

1965

Memory of Things Future

Anthony A. Nemetz
University of Dayton

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/udr>

Recommended Citation

Nemetz, Anthony A. (1965) "Memory of Things Future," *University of Dayton Review*. Vol. 2: No. 2, Article 2.

Available at: <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/udr/vol2/iss2/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Dayton Review by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact mschlangen1@udayton.edu, ecommons@udayton.edu.

Memory of Things Future

By Anthony A. Nemetz, Ph. D.

The title of this paper is not intended to offend common sense notions about time and our awareness of time. And what follows neither promises any exhibitionist demonstration of extra-sensory perception, nor is it intended as a home study course in clairvoyance. On the contrary, I am simply trying to do what the title of this series proposes, i.e. to be intrepid enough to venture beyond the security of a professional imprimatur on a well received textbook. In fact, what I want to discuss could equally well be entitled, "Time and Truth," or "The Scandal in Philosophy."

The difficulty with which I am concerned lies in the very nature of the philosophic enterprise. Philosophers properly pride themselves on the fact that their subject matter is not confined to a single aspect of reality nor constrained in its approach to one royal way. But the unbounded catholicity of the philosophers' concerns is really a troublesome ambition. The philosopher, like Hamlet's Horatio, must always be reminded that there may be more things in heaven and earth than are contained in his philosophy. For how does one serially deal with everything? How can one comprehensively attend to whatever there is?

Traditional answers to such questions all point to procedural devices through which the essential is separated from the accidental or non-essential; or by which the first causes are isolated from the incidental causes; or by tests which separate the analytic from the synthetic, etc. But no matter what the procedure, there seems to be a common goal in all philosophical methods, namely the discovery and articulation of necessary principles or foundations on which the elaborated philosophy can rest and be vindicated. It seems to me that at least in terms of method all philosophers would agree with Aristotle that "the conviction of pure science must be unshakable."

But are the two aims of universality and necessity really compatible? Can one really claim a universal interest in all things, most of which come to be and pass away, and simultaneously hope to discover or formulate principles which at least govern the inquiry — principles which are not subject to the exigencies of change? Perhaps the relation between universality and necessity is much more like the twin hazards of Scylla and Charybdis than it is the happy marriage of Mercury and Philology.

The problem, I submit, is not one of fanciful fabrication. As evidence that the issue is fundamental, I would like to make the rather embarrassing admission that of all the intellectual disciplines, philosophy alone seems incapable of defining itself. Chemists know what chemistry is; geographers are clear about geography; but philosophers seem to spend an uncommonly large amount of their time trying to decide

what philosophy is. The results, however, of the attempts to define philosophy in no way represent a consensus of what philosophers think they are doing. Consider a partial list of such definitions as compiled by Hugh of St. Victor. Philosophy is called “the pursuit of wisdom;” “Philosophy is the discipline which investigates comprehensively the ideas of all things, human and divine;” “Philosophy is the love of that Wisdom, which wanting in nothing, is a living Mind and the sole primordial Idea or Pattern of things;” “Again, philosophy is the art of arts and the discipline of disciplines;” “Philosophy, furthermore, is a meditating upon death, a pursuit of especial fitness for Christians, who, spurning the solicitations of this world, live subject to a discipline in a manner resembling the life of their future home.”¹

This list by no means exhausts the number of historically given definitions, but it is sufficiently kaleidoscopic to allow the conclusion that, as a discipline, philosophy is completely innocent of any kind of isomorphism in purpose and procedure. I realize that some philosophers see only virtue in such varied purposes and consequently hold that the history of philosophy is philosophy itself. And there are others who see that history as the history of errors and, subsequently, believe that the history of philosophy is an encyclopedia of mistakes. But there need be no immediate inclination or declination to either of these extremes.

Two alternatives to such precipitate judgment are easily imagined. The first, unhappily, consists in succumbing to the temptation of the textbook. The sin involved here is a kind of intellectual counter-reformation in which all species of philosophy are taxonomically ordered and graded by the relative distance of their supposed fall from truth. This practice might well be characterized as the “-ism and -ist” brand of philosophy — a practice which Hugh of St. Victor indicted in the Twelfth Century.

In former times, seekers who did not know how to philosophize disputed about philosophy. Now another generation has succeeded them, and these do not even know for sure how one ought to conduct a dispute about philosophy. They have gone one step back beyond those who were already backward enough, in order to learn how to dispute about disputations, and they can't figure out where to classify the very disputations they dispute about. For if philosophy is an art, and to dispute about philosophy is an art, to what art do we leave it to dispute about disputations?²

The remaining alternative to the “all or nothing” judgment and to the syllabus of errors syndrome is simply to make a fresh start, as Aristotle would say.

As I see it, the need for philosophy is natural. Our minds like our hearts are restless, and the desire to know everything with finality is as constitutive of human

1 Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, Jerome Taylor (tr.). New York: Columbia University Press, 1961, pp. 48-62.

2 Hugh of St. Victor, *Epitome* as quoted by Taylor in *op. cit.*, p. 16.

nature as is the desire for happiness. Having said this, the problem quickens, because everything includes the things that no longer are as well as those which are yet to come. And how can we know what is not?

The historically hallowed reply to that question is, of course, to say that because we cannot, we need not know every single thing *qua* single, but can content ourselves with knowing things in principle. To know the principles of things is, consequently, to know the sequence of events in an elliptical fashion. A principle is a compression of convenience in which the past and the future are amorphaously identified. A principle is a dictate which imposes constancy on flux; which invests transience with permanence; and which equates expectation with memory. In short, a principle is a modal transformation of our experience. Our experience is contingent as are the things we experience. But to know in principle somehow vitiates the fleeting successiveness of the world and our experience of it, and in its place proposes invariability. In short, to understand things in principle is to understand them under the modality of necessity. I am aware, however, that necessity itself can be understood under a variety of aspects. The distinction between hypothetical and categorical necessity is common enough, as is the usual disjunction between principles that are declared to be descriptive or normative. Although such niceties are needed and fruitful for the development of a philosophic system, they are of no great moment for my immediate purposes. For my argument simply says that if philosophy is not to be one of the special disciplines, it must maintain its universal concern. And to be effectively universal, philosophy must have some basic principles which are necessary.

Thus far the inventory of philosophic requirements seems superficially decent. Yet, there is a submerged difficulty which could well be the cause of intellectual scandal. For to have a necessary principle about the world of experience is to understand the variable in an invariable way. And that, simply stated, means that for principles to be necessary, principles must be atemporal, i.e., outside of the times of the events which the principles describe. There is no excuse for being etymologically coy about this point. To understand atemporality requires a meaning for time which in turn is to be negated. I want to insist on the need for the understanding of time, because atemporality is not a matter of ignoring time, but of denying it. And as Abelard said, and logicians know: "Negation is stronger (than affirmation)." Making a negation requires a complete understanding of the predicate which is excluded from the subject, whereas affirmation demands only that enough is known of the predicate to insure the coexistence of the predicate with the subject.

Now to speak of a necessary principle as negating time, even though the principle is grammatically affirmative, involves both some reflections on time, and then some considerations on some alternative ways of negation.

I know of no better way to reveal the difficulties in the discussion of time than to quote St. Augustine.

What then *is* time? If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to a questioner, I do not know. But at any rate this much I dare affirm I know: that if nothing passed there would be no past time; if nothing were approaching, there would be no future time; if nothing were, there would be no present time.

But the two times, past and future, how can they *be*, since the past is no more and the future is not yet? On the other hand, if the present were always present and never flowed away into the past, it would not be time at all, but eternity. But if the present is only time, because it flows into the past, how can we say that it *is*? For it is, only because it will cease to be. Thus we can affirm that time *is* only in that it tends toward not-being.³

There are two distinctive themes in Augustine's account of time. Time is in the first place the negation of eternity. The transient successiveness of time is the denial of total simultaneity. But more. Time is fundamentally irrational. It is not a process of counting nor is it the way to give an account. For time is a fractional drift toward non-existence. Augustine is deeply troubled and perplexed. He sees that temporal events can be fully understood only in the total immediacy of eternity. And yet he notes, that despite that fact, we are aware of time passing; that our awareness is the measure of passing events. Here indeed is the paradox of the human situation and the mystery of what it is to be a man.

The paradox is easily stated. We do in fact measure passing events; we do compare periods of time and judge some to be longer or shorter than others. However, to vindicate our judgment or to sanction our explanation, we stand in need of principles which are not tending toward non-being, as we are and as are all things in time. Augustine is not unlike Zeno at the horse races. Zeno bets on the ponies but argues that motion is impossible. For Zeno, the paradox, of course, is not the assertion that motion does not exist, but, rather, that our attempts to account for motion result in the contradiction of the obvious fact that motion does exist.

So, too, in the case of Augustine. We are aware of the passage of time, but our explanation of that awareness demands an appeal to the eternal, and the eternal is in every sense the contradictory of our experience. We need what we cannot have, and we cannot adequately explain what we do have. For Augustine, this is the paradox which constitutes the embarrassment of philosophical system. I think, moreover, this view of Augustine helps us to understand why he says that he read Aristotle's *Categories* without profit, or why he seems to demean the efforts of the *physici*. For inquiries into nature are "oftener mere guesses than certain knowledge." It is true that the context of Augustine's remarks on physics deals with the belief required of

3 Augustine, *Confessions*, F. J. Sheed (tr.). New York: Sheed and Ward, 1943, Bk. XI, Chapter XIV.

Christians. However, this in no way vitiates the force of the judgment that propositions about the world which are generalizations from experience are most often probabilistic or mere guesses. A final example of the same point can be found in the second book of the *De Libero Arbitrio* where Augustine, after proving that God is, says: "For God is, and he is truly and supremely. This we not only hold now undoubted in faith, as I believe, but we also touch it in a sure, although still very tenuous, form of knowledge . . ." ⁴ This is simply not a modest disclaimer on Augustine's part. It is, rather, a synoptic way of stating the paradox of the relation between the human knower and that which is or can be known. Augustine as the knower is most certain on faith about things given on faith. For example, Augustine is more certain that the world was created than he is certain that pear trees will inevitably bear only pears, if they bear at all. To be sure, he has no serious doubts that pear trees will bear anything other than pears and yet, what vindicates this conviction is not generated or guaranteed by the same means as his certitude concerning matters of faith. Matters of faith are unconditionally true. They are the revealed contents of eternal Mind. Matters of reason, even if about faith, are only humanly realized and temporally formulated. This means that given the condition of the knower, knowledge of eternal matters could only be stated with a quasi necessity which is resultant upon the temporal situation of the knower.

For Augustine, moreover, there are not two worlds or two realms of truth. The eternal *is*, and is the measure of everything temporal. Consequently, the viator's knowledge of the temporal is only vindicated by his grasp of the eternal.

The human knower, just because he is human, cannot fully grasp or comprehend the eternal reasons which alone justify the Pauline confidence that the visible things of the world give witness to the invisible source of their creation. Unfortunately, some mediation is required to establish a connection between the "visibles" of experience and the eternal source of their visibility. But such a mediation must always be the contrivance of the human mind, at least the expression of such mediation must conform to rules humanly formulated. As a result, if I in no way deviate from the rules of argument and expression which have been humanly constructed, I can also appropriate to myself a reflexive kind of certainty. Such certainty, however, consists in no more than an assent to the established rubrics of expression. It does not and cannot reveal the full content of what the expression or argument is intended to circumscribe, because that content is contained within the eternity of the Creator.

Thus, a human or temporal approach to what is eternal can be sure or certain in the sense that it is faithful to its own conditions of procedure, but because it cannot encompass the eternal, human discourse can only touch upon the eternal, but never possess it. Hence, the certainty which is the assent to the necessity of the rules of discourse can under no circumstances be equated with the certainty appropriate

⁴ Augustine, *On the Free Will*, Bk. II, Chapter XV in Richard McKeon, *Selections from Medieval Philosophers*, Vol. I. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929.

to the assent to Revelation. This follows from the simple fact that necessity is never a proper predicate of the eternal, but is only a way of constraining or coercing our reflexions and discourse about the eternal.

Augustine is clear that as humans with human devices we cannot possess or express the eternal, but we can and do touch it and in doing so hold it tenuously. This is another way of saying that for Augustine discourse that is conducted by constructed rules can never succeed in fully exhibiting even that truth which things in time contain in virtue of their creation. Hence, he resists the finality of human discourse, and insists that in order to discover the truth even of temporal things we must turn inward. Augustine insists that we look to the "internal light" and to the truth that resides within; that the outer man must turn inward to discover the truth of things which God has made manifest.

Here finally is the significance of Augustine's doctrine of memory. "Great is the power of memory, a thing, O my God, to be in awe of, a profound and immeasurable multiplicity; and this thing is my mind, this thing am I." ⁵ For Augustine, memory and not science offers the only possible reconciliation between eternity and time — a reconciliation which is the mystery of man. Memory serves to help us uncover the numbers of things and the rules of numbers. Such rules are indeed atemporal and are the vestigia of the eternal wisdom according to which all things were fashioned. I do not want here to engage in exegetical or canonical problems, and I am even less concerned about Augustine's apparent fascination with numerology. For I do not see that the point Augustine is making is directly dependent upon the correctness of the biblical text he used. It is always possible to argue better than one can document, and the depth of insight ought never to be measured against the supposedly absolute criterion of Teutonic scholarship.

Augustine may well have been mistaken about the scriptural relation between the laws of number and the constitution of the world. It is altogether conceivable that his meaning for wisdom is not coincident with any form of mathematics. Yet, his conviction that the laws of number are not generalizations from experience is still held as impeccable, and his insistence that the world must be understood in atemporal terms seems equally faultless.

Since Augustine, mathematics and logic have become extremely sophisticated. There is indeed unqualified necessity in logical calculi as in theories of sets. Moreover, the necessity which is properly claimed for these disciplines is such that no empirical evidence could count against or falsify the absolute rigor of these sciences. They are atemporal and stand aside or above the contingent happenings of time. For this reason some forms of algebraic reasoning may even be claimed to be the laws of thought, and *a fortiori* to be laws of things which are thought about. If these concessions are made, some mathematical principles automatically become the basic principles of what has historically been called metaphysics.

⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk. X, Chapter XVII.

To utilize mathematical and logical principles as philosophically architectonic has both an appeal and an apparent advantage. I noted earlier that philosophical principles must be both universal and necessary, and these two conditions are apparently met in the symbolic notations appropriate to mathematics and logic. Moreover, use of such principles would appeal to the philosopher's desire for clarity and precision. For what could be more clear than invariable principles of definition, consistency and proof, in which content is transcended by the nature of the connectives; in which no even could jeopardize validity, and no element of subjective interpretation could gainsay the integrity of intellectual procedure.

I wish that I could stop here and sing the great Amen, because it would not only be a congenial solution, but would even seem to be an implicit argument for asserting that such philosophizing is connatural. Regarding such a possibility, Bergson astutely observed that:

. . . the human intellect feels at home among inanimate objects, more especially among solids, where our action finds its fulcrum and our industry its tools; that our concepts have been formed on the model of solids; that our logic is, pre-eminently the logic of solids; that, consequently, our intellect triumphs in geometry, wherein is revealed the kinship of logical thought with unorganized matter, and where the intellect has only to follow its natural movement. After the lightest possible contact with experience, in order to go from discovery to discovery, sure that experience is following behind it and will justify it invariably.

But from this it must also follow that our thought, in its purely logical form, is incapable of presenting the true nature of life, the full meaning of the evolutionary movement.⁶

To call upon the negative witness of Bergson in this question may strike some as deliberately prejudicial. Bergson, it will be remembered, insisted upon a biological orientation — one in which “intellect and matter progressively adapted themselves to the other in order to attain at last a common form.”⁷ Small wonder, if one sees the universe in totally vital terms, that he should also be dissatisfied with the intellect's apparent comfortableness in the context of rigid materiality.

Fortunately, the problem cannot be dissolved by insisting that the issue is only a methodological difficulty unique to an evolutionary bias. No less a mathematician and logician than Whitehead registers the equivalent warnings.

In considering the history of ideas, I maintain that the notion of ‘mere knowledge’ is a high abstraction which we should dismiss from our minds. Knowledge is always accompanied with accessories of emotion and pur-

⁶ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*. New York: The Modern Library, 1944, pp. xix, xx.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

pose. Also we must remember that there are grades in the generality of ideas. Thus a general idea occurs in history in special forms determined by peculiar circumstances of race and of stage of civilization. ⁸

I confess at once to complete agreement with Whitehead's observations. Traditional descriptions of the philosophic enterprise, especially in the scholastic tradition, tend to borrow Aristotle's mark of metaphysics as the only "free science" and then proceed to argue that philosophic knowledge is knowledge for its own sake. What disturbs me about this notion is that it doesn't make sense, probably because I think it false. Before proceeding with the defense of such outrageous heterodoxy, it might be well to restate the original problem.

At base the issue turns on the compatibility of the twin conditions of universality and necessity. I have argued that the negotiable union of these two conditions rests on the possibility of finding and formulating principles which are atemporal. My reasons for this solution were found in the seemingly paradoxical relation between the natural aspirations of mind and the equally natural limitations of the world of experience. Mind seeks universality, but universality encompasses the future as well as the past. Consequently, universality implies a sense of direction. But where is this vector to be found? Certainly not in the events to be explained, for most of them are no longer or are not yet. The only possible alternative is that the required sense of direction which we formulate in our principles is a contribution of the knowing mind. Yet here is a second difficulty. To speak of the mind contributing a sense of direction to what is not, or at least to what is not yet, is equivalent to saying that mind somehow imposes an invariable continuity on what is irredeemably discreet. Mind, in short, is the poet of necessity. And necessity is totally atemporal, and, hence, necessity is in no way synonymous with certainty which is the assent of a knower who is temporally bounded.

The metaphor of mind as poet strikes me as being the most viable form of explicating my difficulty. The philosophic poem which mind creates differs essentially from every other kind of poetry inasmuch as it is modally legislative. Other poetry speaks of what might be or what could be, but the philosophic poem, the principle, pleads a cause. The uniqueness of this cause, however, is that the poet is the defendant. As such, he cannot be out of his wits, or filled with divine madness, as Plato would have it, or even possess an afflatus which magically translates him out of the court of time. On the contrary, he must have his every wit about him, for this is his total involvement. The defense of mind as poet is one of total self confrontation. Aseptic impersonality is here impossible. The causal defense is one in which all the accoutrements of experience and reflection are called as witnesses. This means that

⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933, p. 5.

emotion and passion, recollection and aspiration are as causally relevant as is reason itself.

I suspect what I am trying to say is that philosophers are intellectually under-privileged poets. Philosophers are modally indigent — they make only necessity. However, a necessity which applies to the things of experience is not an atemporality which allows the philosophers either to annihilate time nor to escape its passing judgments.

T. S. Eliot said it in sum:

Time past and time future
Allow but a little consciousness.
To be conscious is not to be in time
But only in time can the moment in the rose garden
The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,
The moment in the draughty church at smoke-fall
Be remembered; involved with past and future.
Only through time is time conquered.⁹

Eliot's statement is so clear in its demands that it is unnerving. The consciousness of which he speaks is no formal abstraction from experience. Neither is it a generalization of significant moments. On the contrary, consciousness is an atemporal way of catching time's meaning. That I take it is the primary meaning of the line: "Only through time is time conquered." Additional reflection, however, shows that Eliot's statement is biconditional. For he is saying that we can know atemporally if and only if we are in time. To know atemporally, to conquer time, is to see the contingent from the aspect of the necessary. Such necessity cannot ignore the content of each moment. Such necessity cannot be symbolically indifferent to the radical singularity of particular experiences. The kind of necessity of which Eliot speaks and for which I am searching might be paraphrased as the effort to be passionately reasonable or, indeed, to reason passionately. Every other kind of reasoning, or every appeal to pure reason can only result in "mere knowledge," something which may well be instrumental in technological development, but cannot contribute to a philosophy of human nature or to a grasp of the human condition. In fact, systematic philosophy which rests on impersonal necessity is directly subject to Sartre's anathema: it is "In the Way." Such philosophizing should make the philosophers say with Sartre's hero: "I am *In the Way* for eternity." All that then remains is the admission of the absurd, and unspeakable *Nausea*.

⁹ T. S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*, II, in *Collected Poems*, 1909-1935. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930, pp. 216, 217.

These reflections lead me to return to the positive point which I am trying to establish.

How does one introduce the “accessories of emotion and purpose” without which necessary knowledge becomes “mere knowledge”? The problem as I am posing it is philosophical, but only in the sense that a constructed philosophy will succeed or fail to evidence a response to this issue. The haunting quest for atemporal knowledge seems to me to be the prologue to the formation of every discipline. In fact, I suspect that no matter how primitive, every reflective attempt on man’s part to find significance in the world or to find his relation to the world is at base a search for atemporality. Early cosmogonies, theogonies and cosmologies all sought for the significance of the world by rejecting death — at least the finality of death. By such a rejection the poets were at least able to secure a generic significance for a race, a city, or a kind of activity. For example, a theogony by appealing to an eternal principle of generation effectively prevented the significance of events from atomically degenerating as did the events signified.

Eliade, in his book, *Shamanism*, made a similar point with respect to how the sacred is made manifest in history. “Yet in the humblest hierophany there is an ‘eternal new beginning’, an eternal return to an atemporal moment, a desire to abolish history, to blot out the past, to recreate the world.”¹⁰

I certainly do not want to equate the purposes of philosophers with those of ancient myth makers, or with prophets, or with founders of religions. And yet I do see a disquieting similarity when I hear philosophers facetly recounting self-evident truths, synthetic *a priori* propositions, protocol sentences, basic premises, or indeed the hallowed formulae of perennial wisdom.

Curiously, what bothers me about such talk is not its proximity to myth making, but its deletion of those emotions which would make the search for atemporal insight a personal duty, rather than an obligation that has been happily discharged by some godly gifted ancestor. To make the quest for atemporal insight a personal duty is precisely to live out the love which is philologically promised by the term, philosophy. To love is surely not a single emotion, nor is it susceptible or subject to a single definition. Love is, rather, a bundle of tensions that can only be paradoxically paraphrased and awkwardly acted. It is at once a blind sight, a shared silence, an unspoken dialogue, a “madness most discreet,” “a bitter gall and a preserving sweet.” According to the Platonic myth, love is the product of the union of poverty and plenty and which forever vacillates in its memory of its progenitors.

For philosophy to love it must share in this gamut of emotions. As Augustine said it, it is a matter of tenuously holding to what is certainly proved. Other philosophers have said it with different figures and in differing cadences. Philosophy demands a moderate scepticism of mind in the presence of the certitude of sense; it is

¹⁰ Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism*, Bollingen Series LXXVI. New York: Pantheon Books, 1964, pp. xvi, xvii.

the hesitance of reason when confronted with the certainty of faith; it consists in the uncomfortable pluralizing of truths which are founded on the Truth; it is described as the blindness of sight in the presence of the sun; it is defined as the dispensing with symbols in the description of intuition. The list could be extended almost indefinitely, but all such formulae share in Nicolas of Cusa's epigrammatic description: "Learned Ignorance."

If these are the emotions which philosophy must have to avoid becoming "mere knowledge," why does it so often fail? It was Whitehead again who clearly saw the reasons why philosophy often loses those endemic emotions which make it genuine wisdom. He noted that there are "two main errors to which philosophic method is liable, one is the uncritical trust in the adequacy of language, and the other is the uncritical trust in the strained attitude of introspection as the basis for epistemology."¹¹

I will leave aside here any comment on the exaggerated trust in language, since I have elsewhere argued that philosophical insights, once articulated, are thereby entombed in the historical conventions of language from which the student of the history of philosophy must resurrect rather than exhume them in his own day.¹² On this score, I want to say that to subscribe to the traditional formulae of perennial philosophy is to be a linguistic grave robber, and, as corollary, an intellectual archeologist.

The "uncritical trust in the strained attitude of introspection" seems, to me, to be just another way of issuing a warning against the evils of philosophic *hubris*. It is true that to see atemporally is to see with the necessity of our own creation. Although such poetic activity is indigenous to human nature, it does not follow that the resultant creation contains or constrains its creator. Necessity may well be a category of mind, but the creating mind remains for all that matter contingent.

To be contingent is to be something that not only knows but also forgets. And having forgotten, one tries to protect himself against the erosions of time by remembering, and remembering universally, which is to remember the future. This, to be sure, can only be done atemporally, i.e., poetically. Perhaps that finally is the reason and the meaning of John of Salisbury's observation: "That 'Poetry is the cradle of philosophy' is axiomatic."¹³

¹¹ Whitehead, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

¹² Cf. my article, "The Problem of Philosophic Communication," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. I, no. 2, 1961, pp. 193, 213.

¹³ John of Salisbury, *The Metalogicon*, Daniel D. McGarry (tr.). Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955, p. 63.

Post Lecture: Questions and Answers.

There is no particular evil design in the way I am arranging these questions. My only intent is to avoid the difficult ones. So I'm putting those until the end.

Q. *Poetry might be the cradle of philosophy, but shouldn't the human mind grow up from the infant state just as the Greek philosophers went beyond Homer and Hesiod?*

A. Let me make a few observations. I have in the first place a correction to make. Poetry *is* the cradle of philosophy and in a very significant way of the philosopher as well. For the man who does not, and is not able to understand the plurality, the modal plurality, in poetry can ill afford to speak literally. In fact, I'd want to go stronger than that — much stronger — on two scores. First of all, educationally. It seems to me that the history of the human race reflects this relation as does the history of sciences. I am told that without alchemy there could have been no chemistry; and without astrology, no astronomy; and where oh where would psychiatry be without Greek tragedy? One wouldn't even be able to name the thing without having a total list of Oedipus and his kinfolk. And I think this is true as well of the history of learning of the child. The child learns about the world from fairy tales, but is infinitely bored and depressed by factual material. In fact it seems to me that what is indigenous to human nature, namely, the ability to understand poetically, is systematically robbed from him by formal education. And the more he gets, the less he has. I would seriously insist pedagogically that every Ph. D. candidate take one seminar in fairy tales. And, if he couldn't pass that, he would be judged to be unable to write a significant dissertation. All he will be able to do is to be technically competent.

Now the second part of the question — the moving beyond Homer and Hesiod by the Greek philosophers. I have the distinct impression that even today Homer is read more than Aristotle and I think for very good reasons. Homer knew more. The point put another way is that the tendency to make disciplines is in one sense simply a fraud, because discipline-making takes what is naturally plural, naturally pregnant, and starts dividing, and carving, and slicing into thin units. Literalizing impoverishes the depth of insight. And discipline-making is the tool by which this end is achieved. Consequently, I would say, "No, let's *not* get out of that cradle." But if you want to hold that metaphor, I would say: "Intellectually, we all ought to be baby-dolls and just stay in that cradle because that is the way the world is most clearly understood."

In the light of the principles enunciated in your talk, would you kindly pronounce a judgment on contemporary existentialism?

Well, I don't know that I'll pronounce any judgment, but I will react. Existentialism in the sense of Sartre, in the sense of Camus — yes, I'll talk about that much more than the sense of Marcel. Existentialism in the sense of Sartre is simply the final fulfillment, the final carrying out and reaction to the unsupportable optimism, if not sanguinity that Aristotle had in the power of the human mind. It is the ultimate reduction to the absurd of the position that says we can know everything and know everything fully. It says at one and the same time that systematic disciplines which ignore the human being are “mere knowledge,” as Whitehead puts it, and ought to be dismissed. It says that the human condition is so intensely purposeful and so immensely charged with emotion, that to speak a system which leaves this out, is not to speak in any meaningful way. I recall a line from Sartre's play, “The Flies,” in which in the festival of the dead the rock is rolled away from the cave and the chant is made, “Pardon us for living while you are dead.” That is the reaction against the dry bones of system. One has to excuse himself to the dead for living. I think that Sartre has got much to tell us — much — and we have much to learn.

What is it to be morally responsible? It is to have a conclusion of “I.” And if I have a system of ethics in which there is no “I,” how can “I” have an obligation?

Sartre said something else in his last play picking up the Nietzschean dictum, “God is dead,” and then announced something even more terrible — “Man is dead!” That was much more terrible than saying, “God is dead,” for Nietzsche's claim simply said that traditional systems of morality were not adequate to the problems, because traditional systems were traditionally presented in traditional terms and the situation simply could not be accommodated by those traditions.

Now it gets more serious. Now not only are those religious traditions inadequate, but so are the men. And when men live by entombed traditions, they are at least as dead as the things that are entombed. And so in one sense Sartre is not at all the apostle of gloom. He is the greatest summons for self-confrontation and self-responsibility that I know in the literature of philosophy. You say he is atheistic. Sure. Sure! But what difference does that make? What difference does it make to the truth of what the problem is? The problem is simply that as thinkers we have surrendered, generally or for the most part. Philosophers have begun to do only one thing — philosophize about each other; or, what's worse, since lesser minds are always more comfortable reciting than when thinking, they put out formulae to be memorized. Now mnemonic skills cannot replace insight, and here, I think, is the point of Sartre in intellectual terms: You have to think, not recite. A terrible moral responsibility for thinking and that, I think, is the beauty — *the beauty* — of all the ugliness in “Nausea:” to see and confront oneself and say, “I just might be absurd.” And it's not too hard when you're standing up here.

What is your opinion of The Future of Man?

Well, this is signed by Teilhard de Chardin, but I take it, that must be the

author of the book rather than the questioner.

Teilhard in talking about evolution makes a couple of points that excite me. The first is the whole notion of evolution and its direction. Why should we believe for a moment, or be egotistical enough to believe, that we have stopped evolving? And if we continue to evolve, in what direction shall we go? And the answer is obviously: Evolve toward more and more consciousness.

Forget all the old distinctions between the living and the non-living, or between the inert and the “ert,” and think rather of the universe as life and pre-life in which pre-life is waiting to burst out vitally. And then look at the human being and say, “Which way are we going?” It is away from matter toward mind, toward more and more consciousness.

There is a magnificence here of hope, of magnificent hope that we will no longer be chained as we are now by the intemperate and indecent demands of matter and time. In fact, as I think of the possibilities of going forward in an evolutionary way, the emergence may not be the “omega point,” and it may not pass through the “nouesphere,” but wouldn’t it be delightful if we all sort of evolved into angels who wore overcoats.

And one thing more. There is a little footnote in *The Phenomenon of Man* that makes a very exciting point. He’s talking about the Incarnation, despite his disclaimer in the preface, in these terms: Consider for a moment the visitation of the Godhead of his creation. Is it conceivable, asks Teilhard, that creation was unaffected by the presence of the Godhead physically walking in his creation? Is that conceivable? Christ was no mere abstraction; it was the God-man present in the universe. That the universe should have remained unaffected by his presence, or that only somehow souls of some sort or another were affected, but human beings not, and the world not, Teilhard found unthinkable. I do too.

Teilhard goes one step further. He thinks the difference in the universe ought to have been of such magnitude that it could be scientifically measured. And that’s an exciting notion, because the concretization of the Godhead in the Incarnation certainly ought to make a difference to our thinking about the world.

I speak now as a Christian philosopher, or a Christian who is a philosopher, and I confess to an irredeemable prejudice, and that is that I get slightly bilious or worse everytime I hear the facile distinction between faith and reason. Because I think it is the ultimate form, and the most sickening form, of secularism. Now if faith and reason are not that separable and the world I live in is a redeemed world, then my philosophy ought to take account of this fact, and I, as a viator, ought to be able to express that in my philosophy. If my philosophy does not give evidence of my awareness of these two conditions, it is not lousy poetry, it’s not even doggerel. It is a scribbling on an outhouse wall which is socially sanctified.

I take it you would deplore any study of history which pretended to complete objec-

tivity. But can there be a philosophy of history which is not also in your terms a general philosophy?

First point: objectivity. Let the next three minutes be called aphorism-making minutes. I want to say that just as the most practical thing we have is theory, so too the most objective thing is subjectivity. Because when you talk about objectivity (and that's what I thought I was talking about somehow tonight) I find that there is no objectivity anywhere except the objectivity I give it. Now, if that's what objectivity is, namely, what the subject does with it, it is very much akin to what a poet does. He takes something and invests it with its possibilities, and objectivity is one of the possibilities that the subject invests in the thing, in this case, in a discipline. To speak of objectivity, and "Let's be objective," is usually to say, "Let's be irrelevant together."

What is overlooked is that the intellectual disciplines are not in the world, they are not in my experience, they are not a matter of revelation, they are things I make up. And since I make them up, they are my creatures. And since they are my creatures, I should not let them master me.

I sometimes think of this business in sort of Berkleyian terms. First we throw up a lot of dust and then we complain we cannot see. I think of making a discipline in a kind of allegorical way. It's like building a doghouse for a dinosaur. You have three alternatives when the job is done. (The dinosaur, incidentally, is the universe in this allegory and the doghouse is the discipline.) Now you can look at this relationship from the side and notice that not all of the dinosaur is in the doghouse. You can say, "Well, that's not my fault. See that growing beast!" Or you can look at it and see that the tail of the dinosaur is indeed in the doghouse and say, "I know that not everything is covered, but the important part sure is under." Or, lastly, you can crouch behind the fool thing and say, "What do you mean it's not all covered?"

Well, the moral of the story, when you talk about objectivity as found in disciplines, is that *I* make it, and I am in no way going to stand around being mastered by something over which I should be the master . . .

. . . can there be a philosophy of history which is not also in your terms a general philosophy?

I suppose not, but I'm sort of wondering whether you can have a philosophy of history anyway, at least one that historians would be interested in. As far as I can tell, philosophers make philosophies of lots of things, but the people for whom they make them seem singularly unimpressed.

Is TO BE more than TO BE INVOLVED?

Well, that sounds like a kind of moral question. This TO BE is capitalized,

which I think is a mistake unless you wear lederhosen and speak with a Teutonic accent and announce yourself to be a phenomenologist, for that's what a phenomenologist is — a prime mover in lederhosen speaking with a German accent. I don't know what this TO BE business is; I think probably what Popeye says, "I am what I am and that's what I am." Well, that being the case, I sure am involved. The point I'm making (I'm sorry for making light of your question), is that this is the kind of distinction which does not really emotionally excite me, because if I find somebody that is not involved, and just *is*, it will not evoke any large passion on my part.

Do you agree with Augustine that matter was created in time or with Aristotle that it is eternal?

Aristotle does not say that matter is eternal. Aristotle supposes the eternity of motion, which is not at all the same question.

The other part of the question is: . . . *do I agree with Augustine that matter was created in time, that the world was created ex nihilo?* Well, unless I want to take this occasion for renouncing my baptism, I'd better say I agree with Augustine.

Does Aristotle's view imply that the complete annihilation of matter is against the nature of the creator?

Aristotle didn't have the vaguest idea about any creator. He doesn't need one. Matter of fact, he said it would be strange indeed if anybody loved Zeus. And I'd agree with him. I wouldn't love Zeus either.

This looks like it ought to be wind-up time with this question. *Would you please state again* (which means, 'read your paper over again; the first time it wasn't clear') *your distinction that necessity doesn't follow from universality.*

Yes, I can explain that very simply. Universality covers events that are not, will be, or no longer are. Necessity is the direction which the existent and the non-existent share. And that's a profound difference.

There's one other here on mathematics written clearly by a mathematician.

If you agree with Augustine that mathematics furnishes the mind with its desired goal of atemporal necessity, how then do you account for the disquieting contradictions and conundrums that are being unearthed by modern mathematical logicians — Russell's paradox and Goedel's theorem? Perhaps even mathematics does not afford the desired refuge of necessity.

Let me start with the last and say, "Absolutely the case!" Mathematics will not give us the kind of necessity that we need for philosophizing if you want to talk about philosophy in the way we have.

Nemetz: Memory of Things Future

With respect to Augustine's notion of mathematics, remember it's not the mathematics that we understand today. His was much more biblical exegesis, the kind of numbers which was used in Talmudic commentaries. Augustine himself in *De Doctrina Christiana* uses the formulae of Tyconius the African, and while I'm sure that this is the first time this evening his name has come up, it also seems to me to be the place to close, because I'm not going to tell you anymore about Tyconius the African. Let the "intellectual frontiers" expand! Thank you.