among many others on other subjects, there is a curious piece in which the debaters are "La Prose" and "La Poésie." The humorous note is struck at the opening: "La Poésie" exclaims at the presumption that men might be the fathers of the gods. "La Prose" replies: "You cannot deny that, since the gods issued from the heads of poets, like Pallas from the head of Jupiter and Bacchus from his calf. What! don't you remember having been the midwife of them all?" Of course, this has nothing much to do with the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns. But the dialogue is relevant to the Quarrel in its depreciation of poetry. "La Prose" certainly expresses the narrow prosaist's point of view. In general "La Poésie" is not given strong arguments to deliver. For example, she retreats when her opponent retorts: "Are you joking, when you claim to prove a truth by a Fable?" There is already quite a distance from Bouhours to Louis Petit.

ISABEL CASTLE: What was that poem that Perrault recited before the Academy?

FRANCIS: It was his eulogy of the Age of Louis the Great. He celebrates the invention of the telescope and the microscope almost in the same breath as the masterpieces of Corneille. That kind of mixture is offered in much greater volume in his *Parallèles*. His absurd partisanship in favor of the Moderns is nowhere more evident than in the speeches he assigns to the "Président," the defender of the Ancients. For example, this magistrate is sure of the superiority of ancient philosophy, of Aristotle to the Port-Royal Logic, for instance: "I haven't read this Logic of Port-Royal, and have no desire to read it, being very certain that it says nothing that was not better put by Aristotle." The magistrate rejects Descartes as a mere follower of Democritus, whom Aristotle had already refuted. Ergo, Descartes is much inferior to the Ancients. We have already noted that the defender of the Moderns finds Pascal superior to Plato. Such a view must be placed in the context of Perrault's belief in the superiority of Christianity to paganism. On the more purely literary aspects of the Quarrel, Perrault allows himself to be carried away. Not only does he assert the superiority of the Corneilles and Racines to the Ancients, but he also includes among the exemplary Moderns some of the victims of Boileau's satire, even the Chapelains and Scudéry's! Fontenelle was more temperate in his defense of the Moderns.



LANGLEY: I doubt that one could derive a very complete understanding of the Quarrel simply from the dialogues, but they do serve to complete our knowledge. I suppose the more or less contemporary dialogue, *The Impartial Critic* of John Dennis in England, would be worth mentioning, on the side of Ancients. Still, in his case, a certain national pride led him to prefer Milton over Virgil!

JANE FRANCIS: National pride actuated Dryden in his criticism of French drama, didn't it?

LANGLEY: Dryden was justified, I think, more than certain later writers, like Hurd and Landor, undoubtedly. Yet it is only when a national literature is trying to defend itself against undue influence from abroad that such things are worth bringing up in a discussion of literary criticism.

CASTLE: If such a national culture has something promising to protect! I take it that the *Strum und Drang* in Germany made such a claim in opposition to undue French classical influence there.

ISABEL CASTLE: Lessing and Friedrich Schlegel also. But only Schlegel argued this point in dialogue, didn't he?

FRANCIS: Tedesco could answer that, if he were here. Lessing reminds us of the discussions of Diderot concerning the *drame bourgeois*. And here we find the dialogue in a salient position. Diderot's *Entretiens sur le fils naturel* must be regarded as a primary document. It is perhaps more important, and certainly for us more interesting, to read than the play which it was meant to interpret.

JANE FRANCIS: In that way, like Hugo's *Preface to Cromwell*! Who has ever read Hugo's *Cromwell*? And who has read Diderot's *Fils naturel* in a hundred years? In the French course I took, it was said that the best example of Diderot's idea of a bourgeois drama was Sedaine's *Philosophe sans le savior*.

LANGLEY: Diderot is famous for his enthusiasms. Well, I don't believe we feel much enthusiasm for his ideas on drama, much less for his dramas themselves! All that stuff about presenting the social condition instead of the character, the various occupations of commerce and industry, and the *père de famille*! That heavy father!

FRANCIS: At least he was ahead of his time, in one way: he anticipated Alexandre Dumas fils and Emile Augier and their social drama.

LANGLEY: If you mean that as a point in his favor . . . !

FRANCIS: One cannot deny the historical importance of Diderot's *Entretiens*, but if you want an example of a Diderot dialogue on the theatre that is still able to arouse sharp controversy, why not look at the *Paradoxe sur le comédien*? Like his *Neveu de Rameau*, it was more or less a confidential document during his lifetime, but it received a lot of public attention since as well as the attention of great actors and directors, such as Jacques Copeau and Louis Jouvet. Jouvet wrote that only Diderot left a document on the art of acting, that the *Paradoxe* was the first treatment that can be called psychologically true, and that Diderot was the first to understand the *dédoublement*, the splitting of himself that the actor must undergo. Still, Jouvet thought that it's not so much *dédoublement* as *disponibilité* that is required of the actor. He also questioned whether there ever existed actors of the absolute type that Diderot conceived. Jouvet's judgment may be balanced by that of Jean-Paul Sartre, who said in *L'Idiot de la famille*: "Diderot is right: the actor does not really experience the feelings of his character; but it would be wrong to suppose that he expresses them in cold blood: the truth is that he experiences them in an *irreal* (nonreal) mode. His real feelings,—stage fright, for example . . . serve him as *analogues*, he aims through them at the passions that he must express."

ISABEL CASTLE: Oh, yes, Stanislavsky, the Method, and all that! But isn't all that irrelevant to the subject of literary criticism?

FRANCIS: I grant that the art of acting is somewhat outside our proper range. There is, however, another aspect to Diderot's *Paradox* that is related to literature. This is the concept of genius, so different from the picture of the inspired madman that Dorval suggests in the *Entretiens*, which were written years before the *Paradox*. By inspired madman, I mean the Dorval of the scene where he is transported by the spectacle of nature that he is contemplating. There apparently was a change in Diderot's concept of genius, almost as if he were on the way to Paul Valéry's downgrading of the place of inspiration in the poetic process. Incidentally, Valéry's *Fragments du Narcisse* could almost be read as a takeoff on that opening passage of the second *Entretien*! But to return to the subject of genius—in the *Paradox* Diderot was perhaps trying to find in the great actor the very image of genius, as in the *Rêve de D'Alembert*, where he says: "The great man will . . . seek to be master of his impulses . . . he will be a great king, a great minister . . . a great artist, especially a great actor, a great

poet . . . he will reign over himself and all around him.”

LANGLEY: That’s certainly not the Diderot, or the Dorval, of the *Entretiens!*

FRANCIS: Tedesco told me of the influence of the *Paradox* on a dialogue on the theatre in Martin Buber’s *Daniel*—just another instance of Diderot’s impact. But maybe we should go on. I recall that we left Rousseau somewhat outside the realm of dialogue when we mentioned him previously. Nevertheless, even Rousseau may be cited in support of our efforts to use examples from that genre to illustrate important steps in the evolution of literature. I refer to his second preface to *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Rousseau calls it “ce Dialogue ou cet Entretien supposé.” Its subtitle is *Entretien sur les romans entre l’éditeur et un homme de lettres*. There is a curious contradiction between this subtitle and the insistence by the “editor” that the work is not a *roman* but a *recueil de lettres*, not a novel but a mere collection of letters. That is one of the main arguments of the dialogue carried on with himself by that novelist-in-spite-of-himself, Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

LANGLEY: How is his little argument with himself an important step in the evolution of literature?

FRANCIS: Of course his preface had no influence independent of the book itself. In fact, few readers seem to have noticed it down to our own times. The preface shows how the genre of the novel was still looked down upon around 1760. Rousseau had his own doubts concerning the form, doubts having to do with its moral effects and its verisimilitude. By answering his own doubts he was answering the objections of others.

LANGLEY: But it is with his book that he won over the public, not with his dialogue.

FRANCIS: I don’t mind conceding that. Rousseau’s *Entretien* is still worthy of a place in the series leading from Chapelain and Boileau.

CASTLE: Are you implying that the series does not stop with Rousseau?

FRANCIS: Perhaps we’ll have to go outside of France for the continuation, say, to Schlegel’s *Dialogue on Poetry*.

LANGLEY: Tedesco mentioned a dialogue on poetry by Friedrich Schlegel when we were discussing philosophy. I looked it up and discovered that it is hardly a dialogue at all, but a set of essays followed by snatches of conversation. I did find there a “Letter on the Novel,” which I presume is what Francis is referring to. I was amazed to read that the author despised the novels of Field-

ing and La Fontaine. His opinion had something to do with his distaste for realism. The footnote in the translation I read identified La Fontaine as the French fabulist. I could not believe my eyes until I realized that Schlegel was not alluding to the author of *Psyche* but to a German novelist named August Lafontaine! Another curious remark in the "Letter on the Novel" is that the writer regards Rousseau's *Confessions* to be an excellent novel, but *La Nouvelle Héloïse* a mediocre one. The most valuable point made in the work is on the novel as the principal genre of modern literature as the epic was of ancient literature. Schlegel also says that the novel, *Roman* in German, must be romantic. I don't know whether he carried out his own prescriptions in his *Lucinde*. I imagine that this dialogue, being an early work, supplies only a small part of his ideas on literature, and it doesn't contain a couple of quotations which I find interesting in his *Fragments*. In one, he called novels the Socratic dialogues of our time. In another, we read: "A dialogue is a chain or wreath of aphorisms, a correspondence is a dialogue expanded."

FRANCIS: I need say no more on the novel. You have touched on all that I had in mind, in that respect. There is another thing that sticks in my memory. It is the disparaging way Schlegel refers to French classical poetry. One of his speakers calls it a false poetry, an example of how a great nation can exist without poetry. Thus, the little book has significance for the German reaction against French classicism which started with Lessing and continued in a different form with the *Sturm und Drang*. However, it is perhaps the only dialogue that can be cited as a document for that reaction.

LANGLEY: And as I said, it's not exactly a dialogue.

CASTLE: Perhaps Schlegel should have strung together some more of his aphorisms.

JANE FRANCIS: I think it's about time that someone brought up dialogues in which the talents of women writers are discussed, and so, I'll throw in the *Noctes ambrosianae*. Two of the speakers express admiration for Mme de Staël and for a number of British novelists, such as Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen. This part is dated 1826.

ISABEL CASTLE: And apparently none of them had to call herself George to get her novels published!

JANE FRANCIS: Out of justice to John Wilson and James Hogg, they never complained about "hordes of scribbling women" like another male writer I could name!

LANGLEY: Yet I do recall that there are no women present at those conversations, as these are set forth in *Blackwood's Magazine*.

FRANCIS: I am reminded of the "Dinners at Magny's" reported in the *Goncourt Journal*. George Sand was the only woman who was ever invited.

CASTLE: This is an intriguing subject that has come up before. I wondered whether the *Noctes ambrosianae* may have any other claim upon our attention. I had never heard of the work.

JANE FRANCIS: There is praise for the Lake Poets. There is also praise for Voltaire and Goethe. North says of Voltaire: "Heavens! what a genius was Voltaire's! So grave, so gay, so profound, so brilliant — his name is worth all the rest in the French literature." Another speaker interjects: "Always excepting my dear Rabelais." And North agrees: "A glorious old fellow, to be sure! Once get into his stream, and try if you can land again! He is the only man whose mirth exerts the sway of uncontrollable vehemence. His comic is as strong as the tragic of Æschylus himself."

CASTLE: Why is the work not so well known as Landor's?

JANE FRANCIS: I believe Landor's conversations have more unity and are more finished works of art. Those Ambrosian nights went on for years and years. The conversations ramble so much that nobody would have the patience to read them all nowadays. And I myself read only a few for an English paper I wrote as a student. My old notes happened to come in handy for our conversation today.

CASTLE: I'm glad that you kept them.

LANGLEY: Since you have referred to Landor, we may mention a couple of his *Imaginary Conversations* dealing with literature. His judgments of French classicism might have pleased the speakers in Schlegel's little work. For example, here is what he had to say about Boileau: having quoted some lines from an "Epistle," "The man must have been born in a sawmill, or in France, or under the falls of Niagara, whose ear can suffer them" and then about Racine: "Racine has stolen many things from Euripides: he has spoilt most of them, and injured all." This is in the conversation between the Abbé Delille and Walter Landor. Since he put his own name to them, they must be taken for his own opinions. He does praise Voltaire's style "where eloquence is not called for." Landor's preference for writers of the Italian Renaissance is implicit in conversations in which Petrarch and Boccaccio are the

stars. Did he not call Boccaccio the most creative genius that the continent has produced since the creation?

CASTLE: The only piece of Landor's that I know is the one that presents Achilles and Helen, who are literary figures no doubt, but not given to discussing literature. The only reason why I know this one is that the Mexican essayist Alfonso Reyes had some fun with it in his parody, "Diálogo de Aquiles y Elena." Here is a passage from Landor: Achilles tells Helen: "[There is] about me only one place vulnerable: I have at last found where it is. Farewell!" Although Helen pleads for him to stay, he insists on leaving her. Alfonso Reyes is amused by Achilles's romantic confession that his vulnerable place is his heart! My own confession is the prosaic one that my knowledge of English dialogues comes mostly from references in Spanish. Thus, I learned about Walton's *Compleat Angler* from Miguel de Unamuno and about Oliver Wendell Holmes's *Breakfast Table* series from a dialogue by the same Unamuno. I must further confess that these references do not involve crucial questions of literary theory.

LANGLEY: As I have argued before, dialogues by their very nature, at least in recent times, can only reflect, not fully represent, the crucial questions because their nature is too informal.

FRANCIS: Fully or not, they do often reflect the crucial questions. For example, the conflict between science and poetry that was discussed a few years ago by C. P. Snow in *The Two Cultures* is the topic of a dialogue dated 1883 by the novelist Paul Bourget. It is made up of a long speech by a "positivist" followed by a long reply by the defender of poetry. Formally speaking it is not a very exemplary dialogue. There are no rebuttals or interruptions. Bourget was a political reactionary, and consequently his piece fails to present the issues clearly. The "positivist" is really only a *bon vivant*, a young marquis, who, like his sentimental young friend, disapproves of modern democracy. The marquis argues that poetry has no place in today's civilization, for both science and democracy are antagonistic to it, but he is resigned and determined to make the best of it. He admits that science contains an incurable and basic pessimism and declares that bankruptcy is the final word of this immense hope of their generation. Thus, Bourget anticipates the cry that will be raised a few years later by the traditionalist critic Ferdinand Brunetière. The marquis finds an element of despair in the very definition of the experimental method for by condemning itself to reach only

for facts it condemns itself finally to nihilism. It is probable, moreover, that democracy makes civilization lose in depth what it gains in breadth. The effect of democracy is unfavorable to poetry, and this effect is aggravated by science. Science substitutes the idea of ignorance for mystery. Poetry is not useful, and scientific facts are too technical to be suitable for poetry. With the evolution of genres, epic and tragedy are becoming extinct. Literary species, like living species, are subject to the law of competition.

His friend answers that the original part of poetry does not derive from the environment. "Poetic creation needs solitude. Democratic America did not prevent the rise of Edgar Allan Poe. Science drives mystery from the domain of reason but not from the domain of emotion. Poetry is not definable scientifically. It will provide solace, an ideal refuge from the odious violence of the barbarians and far from the obsessive tyranny of facts." Thus science is assigned the domain of the intelligence and poetry that of the sensibility. In conclusion, Bourget reports that the speakers separated without either being convinced by the other. Perhaps they were both right, for there is no theory absolutely true. Bourget will be much more dogmatic in his later career on moral and political issues, but the issue between poetry and science he never really resolves. Of course, C. P. Snow does not seem to have resolved it either, judging from what adversaries like F. R. Leavis have said. That response is indeed an instance of what the French call "un dialogue des sourds!"

CASTLE: Wouldn't it be tedious if such disputes really came to a conclusion? We would lose the fun.

LANGLEY: That being your attitude, you would enjoy the two dialogues of Oscar Wilde published in *Intentions*. What Wilde thought about the form is stated by his mouthpiece Gilbert in *The Critic as Artist*: "The critic . . . may use dialogue, as he did who set Milton talking to Marvel on the nature of comedy and tragedy, and made Sidney and Lord Brooke discourse on letters beneath the Penshurst oaks. . . . Dialogue, certainly, that wonderful literary form which, from Plato to Lucian, and from Lucian to Giordano Bruno, and from Bruno to that grand old Pagan . . . the creative critics of the world have always employed, can never lose for the thinker its attraction as a mode of expression. By its means he can both reveal and conceal himself, and give form to every fancy, and reality to every mood. By its means he can exhibit the object from each point of view, as a sculptor shows us

things, gaining in this manner all the richness and reality of effect that comes from those side issues that are suddenly suggested by the central idea in its progress and really illumine the idea more completely, or from those felicitous after-thoughts that give a fuller completeness to the central idea, and yet convey something of the delicate charm of chance." Ernest objects: "By its means, too, he can invent an imaginary antagonist, and convert him when he chooses by some absurdly sophistical argument." This objection is countered by one of those characteristic witticisms of Wilde: "Ah! it is so easy to convert others. It is so difficult to convert oneself." In order to convince oneself, one must pretend to be someone else. A reader, for his part, may object that Wilde doesn't really do this. With all his cleverness as a conversationalist, he doesn't trouble to give the second speaker much to say. Neither Cyril in *The Decay of Lying* nor Ernest in *The Critic as Artist* contributes except for brief assents or demurrals. Their friends Vivian and Gilbert do almost all the talking. *The Decay of Lying* sets forth the now familiar notion that life imitates art, that Balzac created the nineteenth century, that the impressionists virtually invented sunsets. The essay closes with "The final revelation . . . the telling of beautiful untrue things is the proper aim of Art."

FRANCIS: Wilde evidently anticipated Jean Cocteau, who said that the poet is a liar that always tells the truth.

LANGLEY: That kind of gay irresponsibility pervades the considerably longer dialogue *The Critic as Artist*. The work is, I suppose, a major source for the thesis that the critic is as much a creator as the author he criticizes.

ISABEL CASTLE: If that is so, Wilde certainly has a lot to answer for!

FRANCIS: The so-called creative criticism of Albert Thibaudet was perhaps indebted to Wilde. I surmise, however, that Isabel is thinking of more extreme forms of the phenomenon, common nowadays.

LANGLEY: Wilde's work is a mixture of paradoxes tempered by commonplaces. The paragraphs begin by shocking and often end by compromising. But I don't wish to belittle him. I was reminded of Mandeville while re-reading this passage: "[Men] rage against Materialism, as they call it, forgetting that there has been no material improvement that has not spiritualised the world, and that there have been few, if any, spiritual awakenings that have not wasted the world's faculties in barren hopes. . . ."



CASTLE: That sounds like one of those side issues or afterthoughts you mentioned, but it doesn't seem to illumine the central idea.

LANGLEY: Wilde could never resist the impulse to be clever, since he knew it to be a rare talent. That statement was meant to be an argument against conventional moralizers. What reminded me of Mandeville, however, was his next sentence: "What is termed Sin is an essential element of progress." But that topic would lead us away from literary criticism. Wilde's thesis bears a specious appearance of truth: "I would call criticism a creation within a creation. For just as the great artists, from Homer and Æschylus, down to Shakespeare and Keats, did not go directly to life for their subject matter, but sought for it in myth, and legend, and ancient tale, so the critic deals with materials that others have, as it were, purified for him. . . . I would say that the highest Criticism, being the purest form of personal impression, is in its way more creative than creation . . . from the soul there is no appeal. . . . That is what the highest criticism really is, the record of one's own soul."

JANE FRANCIS: Is that an echo or a source of Anatole France's assertion that the good critic is one who recounts the adventures of his soul among masterpieces?

ISABEL CASTLE: Perhaps Tedesco would say that it is the *Zeitgeist* in both cases.

LANGLEY: Wilde quotes Walter Pater's description of the Mona Lisa as an example of criticism of the highest kind: "It treats the work of art simply as a starting-point for a new creation."

CASTLE: I've been puzzled by some disparagements of Leonardo's painting that I've recently heard. Now I suspect that Pater and Wilde may be to blame. The detractors, instead of looking at the painting, have been reading Pater!

LANGLEY: Wilde's aestheticism often sounds far from original. We tire of the refrain of Art only.

FRANCIS: Was Wilde only a belated Parnassian?

LANGLEY: There is more to his dialogue than that. Here is a reminiscence of Poe: "[Art] does not spring from inspiration, but it makes others inspired."

FRANCIS: That anticipates Paul Valéry.

LANGLEY: Wilde had something interesting to say about form: "the real artist . . . does not first conceive an idea, and then say to himself, 'I will put my idea into a complex metre of fourteen lines,' but realizing the beauty of the sonnet-scheme, he conceives certain modes of music and methods of rhyme, and the mere

form suggests what is to fill it and make it intellectually and emotionally complete.”

FRANCIS: Now, that certainly sounds like Valéry.

CASTLE: What about the Spanish writer Unamuno? He wrote toward the very beginning of the century: “You know . . . that Carducci . . . called rime *generative rime*. And, in fact, the necessity of placing a consonant obliges a poet, a great poet, to follow a new association of ideas.”

JANE FRANCIS: Isn't there anything new under the sun?

LANGLEY: Perhaps the writers and artists who seek originality at all costs might see a warning in these coincidences.

CASTLE: I should explain that Unamuno's remark comes from a dialogue in his *Soliloquios y conversaciones*. The point is another in favor of Francis's position in regard to the significance of dialogues for literary evolution.

CASTLE: When we saw the Tedescos the other day and he said they couldn't come this afternoon, he mentioned a couple of German dialogues involving problems of the drama. One was by the Viennese playwright Hugo von Hofmannsthal on “Characters in Novel and Drama,” with Balzac as one of the two main speakers. Tedesco called it a brilliant speculation based on a distorted picture of Balzac's career. Its theme is the alleged incompatibility between the novelist's genius and the abilities needed for writing plays. Balzac is the great creator who would not or could not write drama.

FRANCIS: Perhaps Hofmannsthal was not aware that Balzac did write plays, including the remarkable *Mercadet*, which indicates that had he lived he might have cast Dumas *films* and Emile Augier into the shade.

CASTLE: Tedesco did cite a scholar who described Hofmannsthal's dialogues as exemplifying a hybrid form between fiction and criticism.

LANGLEY: As one might describe Mallock's satire on Victorian liberals and agnostics, *The New Republic*. But excuse me, this is not on drama. The word hybrid reminded me of it.

CASTLE: By coincidence, the other dialogue mentioned by Tedesco is also by an Austrian playwright. It's Hermann Bahr's *Dialog vom Tragischen*. Bahr was apparently much inferior to Hofmannsthal as a writer, but his dialogue is more suggestive, more challenging than that of his compatriot, as well as more obscure, at least to me! There are half a dozen speakers gathered to discuss the state of the tragic theatre, admitted to be in decline at the start of the

century. The ideas of the various interlocutors reflect those of Plato on the dangers of poetry, of Aristotle on catharsis, of Diderot on the actor, of Nietzsche on the Dionysian element, even of Freud on hysteria. A recurring theme is the need for that Dionysian element in modern culture, an element inadequately supplied by the theatre of the period. The Physician compares the art of tragedy to homeopathy, and the Philologist to catharsis. The Master agrees with the Physician that modern man is attracted by chaos, feeling a nostalgia for the slime, playing the "Platonic sadist." Every culture, he says, has disowned vice but has been unable to do without it. In future too, men will need the dark arts from which to return then to sanity. The Artist points to the achievements in music and painting, and the Master wonders how men who admire Rodin and Klimt can be content with mere puppets in the theatre. These are the main points brought up by Tedesco.

FRANCIS: It is really striking how those points sound like Antonin Artaud's theatre of cruelty. I suppose Bahr was no more successful than Artaud was in embodying his theories in dramatic works.

CASTLE: Tedesco did imply that that was the case.

LANGLEY: Since we have reached the twentieth century, it may be appropriate to make amends to T. S. Eliot for the unfavorable judgment I cited in connection with Dryden of Eliot's *Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry* for I believe that Eliot almost succeeded in embodying his theories in his dramatic works—better, I take it, than your Austrian or your "jumpy Frenchman," as Tyrone Guthrie called Artaud. The two main ideas, the value of verse for drama and the relation between liturgy and the theatre, are both embodied in his plays. It is true that his dialogue is not dramatic. I should add that there are too many speakers in it and that they are hard to distinguish from one another. One of the principals Eliot designated by the letter *B*. Your Hermann Bahr might have approved a remark of his: "In a world without Evil life would not be worth living." He might even have approved what another speaker says: ". . . if the Elizabethan and Jacobean period was also a period of chaos, and yet produced great poetic drama, why cannot we?" *B* does not know. But he does know that "the greatest drama is poetic drama, and dramatic defects *can* be compensated by poetic excellence." One of his friends had already stated: "The tendency . . . of prose drama is to emphasize the

ephemeral and superficial; if we want to get at the permanent and universal we tend to express ourselves in verse.”

ISABEL CASTLE: Although the ideas discussed are not the same, it seems obvious that Eliot was prompted by Dryden’s dialogue to write his.

CASTLE: Eliot’s defense of verse was perhaps a source for the argument in a recent work called *The Blue Clown*, especially the dialogues on the theatre. The two interlocutors also debate the value of Artaud’s theory of the theatre of cruelty, which Eliot, of course, would have considered a gross exaggeration of his idea of liturgical elements in drama.

LANGLEY: I imagine you are right in that supposition. Our discussion seems to have brought us down to the present day.

ISABEL CASTLE: What can be more up-to-date than Artaud’s theatre of cruelty?

JANE FRANCIS: How about structuralism?

LANGLEY: Maybe your husband can tell us. Francis, why don’t you fire last!

FRANCIS: I still stand by my assertion that a pretty good idea of the history of literary concepts in France can be gained from works in the dialogue form. I was lucky to happen upon a very amusing parody of structuralism in the form of a dialogue entitled *Les Matinées structuralistes*. It’s perhaps more like a playlet than a dialogue, however, something like the *género chico* that Castle is familiar with. It satirizes the fad insofar as this is superficial and imitative, but the allusions to some of the leaders, like Louis Althusser, are unmistakable. The playlet is a takeoff on a class in a Parisian school that can only be the Ecole Normale Supérieure. It must be admitted that the piece itself is somewhat superficial.

CASTLE: If you had wagered that one could illustrate the evolution of literary ideas by citing dialogues exclusively, I believe that you would have won your bet.

## 7. By Way of Conclusion

At Langley's.  
Langley, Tedesco, and Francis are present.

TEDESCO: Well, I've read Joly's *Dialogue aux enfers entre Machiavel et Montesquieu*. It reminds me very much of the conversations between Naphta and Settembrini in Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*. Naphta is like Machiavelli, a sort of *advocatus diaboli* undermining the liberalism of Montesquieu and Settembrini. Oh, excuse me, Langley, you weren't there when Francis told us about this dialogue suppressed under the Second Empire.

LANGLEY: I think I ought to tell you that I've been listening to the tapes of the conversations you held in my absence. Jane Francis and Isabel Castle thought it would be fun to record them.

FRANCIS: I'm glad I wasn't aware there was a tape recorder taking down everything.

TEDESCO: So am I. It would have been inhibiting to know that. However, at least we won't have to repeat what was said. We can just proceed to try to draw final conclusions from it all. By the way, I hope that this place isn't bugged too! I'm not used to recorders and might become self-conscious. I wouldn't mind otherwise.

LANGLEY: I assure you that it isn't!

TEDESCO: Speaking of these modern technical devices, they have made possible that hybrid form of dialogue called the interview, first in the nineteenth century in the newspapers, then in our century through radio and television.

LANGLEY: Apparently you've been listening to Eric Sevareid and Willy Brandt or to Toynbee on Toynbee. Of course, one important difference between a Socratic dialogue and a book like *Toynbee on Toynbee* is that Socrates asks the questions whereas Toynbee is asked. The interview of a public figure is not a philosophical dialogue unless the interviewer becomes more than a mere questioner, and he would do so only at the risk of being presumptu-

ous. In *Toynbee on Toynbee*, G. R. Urban may expatiate on his own views, but there is no clash of opinions for the protocol would make it unseemly for him to push his own opinion any farther than necessary to elicit a pronouncement from the great man. This is true also of a recent book on Jean Piaget.

FRANCIS: The journalist's interview seems to have engendered still another hybrid, showing that certain hybrids can be fertile. I am thinking of André Gide's *Interviews imaginaires*, in which the author perhaps wants to teach the prospective interviewer how to go about discussing such questions as French grammar, the (then) new poets like Eluard, the dozen books to take with one to a desert island, and so forth.

TEDESCO: But isn't that just a matter of Gide choosing a catchy title for writing what is not really novel at all, just another descendant of Diderot?

FRANCIS: I'll agree to that. By the way, others have associated those two. There is a recent book in which the author imagines an "Elysian encounter" between Diderot and Gide.

TEDESCO: Another recent writer has brought out *Einstein and Beckett, A Record of an Imaginary Conversation between Albert Einstein and Samuel Beckett*. And he didn't even wait until both were dead!

FRANCIS: That reminds me of Langley's proposed touchstone for distinguishing the *dialogue des morts* from other types. You said that there the speakers are not distracted by thoughts of dinner. Yet in Voltaire's dialogue of Lucian, Erasmus, and Rabelais they interrupt their talk to join Swift for supper!

LANGLEY: You can't catch me with that! Obviously Voltaire was just up to his usual tricks! In a more serious vein, couldn't we say that the dialogue form is a genre that, long before the novel, began questioning its own existence and excuse for being? I'm not merely referring to the radio conversations before the war, entitled *Invitation to Learning* in which Huntington Cairns, Mark Van Doren, and Allen Tate dismissed it virtually in common accord. Cairns, for example, asked: "I have been thinking about the twenty-seven dialogues we are publishing as a book. Isn't it interesting that of all the art forms the Greeks used, only the dialogue has not survived?" And Van Doren concurred: "I wonder if the dialogue has not actually survived in Plato alone." More recently a historian introducing a new edition of G. Lowes Dickinson's *A Modern Symposium* commented: "It is a particular pleasure to introduce this work because it involves elements which have been on hard times in recent decades, and to the loss of

everyone. I refer not so much to the symposium, which has disappeared into history and is rarely identified with anybody after Plato, but to the essayic style and content.” Dickinson is praised for his catholicity and courtesy for different viewpoints. But as I was saying, we can go much farther back to find similar doubts cast on the viability of the genre. Take this quotation from Joseph Addison’s *Dialogues upon Ancient Medals*: “Some of the finest treatises of the most polite Latin and Greek writers are in Dialogue, as many valued pieces of French, Italian and English appear in the same dress. I have sometimes been very much distasted at this way of writing, by reason of the long prefaces and exordiums into which it often betrays an author. There is so much time taken up in ceremony that before they enter on their subject the Dialogue is half ended. To avoid the fault I have found in others, I shall not trouble my self or my Reader with the first salutes of our three friends, nor with any part of their discourse over the tea table.” The speakers Cynthio, Eugenius, and Philander proceed to display much antiquarian lore and knowledge of classical writers. The third dialogue closes with Cynthio and Eugenius stating that they were well pleased with Philander’s discourse, but they were glad, however, to find it end. Addison’s conscience does not seem easy, to say the least about it.

Shaftesbury’s uneasiness is of a different nature. In *The Moralists*, Philocles declares to Palemon: “a reason I have often sought for, why we moderns who abound so much in treatises and essays are so sparing in the way of dialogue, which heretofore was found the politest and best way of managing even the graver subjects. The truth is, ’twould be an abominable falsehood and belying of the age to put so much good sense together in any one conversation as might make it hold out steadily and with plain coherence for an hour’s time, till any one subject had been rationally examined. . . . There is a certain way of questioning and doubting, which in no way suits the genius of our age. Men love to take party instantly. They cannot bear being kept in suspense. We are too lazy and effeminate, and withal a little too cowardly, to dare doubt . . . that academic discipline in which formerly the youth were trained; when not only horsemanship and military arts had their public places of exercise, but philosophy too had its wrestlers in repute. . . . This the greatest men were not ashamed to practise in the intervals of public affairs. . . . Hence that way of dialogue, and patience of debate and reasoning, of which we

have scarce a resemblance in any of our conversations at this season of the world.”

Shaftesbury’s antagonist, Mandeville, was more confident, as it was his manner and temperament to be. I quote from his preface: “The Reader will find, that in this Second Part I have endeavoured to illustrate and explain several Things, that were obscure and only hinted at in the First. While I was forming this Design, I found on the one hand, that . . . the easiest way of executing it, would be by Dialogue; but I knew, that to discuss Opinions, and manage Controversies, it is counted the most unfair Manner of Writing. When partial Men have mind to demolish an Adversary, and triumph over him with little Expence, it has long been a frequent Practice to attack him with Dialogues, in which the Champion, who is to lose the Battle, appears at the very beginning of the Engagement, to be the Victim, that is to be sacrificed. . . . That this is to be said against Dialogue, is certainly true; but it is as true, that there is no other manner of writing, by which greater Reputation has been obtained.” Mandeville mentions in particular Plato and Cicero, and then goes on: “It is evident then, that the Fault of those, who have not succeeded in Dialogues, was in the Management, and not in the manner of writing; and that nothing but the ill use that has been made of it, could ever have brought it into Disrepute. . . . Plato [had to be] as great a Man as Socrates. . . . Man must have Cicero’s capacity. Lucian likewise . . . chose Persons of known Characters. . . . When the Personages fall short of those Characters . . . the Author undertook what he was not able to execute. To avoid this Inconveniency, most Dialogue writers among the Moderns have made use of fictitious Names.” Here Mandeville makes fun of the countless Philalethes found in dialogues these two hundred years!

Bishop Richard Hurd was to show none of Mandeville’s boldness in his rather anodyne *Moral and Political Dialogues*. These could indeed be described as morally edifying and more politic than political. It is, however, his Preface that I consider most interesting, especially in regard to what topics he deemed to be appropriate in dialogue and what he felt it would be better to exclude. Here are some sentences culled from the Preface: “In an age like this, when most men seem ambitious of turning writers, many persons may think it strange that the kind of composition, which was chiefly in use among the masters of this numer-



ous and stirring family, hath been hitherto neglected. . . . It can do no hurt, when the subject is proper for familiar discourse, to throw it into this gracious and popular form. I have said, *where the subject is proper for familiar discourse*; for all subjects, I think, cannot, or should not be treated in this way. . . . We should forbear to dispute some things, because they are such as both for their sacredness, and certainty, no man in his senses affects to disbelieve. . . . Thus much I have thought fit to say, to prevent mistakes, and to shew of what kind the subjects are which may be allowed to enter into modern Dialogues. They are only such, as are either, in the strict sense of the word, *not* important, and yet afford an ingenious pleasure in the discussion of them; or not *so* important as to exclude the sceptical inconclusive air, which the decorum of polite dialogue necessarily demands. And, under these restrictions, we may treat a number of curious and useful subjects, in this form.”

TEDESCO: What you earlier quoted from Hume suggests that he may have been taking issue with Hurd. This is more or less what Hume wrote, isn't it? “There are some subjects to which dialogue-writing is peculiarly adapted,” for example, “Any point of doctrine which is so obvious, that it scarcely admits of dispute, but at the same time so important, that it cannot be too often inculcated,” and, “Any question of philosophy which is so *obscure* and *uncertain*, that human reason can reach no fixed determination with regard to it.”

LANGLEY: Certainly Hume and Hurd were not kindred spirits! Nevertheless, let me produce a few more of Hurd's remarks. He observed that there was a certain novelty in the use of the form at the time, for though there were dialogues in abundance, but very few that could be compared with the great models, Plato and Cicero: “in our language at least (and, if I extended the observation to the other modern ones of most estimation, I should perhaps do them no wrong) I know of nothing in the way of Dialogue that deserves to be considered by us with such regard. There are in English THREE Dialogues, and but Three, that are fit to be mentioned . . . well composed in their way. . . . Had that way been a true one, I mean that which antiquity and good criticism recommend to us, the Public had never been troubled by this attempt from me, to introduce another . . . I mean *The Moralists* of Lord Shaftesbury; Mr. Addison's *Treatise on Medals*; and the *Minute Philosopher* of Bishop Berkeley. . . . Where is the

modesty . . . to attempt the Dialogue-form, if it has not succeeded in such hands?" The curious thing about Hurd's criticism is that he takes for a serious fault their use of fictitious characters. Hurd claims to do better, he presents real historical figures.

TEDESCO: That does seem to be a superficial criticism.

FRANCIS: And not much of a merit to have set out historical figures, if that's all he could pride himself upon!

LANGLEY: Moreover, the speakers in Berkeley's *Alciphron* were only too easily recognizable, at least by Mandeville! In regard to the so-called rarity of dialogues, Hume begins his with the words: "It has been remarked . . . that, though the ancient philosophers conveyed most of their instruction in the form of dialogue, this method of composition has been little practised in later ages; and has seldom succeeded in the hands of those who have attempted it." In the next century, Landor has Cicero say: "I approve of the Dialogue for the reason you have given me . . . the fewness of settled truths, and the facility of turning the cycle of our thoughts to what aspect we wish. . . ." Still, Landor was not in accord with Hume or Renan, as we may see from his *Pentameron*: "The better parts of Homer are in dialogue; and downward from him to Galileo. The noblest works of human genius have assumed this form: among the rest I am sorry to find no few heretics and scoffers. At the present day the fashion is over." Of course, Landor may not have meant all that about heretics: he assigns these words to a Monsignor. The authors I have cited would not agree on any one thing, except perhaps the problematic nature of the form they cultivated.

FRANCIS: A similar series of quotations could be produced from French writers, often almost paralleling those you have set out in array. You began with the early eighteenth century. In France, we can start earlier with La Mothe Le Vayer, who referred to this type of writing "which cannot displease except when badly employed by those who don't know well enough how to use it," in a preface to some examples that are hardly models to imitate. In another preface, this time addressed to Chancellor Seguier, he wrote: "You want me to deal with those who, as you say, are unable to appreciate [Plato's] Dialogues, and who speak of his works and his eloquence with such great scorn. . . . I know that many people make such unjust judgments only because of the aversion they have for the dialogue form. They think that there is no worse way of writing than colloquies or conversations. Proba-

bly because they have seen only very poorly composed dialogues.” La Mothe Le Vayer offered various other explanations for the prejudice against Plato which are not relevant for us here.

In a Discourse on the nature of dialogue which he placed before his *Nouveaux Dialogues des Dieux*, Rémond de St.-Mard remarked: “The nature of the Dialogue has never been clarified. It is the most ancient kind of writing: one may believe that the first persons that vanity and idleness induced to write, chose this manner.” In a postscript he tried to refute those who contested his theory, by citing, of all people, Bernard Palissy. Palissy wrote in dialogue and styled himself an uneducated worker in clay: “he complains in one of his Dialogues of not knowing how to read, a fault without which our peasant adds that he would have been a great man!” Of course, Palissy meant only that he could not read Latin or Greek! St.-Mard’s blooper is inexcusable. He’d said indeed that the Dialogue is a genre in which the writer expects that he won’t be taken literally, but his essay was serious. The notion that the dialogue is one of the oldest literary types had been set forth before Rémond de St.-Mard, by Charles Sorel.

TEDESCO: Is it possible that they were thinking of the Book of Job?  
You have a pretty ancient dialogue there.

FRANCIS: I don’t recall seeing it mentioned. If I may return to the failure to appreciate Plato that La Mothe Le Vayer found among his contemporaries—this attitude was to be maintained by Charles Perrault later on. With him it involved the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns. He felt Pascal in the *Provincial Letters* had it all over the Ancients. Among other comments on the genre made during the period, there is one by the author of the *Dialogues entre messieurs Patru et d’Ablancourt sur les plaisirs*: “The Dialogue is pleasant and more suitable for presenting that sort of subjects than a methodical and coherent discourse. As for me, I have never been able to enjoy those Dialogues full of doctrines and excerpts; you would think that the speakers had brought their libraries along rather than their minds.”

TEDESCO: There’s a warning there for us!

LANGLEY: Francis’s author was apparently like Addison with his dislike for long preliminaries.

FRANCIS: What amused me when I read that Frenchman’s comments was his eulogy of two books of dialogue by Père Bouhours, the *Entretiens d’Ariste et d’Eugène* and *La Manière de bien penser dans les ouvrages d’esprit*. The interlocutors of Père Bouhours often talk as if they had brought along their libraries, choice though these

were, for the most part. In an antiquarian mood, Ariste and Eugène hold one conversation on “Les Devises” that might be compared to Addison’s *Dialogues on Medals*. On the whole, their conversations flow along quite pleasantly, as do the more or less contemporary *Conversations* of Madeleine de Scudéry. Decades before, she had run her amorous, and moralizing, dialogues into her interminable romances. Now she was publishing them separately. It may be pertinent to recall Joseph de Maistre’s distinctions between *conversations*, *entretiens*, and *dialogues*. There was an effort to establish such distinctions during the period of Père Bouhours. Twentieth-century French scholars have tried to distinguish a conversational type from the Platonic mode. In fact, late in the nineteenth century, Georges Doncieux wrote as follows: “There is reason to distinguish between the artificial dialogues directly inspired by antiquity and these other dialogues, a spontaneous product of a literary instinct that declared itself toward the middle of the seventeenth century. The *Dialogues des morts* of Boileau, Fontenelle and Fénelon are simple imitations of Lucian, and probably Malebranche would not have put his philosophy into dialogues without the example of Plato. But the *Entretiens sur les mondes* of the same Fontenelle, the *Conversations* of Méré and Mlle de Scudéry, the *Entretiens* of Bouhours, as well as the *Conversation du Père Canaye* of St.-Évremond, exist independently of any ancient model. Our seventeenth century would have invented the dialogue, if the Greeks had not already done so.”

TEDESCO: Evidently it would not have been the Platonic type, in any case.

FRANCIS: No indeed, the premium was on elegant and witty exchanges. There was no violent conflict of opinion. There was no maieutics! Why, Bouhours’s speakers are virtually interchangeable, though not quite. The socializing of the salon did not favor too much independence of opinion, nor too many eccentricities. No doubt, the climate would change with the eighteenth century, with the end of the conformist reign of Louis XIV. Mlle de Scudéry’s *Moral Conversations* pleased the churchmen Mascaron and Fléchier, as well as Mme de Sévigné and Mme de Maintenon. It seems that the model conversations were even used at Mme de Maintenon’s school for girls at Saint Cyr. But a stop was put to that! In Abbé de Gérard’s book of *entretiens* between Theandre and Philemon, entitled *La Philosophie des gens de la cour*, we learn that the pagan philosophers took all they have that is fine and

solid from the Scriptures. The author states: “Qu’on a dû retrancher de cette Philosophie des Gens de Cour, la chicane et les termes de l’École. Qu’on ne doit affecter aucun Parti, ni s’attacher à aucune Secte.” I’ll try to put this part into English: “It has been necessary to excise all pettifogging and Scholastic terms from this philosophy for people of the court.”

TEDESCO: I noticed the mention of Pascal’s friend, the Chevalier de Méré. What sort of conversations did he compose?

FRANCIS: I’ll just give one passage where he refers to the ancient Greek philosophers. His attitude to Aristotle is very far this side of idolatry, as one can see from the account of Alexander and Aristotle: “This young conqueror, who ran everywhere after glory, had a tutor who did not seek it any less in his own way and if the pupil became master of the world, one can add that the tutor, as much through his skill as through the favor of the prince, took the lead in the sciences. He had the sort of intelligence needed to be successful in life, but as for certain more recondite knowledge, he did not go as far as some of his predecessors. These found their happiness in knowledge and were accustomed to say that they knew almost nothing. They were honest people of good faith who dealt with doubt of doubtful things, and as for those things that one can clearly understand, though of the loftiest theoretical nature, they spoke of them nevertheless in a manner that smacked neither of art nor of study, but so clearly and naturally that in order to understand them right off, one needed only a certain amount of intelligence. He, however, whose aim was not so much to know as to get a reputation for knowing, realized that they were above him and that good judges of minds and sciences would never place him in the first rank. . . . so he resorted to winning over those less clear-sighted and to get himself admired by the multitude.” Here we have an illustration of the spirit of the *honnête-homme* of that age. In the same conversation Méré declared: “I believe that the best means for becoming skillful and learned is not to study a great deal, but to *converse* often about things that open the mind.” This is what the dialectic jousts of Socrates have come to!

TEDESCO: Castle, who told us about Galiani, probably knew Diderot’s *Apologie de l’abbé Galiani*. Diderot makes some good points about the nature of the dialogue form. Replying to Morellet’s critique, he writes: “You don’t like Abbé Galiani’s skeptical procedure. So much the worse for you, for it is very acute, very pleasing . . . but it requires genius. Nothing accords better with

the quest because while doubting one establishes each point, with the task of persuasion because one turns aside passions." He agrees with Bacon's view that when science has reached a high stage of development, that procedure is not appropriate any longer, but politics and economics had not yet reached that stage. "Socrates treated the Athenians like children, and he was right. In how many subjects, even important ones, are we not like his Athenians! Socrates eluded the traps of self-pride, of stubborn striving for personal advantage, of the sophistry of passion: he guided you to his destination without your noticing it, and he did well."

LANGLEY: Bertrand Russell would concur with what Diderot said about Bacon. And apparently Diderot thought the readers of his *Rêve de d'Alembert* were like children too!

TEDESCO: He wrote the *Apology* when he was composing the dialogue about *D'Alembert*, so there might be a connection.

FRANCIS: Except for Diderot, the French attitude toward Socrates was not as favorable as that of the Germans, that Tedesco discussed earlier. Several French commentators considered that Plato's method was too slow. Perrault and Rémond de St.-Mard were among them. Incidentally, Voltaire, great admirer of Socrates as he was, had nothing to say about the maieutic method, as such.

TEDESCO: On the basis of the references you two have made, one could conclude that the number of dialogue-writers who assert the rarity of dialogues is so great as to constitute a refutation of their assertion!

LANGLEY: They assert the rarity of good ones, and presume their own will be the shining exceptions.

TEDESCO: Of course, you would not impute this presumption to Diderot and Voltaire, who did write good ones.

LANGLEY: Certainly not.

FRANCIS: Perhaps you won't mind if I quote from an article on the subject contributed by Marmontel to the *Encyclopédie*. After praising Plato and Cicero as protocol demands, he declares: "A dialogue that is merely a clash of opinions, throwing off sparks which leaves at the end only uncertainty and obscurity, is not a philosophical dialogue: it is a sophistical dialogue." The beauty of the philosophical type results from the importance of the subject and the weight that the reasons cited give to the opposing sides. If the piece is less a dispute than a lesson, one of the two speakers may be ignorant, but he should be ignorant with intelli-

gence, even wit. Fontenelle's *Plurality of Worlds* is a model of this type. It is perhaps somewhat mannered, but its ingenious manner is not that of Pluche or of Bouhours. Marmontel goes on to define what is acceptable in historical dialogue. History all in dialogue would be too diffuse, but dialogues on certain aspects of history, problematic enough to justify discussion, interesting enough to be explored, could be very useful. A model of this type he found in Montesquieu's *Sulla and Eucrates*, although the author showed too much deference for Sulla to satisfy the Encyclopedist.

LANGLEY: That type of historical dialogue includes a large number of Landor's *Imaginary Conversations*. We could not appropriately deal with these before, since in his dialogues of controversy he judges the past and not the present. An example of this is the one presenting Rousseau and Malesherbes. Landor's footnote is significant: "The condemnation of Malesherbes and the coronation of Buonaparte are the two most detestable crimes committed by the French in the whole course of their Revolution. How different the destiny of the best and the worst man among them!" In a much lighter vein, the same volume contains the amusing confessional scene between Bishop Bossuet and one of the later mistresses of Louis XIV. To borrow the words of Marmontel, the incident is interesting enough to be explored! Such explorations, of course, are confined to the prurient mind of the writer. Still, Landor brings out charmingly the girlish naiveté of the Duchess de Fontanges when she alludes to the aging king in bed as well as the embarrassment of the prelate torn between obligatory reverence for the monarch and disapproval of his behavior. And Bossuet is not insensitive to her allure: in fact, at one point he drops his ring.

TEDESCO: Herbert Read was quite right in placing such pieces in the class of dialogues of character. A prize example would be *Le Neveu de Rameau*. Of course it's not a historical dialogue.

FRANCIS: French scholars find it difficult to come to terms with it. Thus one scholar insists on its subtitle: "Satire seconde."

LANGLEY: We are back to Frye's Menippean satire, to the problematic nature of the type and its marginal position among more distinct types.

FRANCIS: How could it escape being challenged, when the more distinguishable types are themselves being challenged, in these days of the antinovel and the antitheatre?

TEDESCO: Its existence is debated, yet it exists!

FRANCIS: If you add together all that have been variously praised by estimable critics, you get a goodly sum. Just remember Pascal, Malebranche, Voltaire, and Diderot—and Wieland and Lessing. As for the English, we haven't even discussed one of the finest, Berkeley's *Hylas and Philonous*.

LANGLEY: Well, perhaps I should grant all that. But are there many of high quality after the eighteenth century? In English, some of Landor or Santayana?

FRANCIS: I wonder if we should so readily have accepted William James's opinion of Renan, that Isabel quoted. Now Charles Péguy was not exactly a tender-minded critic, and he found Renan's dialogues admirable. Certainly there are many impressive ideas there, even for today. To take but one example, the nightmare of Théoctiste: "an authority could have some day at its disposal a Hell, not an imaginary one of whose existence there is no proof, but of a real Hell."

LANGLEY: Striking ideas do not make a dialogue. I am afraid that Renan did not have enough clash of ideas in his dialogues. The gradation from "Certitudes" through "Probabilities" to "Dreams" represented by the successive speakers leads to the same suspension of judgment we found so disappointing in La Mothe Le Vayer.

TEDESCO: Perhaps it results from a certain failure of nerve in the aftermath of the defeat of France in 1870 and of the Commune of 1871 on the part of the once optimistic author of *L'Avenir de la science*?

FRANCIS: I must admit that Renan could just as well have consigned his thoughts to essays. Though his exchanges with Marcelin Berthelot were at the source of his dialogues, the two men thought too much alike to make for genuine debate. It may be of interest to consider some later writers who underwent the influence of Renan, on the one hand, Pierre Lasserre and Maurice Barrès, on the other hand, Anatole France, Remy de Gourmont, and Julien Benda. They all started from a skeptical position, and they all composed dialogues. Lasserre and Barrès reacted against that position and moved to the political right, France and Benda to the political left, only Gourmont persisting with suspension of judgment. Lasserre's first book was *La Crise chrétienne*, in dialogue form but with little debate. Gourmont's *Dialogues des amateurs* presents two speakers who hardly disagree, M. Desmaisons and M. Delarue. André Gide would read that and sigh for some fresh air that a M. Deschamps or a M. Du Plein Air



might bring. Barrès reacted against Renan in his *Huit Jours chez M. Renan*. An irreverent put-down is administered to the venerable subject, which will not be forgotten by Jean-Paul Sartre's protagonist in *La Nausée*. You may recall that Roquentin records this fictitious action: "J'ai fessé Maurice Barrès. Nous étions trois soldats. . . ." Leaving that aside, Barrès's novel *Les Déracinés* contains some vigorous arguments pitting liberalism against nationalism. The novel advocates the life of action against the life of pure thought, but it is only political action. Barrès's protagonists will be succeeded by those who choose physical action. Thus Renan's own grandson, Ernest Psichari, will vindicate the strenuous life against his grandfather's contemplative *dolce far niente*. It is in the dialogues of his war-time book, *Le Voyage du centurion*. Psichari had returned to the religious faith that the author of *La Vie de Jésus* had renounced. Pious souls greeted the return as a repudiation of the apostate ancestor, that notorious freethinker.

LANGLEY: But it wasn't his dialogues that made him notorious. You can bring forward as many dialogues by different writers as you want; however, you have to admit that after the eighteenth century such writings would never have sufficed to make their authors famous.

TEDESCO: You are certainly right. Schelling, Schopenhauer, and also Heidegger composed one or two, but these were not their major works.

LANGLEY: I notice that you didn't mention Nietzsche in that list.

TEDESCO: Zarathustra was indeed a great monologist. His disciples were scarcely ever given anything to say, whether in assent or in dissent. Schopenhauer included a "Dialogue on Religion" among his essays, and one on immortality. They are *obiter dicta*, like the dialogue of Descartes on the search for truth, which Leibniz owned.

FRANCIS: The fact that so many modern thinkers tried their hands at it should not be minimized. Of the French writers born around 1870, Gide, Valéry, and Claudel are notable. It is curious that Péguy entitled two of his important works "dialogues," yet they are really essays or monologues. The second speaker is apparently silent in his *Marcel premier dialogue de la cité harmonieuse* and his *Clio dialogue de l'histoire et de l'âme païenne*. Close reading is required to distinguish two voices, or even two separate inflexions. On the other hand, there are writings by Péguy formed

largely of conversations with friends or associates, for example, his series on "La Grippe" and the following pamphlets.

We have already mentioned André Gide in regard to *Corydon* and the *Interviews imaginaires*. His two friends Valéry and Claudel call for some comment here. Paul Claudel's *Conversations dans le Loir-et-Cher* cannot be called one of his major works, as may be done in the case of Paul Valéry's dialogues. Claudel's poems and dramas throw the *Conversations* into the shade. The fluvial setting may remind one of Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesie* with the sail on the Thames, but there seems to be no straight progress here toward a destination. Rather do we find lyrical flights of thought that subside in succession without advancing any precise thesis. *Recherche* is the word applied by one speaker to their conversations because they are not so much dialogues as alternating meditations. Four men with Latin names are accompanied by an actress and a woman musician. An otherworldly note is contributed by the fact that the boat ride takes place on the Loir-et-Cher, a nonexistent stream that sounds real because it is the name of the department where the Loir and the Cher have their separate channels. The first conversation unfolds on a terrace above this stream one Thursday in July. A speaker states the right to contradict himself and to repeat himself. The others add that it will be a rotating argument in quest of the idea, like a dog chasing its tail, not only stoutly following a straight line between milestones but proceeding in spirals, in leaps and circuits in the void, a discussion not only in two dimensions but in three. The boat ride takes place on a Sunday in August. On the third occasion the friends have arrived at the castle of Amboise. Their conversations turn on the architecture of cathedrals and of skyscrapers, the growth of modern cities, and the future of industrial civilization. The speaker called Civilis remarks: "When man tries to imagine a Paradise on earth, that makes immediately a very proper Hell." Later one of the women rebukes the men for eluding the question of what the future will be like. Civilis replies: "Perhaps we advance toward the future backwards only, without seeing it, like oarsmen facing the past?" The setting of the fourth conversation is the deck of a Japanese ship bound for San Francisco. The two world travelers speaking there are new to the reader. They are engaged in discussing the unfinished message left by Civilis, now no longer alive, a message out of the conversations on the Loir-et-Cher. What will tomorrow be like? They

trust it won't be on the model of the Soviets. We should note that Claudel was writing in the twenties. The topic of the nature of dialogue as conceived by Claudel comes up in this context. One speaker opines: "The Soviets supposed themselves inspired by the West, but in reality they were obeying the profound law of Asia which never attains form without compression. Nothing helps to explain the communist regime as well as the castes of India and the Chinese family." His friend responds: "It's amusing to sense our thoughts being born from one another. Playwrights are wont to set antagonists clashing against the opposing views without really comprehending them. Why not instead show the idea passing like a flame from one mind to the other and evolving in a series of alternating propositions that gain support from each like the eclogues of Virgil or Theocritus? Like the shuttle in a loom." A reader might object that Claudel's speakers are all kindred spirits. There are no genuine antagonists here. Typical of Claudel's self-assurance is an exchange between Saint-Maurice and Grégoire: "Have you noticed that as soon as the first Christian missionaries appeared, the sages of Asia were reduced to silence? There was an end to the philosophers' researches." "That is true," agreed his friend. After more movements of the shuttle of their reflexions, these come to a close. The last word is accorded to Saint Athanasius, and it is: "the Almighty, Perfect, and Holy Word of the Father."

LANGLEY: Evidently these conversations are hardly Socratic. Claudel's description amounts to an admission of this. I wonder if Valéry's dialogues come any closer to the Socratic type, even though Socrates figures in them as the leader of the discussion.

FRANCIS: Socrates figures in three of them. *Eupalinos ou l'architecte* is a *dialogue des morts*, in which he looks back with his disciple Phaedrus on their earthly state. "Alas!" he laments, "I applied a truth and a sincerity more deceptive than are myths and revealed words. I taught what I invented . . . I fathered children on seduced souls and delivered them skillfully." He regrets passing his former days in pure thought, unlike the architect, Eupalinos and the shipbuilder, Tridon. These two practical men appear in the rather long stories Phaedrus relates to him. In Valéry's dialogue, both Phaedrus and Socrates question Plato's Eternal Ideas. Phaedrus exclaims: "Oh, by what a contrast I am possessed! There is perhaps for memories a kind of second death that I have not yet undergone. Yet do I live again, yet do I see again the ephemeral skies! The most beautiful does not figure in the Eter-

nal!" Valéry neglects a central element of the historical Socrates, his role of ethical teacher. This makes possible Valéry's contrast between thought and action, between Socrates and Anti-Socrates. The latter does not find his ease in the Elysian Fields. Here I would like to digress briefly. There is in a biography of Fénelon an interesting distinction set up between Fénelon and Malebranche: The former "could never have repeated the noble words in which Malebranche reminds men that they make on earth the same use of their Reason that they will in heaven, for Faith must pass away, but Reason will abide forever." Now Valéry's speakers would evidently not have agreed with Malebranche entirely. Even though one of them does anticipate Mallarmé's "Gloire du long désir, Idées!" We might wish that Malebranche had written *dialogues des morts*, in the spirit of those noble words.

Valéry's second important dialogue is not a *dialogue des morts*. *L'Âme et la danse* is about living men commenting on the dancing of a living girl. Here also Socrates extols the value of action and celebrates bodily existence as realized at its supreme level in the art of the dance. The function of the interlocutors hardly goes beyond that of giving cues to the main speaker's epigrams and witticisms. And in another of Valéry's works, *L'Idée fixe*, the Doctor is the foil to his friend Edmond T. This talkative reincarnation of the taciturn M. Teste makes the big speeches and the Doctor provides clever repartee. Julien Benda criticized the work for lacking method and leading nowhere. Valéry's purpose was indeed precisely that of demonstrating that thought cannot be fixed. This dialogue therefore could not come to a conclusion; it could only come to a stop. If they are not Socratic, Valéry's dialogues are dazzling achievements in the art of conversation. They mark a high point in the sequence from Fontenelle through Voltaire, Diderot, and Renan.

A distinguished contemporary example is a little book by the critic Jean Paulhan, *Entretien sur des faits divers*. Here the delight in clear ideas is effectively conveyed to the reader. The protagonist, René Martin, is a paragon of lucid thinking, another in the French series which includes Valéry's Teste.

LANGLEY: Whether Platonic or not, the dialogues of Valéry certainly seem to be worth reading. I am not sure that the English language has any to compare with them, aside from Santayana's *Dialogues in Limbo*. I'm thinking only of the twentieth century, of course. Santayana's are hardly more Platonic than Valéry's.

Maieutics is renounced by both of these writers. Elizabeth Merrill's pious hope, expressed in 1911, that English may yet produce a great dialogue has not been realized in the sixty years since then. Nevertheless, Santayana's "Vortex of Dialectic" in *Dialogues in Limbo* is a remarkable accomplishment. The Anti-Socrates of this dialogue is identified only as The Stranger. Socrates claims that his method is useful because he must prod people with questions in order to make them think. The Stranger replies that dialectic is futile: it tells us nothing about reality. "On the contrary the order of nature is disguised or reversed by dialectic." I consider this an important admission by the Platonistic Santayana, supporting Russell's negative verdict on the validity of philosophical dialogue in our time.

TEDESCO: It is the debate between Calogero and Spirito. May Calogero never give in!

FRANCIS: More power to Calogero, I also say! The other side is already dominant enough, even affecting to ignore that it has an adversary at all.

TEDESCO: I sometimes wonder whether Plato's doctrine of reminiscence itself, which we have more or less dismissed as archaic, does not continue to survive in varying forms, notwithstanding what critics like Russell have said. In a chapter on cognitive capacity, Noam Chomsky quotes Russell's query: How can human beings know as much as they do, despite their limited and brief contacts with the world? Chomsky's answer is extremely interesting. You recall my fanciful remarks about the evolution of intelligence. Well, here is what Chomsky writes: "We can know so much because in a sense we already knew it, though the data of sense were necessary to evoke and elicit this knowledge. Or to put it less paradoxically, our systems of belief are those that the mind, as a biological structure, is designed to construct."

FRANCIS: And incidentally, designed to reconstruct again and again that old Platonic idea!

LANGLEY: You must admit that if there are such reconstructions, they are no longer cast in the dialogue form. The climate is not favorable.

FRANCIS: The decline of philosophical dialogue is a fact. But how much richer and more impressive would it not be if we could include chapters of D'Urfé's *L'Astrée*, the Glubdubdrub episode of Gulliver, pages from Camus's novel *La Peste*, I mean the dialogues between Dr. Rieux and Tarrou, as well as the colloquium of the scholars in Malraux's *Les Noyers de l'Altenburg*!

Seen from this angle, it intersects several areas from religious polemic to novels both pastoral and picaresque. If Brunetière could trace the evolution of lyrical poetry in France and its absorption in the pulpit oratory of Bishop Bossuet, using this as an explanation of the decline of lyric in the French classical age, why can't we do likewise with the philosophical dialogue and trace its absorption in novels and plays?

LANGLEY: But Brunetière was wrong, wasn't he? He was misled by a deceptive analogy with biological evolution. And we should be even more so if we followed his example. The impulse to write dialogue is not like the lyrical impulse. Is it an impulse at all?

TEDESCO: Remember that Lukacs felt the impulse to write a dialogue at the outset of World War I and wrote an essay on *The Theory of the Novel* instead.

FRANCIS: And Proust started to compose imaginary conversations with his mother which turned into his *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

LANGLEY: Aren't you making too much of that?

FRANCIS: Well, the intermediate form was published posthumously under the title *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. But I have another example of that impulse. Valéry declares at the beginning of his *Faust*: "On a certain day in 1940, I caught myself talking to myself in two voices, and I proceeded to write down what came." One is reminded of the two lobes of Ernest Renan and André Maurois.

LANGLEY: Didn't they know that there is a division of labor, of functions, between the cerebral hemispheres? To talk of a dialogue between the lobes of the brain is not scientific. Why not admit that the dialogue is a rather antiquarian, backward-looking genre? It appears from the examples I listened to on the tapes that after the Age of the Enlightenment extremely few forward-looking authors have used it, in the fields of religious or political polemic. I say this without forgetting the flippant *Heavenly Discourse* of Charles Erskine Scott Wood, and I make an exception for Maurice Joly's *Machiavel et Montesquieu*, which impressed me very much, in fact.

TEDESCO: Someone who heard of our conversations suggested we should look beyond the European tradition, to Asia, for example, as was done by Ninian Smart in his *World Religions: A Dialogue*. It brings together two different Buddhists, a Christian, a Hindu, a Jew, and a Muslim. There's more variety there than even in Jean Bodin's *Heptaplomeres*!

FRANCIS: We do find dialogues between Europeans and Asians written by authors we've mentioned, Valéry and Gide, for example. Still, why look that far, when we have probably overlooked things within our own horizon? For example, we have neglected both the Alains! I have in mind the *Quadrilogue invectif* of Alain Chartier, and the various *entretiens* published by the modern Alain, Emile Chartier, that is. They could have furnished us with chronological boundaries, the Hundred Years War, and our world wars since their writings deal with these subjects. Of course, Alain's *entretiens* concern philosophy and sculpture, not history. As a *lycée* professor, he had as students André Maurois and Simone Weil, to name only the most famous of them. I must admit that the young nowadays have hardly heard of him.

LANGLEY: Apparently you aren't proposing him for the role of a modern Socrates, or a Plato either.

TEDESCO: But think of all those TV roundtables and panels on every subject under the sun. The symposium is certainly thriving there, with or without potatoes.

FRANCIS: André Malraux hailed in the colloquium a modern genre, or literary art form. The colloquium in question dealt with himself.

LANGLEY: At best, you have in those symposia only the raw materials. It's perhaps possible that some new Plato or Diderot will take the raw materials and whip them into artistic shape. If that ever happens, I'll be as delighted as either of you.

# Notes

## CHAPTER 1

PAGE 1. Denis Diderot, "De la Poésie dramatique," *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 7 (Paris: Garnier, 1875), pp. 314–15. This section bears the caption: "D'une sorte de drame philosophique." For other comments on "The Passion Play" of Socrates, see John Gasser, *Masters of the Drama* (New York: Random House, 1940), pp. 77–78; Jean Seznec, "Le Socrate imaginaire," *Diderot et l'antiquité* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 1–22, 118–24. Erik Satie composed *Socrate—Drame symphonique en trois parties* in 1918. Cf. Rollo H. Meyers, *Erik Satie* (New York: Dover Publications, 1968), pp. 56–58, 96–99.

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PAGE 4. Maurice Joly, *Dialogue aux enfers entre Machiavel et Montesquieu* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1968).

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PAGE 6. Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'Amore*, ed. Carl Gebhardt (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1929). Cf. James A. Devereux, S. J. "Leone Ebreo and Florentine Neoplatonism," in *Renaissance Papers*, 1975, ed. Dennis G. Donovan (Durham: Duke University, 1975), pp. 11–17.

PAGE 6. Gio. Battista Vimercato, *Dialogo de gli horologi solari* (Venice, 1566).

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PAGE 6. Jean Bodin is treated by Roger Chauviré, *Jean Bodin, auteur de "La République"* (Paris: Champion, 1914), pp. 17–18, 96.

PAGE 7. Georg Lukacs, *La Théorie du roman*, trans. Jean Clairevoye, (Geneva: Editions Gonthier, 1963), pp. 5–6. Before Boileau's *Dialogue des héros de roman*, other dialogues on the subject had appeared: Jean Chapelain, "Dialogue de la lecture des vieux romans," in *Opusculs critiques*, ed. A. Hunter (Paris: Droz, 1937), pp. 205–41; Jean-François Sarasin, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Festugière vol. 2 (Paris, 1926), pp. 146–232.

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PAGE 11. Russell, *ibid.* p. 132.

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PAGE 13. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel; *Lectures in the history of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson, vol. 2 (London: Kegan-Paul, 1894), pp. 16–17.

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