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Responding to One's World: On the Language of Philosophy, the Idiom of the Artwork, and Conversation

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I need to thank my friends Claudia Baracchi and Jim Risser for their generous remarks that have somehow magically made my work sound more interesting than it is. The care with which they have treated my work and me reminds me why I have always thought that Aristotle was right when he said that we find the clearest mirror of the best of ourselves in the eyes of the friend. Our friendship and conversations have lasted for decades now, and they have both formed and shaped my understanding of what it is that we do. My debt to each of them extends far beyond the wonderful papers that they have written and to which I hope to do justice in my response. Their remarks take up a wide range of themes: conversation, writing, words, images, tragedy, the language of philosophy, the presumption of a bond between philosophy and ethical life, their remarks speak about art and the challenges that philosophy faces in this present historical moment. Given the sweep of their remarks I cannot respond as I ought, but I will try to address what I see as a common question that drives both of them. Doing this gives me the occasion to ask if there has been any real coherence in the work that has been at the centre of my life for so long. I have discovered that this is a difficult task and I am grateful to my friends for their help in this effort. In the end, it is this remarkable experience of thinking in language and with others, and of the ethical sense that such thinking and sharing cultivates that I would like to respond to today. It is this experience that Plato and Gadamer – two figures that both Baracchi and Risser enlist in their own reflections – find as at the heart of what constitutes the activity of philosophizing. It is precisely in conversations such as these that we help one another better understand our worlds – and ourselves.

Barrachi and Risser share a concern – one that has become increasingly puzzling to me over the years – about the nature, aims, and responsibilities of a philosophical way of life. Both of them come at this nest of questions about philosophy itself in different ways, but in the end both of them point to these questions as highlight to what is at stake in all of the other questions they pose. Here is the way they each frame the question:

Baracchi: “What could philosophy ever become if it were to open itself to alterity, to the other than the logos, in the movement of life?”

Risser: “[It is necessary] to call into question what we do as philosophers and even what counts as philosophy. ... It is a matter of asking about the very idea of a philosophical sensibility.”

Furthermore, both of them refine what this set of questions amount to by indicating the way in which they drive to what is best defined as an ethical struggle:

Baracchi: “This is a quintessentially ethical struggle, played out in the *polis*, urged by the sharp awareness of the vulnerability of children and of our evanescence overall: an ethical, political, and pedagogical struggle.”

Risser: “What is the capacity of philosophy to transform the situation out of which it arises? What is the significance and responsibility of philosophy? What is the *ethos* of a philosophical life?”

Of all the many insights which my friends have laid out, it is this concern, this question of the character, task, and responsibility of philosophy itself that haunts me most of all. One would think that after almost half a century of reading philosophy, I would have a clearer sense of just what it is that I have done with my life, however, I need to confess – especially in light of what my friends have shown to be an important matter – that I have only become more convinced that this strange life you and I live, a life that from time to time provides us the privilege of conversations and engagements such as my friends Claudia and Jim have given me, is a great riddle. Over time, I have become convinced that this question of what philosophy is, of its place in a life shared with others, is perhaps the most uniquely philosophical question of all. To say this is not to suggest that the project of philosophy simply folds back into itself in a peculiar sort of narcissism or insularity; rather, it is a way of recognizing that the capacity to engage the world philosophically is oddly resistant to

being addressed unless some philosophical assumptions are taken up. This is not a matter of the self-validation or self-aggrandizement of philosophy, but a way in which it necessarily throws itself into question. Rather, I believe that it is precisely this need of philosophizing to throw itself into question that drives both Baracchi and Risser find their remarks culminating in questions about the very idea of philosophy.

It is important to approach these questions by remembering that philosophy is not a discipline, not a body of knowledge, but simply and above all else, an intensification of the human capacity for thinking, for paying attention to the world in a quite peculiar way that has no concern with utility. It is, as one finds so clearly formulated as the basic assumption of hermeneutics, a matter of understanding, not of cognition – of phronesis, not episteme – and I would argue that this is the most original form of thinking.¹ I also note that even though this capacity of thinking – of being in the world by being able to be elsewhere at the same time – defines us it is exceedingly difficult to sustain and not something we can turn on at will. Rather, it is, as Kant suggests, best defined by its astonishing spontaneity that, as Gadamer suggests, natively drives itself into the word. Furthermore, this capacity for thinking that philosophy intensifies is something that we seem best able to do in conversation whether with a text, a friend, or the dialogue we have with ourselves. This conversation is, as Baracchi reminds us, a space in which “the play of receptivity and restitution, of listening and giving back, always wanders incalculably. Positions keep shifting, each return seems to come from somewhere else, in a constant, if subtle, mutation of perspectives. The back-and-forth of conversation is a morphic, indeed anamorphic field. Formative, transformative, and deformative – the field of imponderable variations, tensions, warps, obliquity.” In other words, it is a conversation that needs to struggle with what Plato called the “ἀσθενέζ” [“weakness”]² of the *logos*, with the insufficiency of words at all.

But there remains one more feature at the heart of the idea of philosophy as I understand it and it is perhaps the oldest of philosophical assumptions; namely that there is a bond between thinking and – for the want of a better word – what we call the “good.” It is bond that both Baracchi and Risser highlight, but both deflect – perhaps out of some suspicion of the long history that has misused the word – the word “good.” Instead, Risser will speak about

1 It is thus telling that both Baracchi and Risser refer to the primacy of ethical concerns over the epistemological when speaking about the character and promise of the philosophical project. Likewise, both highlight the significance of Aristotle, Kant, and Levinas for the elaboration of this claim; there is, one might say a certain primacy of the practical, of judgment, of the ethical wedded to the very idea of philosophy.

2 Plato, 7th Letter, 343a.

how thinking generates itself and sets an essential bond with conscience, and Baracchi will find the reference to the good established most of all in its kinship with the beautiful. And yet, even if they do not speak of this bond that thinking finds to something that orients it, both Baracchi and Risser will insist upon the way in which thinking cannot escape its own ethical orientation and impulses – and it is this bond that give philosophy as the intensification of thinking its real weight. Plato describes this bond as a sort of heliotropism – just like sunflowers, thinking follows the sun, that offspring of the good, and it nourishes itself on the light that is proper to the good. This sense of a constitutive bond, between thinking and the good is an assumption that ranges from the first words of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*: “it has been beautifully said [δίο καλώς] that the good is that for which everything longs”³ to Arendt's question at the beginning of *The Life of the Mind*: “Could it be that the activity of thinking *as such*, the habit of examining whatever happens to come to pass or to attract attention, regardless of results or specific content, could this activity of thinking be among the conditions that make people abstain from evil doing or even actually ‘condition’ them against it?”⁴ Now this suggestion is a profoundly, I am tempted to say uniquely, philosophical one – to even pose this question as a possibility requires that one become aware of what is ordinarily rather invisible: the activity of thinking itself. However, I am no longer convinced that this question permits a philosophical answer. I have come to believe that the answer to this question is not, indeed cannot be, a proposition, but that it is at most a decision, an existential choice that is without reason even if there are many reasons one can give. Such a dilemma puts one in an impossible situation, one akin to what Kant described as the “peculiar fate of reason” in the first sentence of his first Critique.⁵ And yet, even if it is by some measure impossible, it is this choice, this existential commitment to the choice of a life centered upon nourishing this bond between thinking and the good is, I believe, the choice that most of all defines the philosophical life, and it is this choice that I want to think about in what follows.⁶

3 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094a1.

4 Hannah Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 5.

5 Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1956), A VII.

6 Here, I hope it goes without saying that the philosophical life is not in the least a matter of the life of a philosophy professor or of one who loves books of a certain kind. It is rather a deeply human choice even if that means opening being human beyond itself. I need to mention that when this paper was originally presented as a talk at SPEP, I was deeply critical of way in which being housed in a university has shaped and distorted the very idea of philosophy and our understanding of it. I suggested that it was fundamentally problematic to wed the idea of philosophy to the aims of an institution such as a university. It was a remark borne of a cynicism that has sadly taken hold of me over the years. But I was powerfully, and

This bond between thinking and the good is not without consequence, a promise of sorts – or better – a demand. This demand emerges out of the recognition that this kinship is only meaningful, only completed when it is realized in life. It is at this point that philosophy assumes its responsibility in the world. Let me say at the outset that such a remark does not imply that philosophy should be “relevant” or that it needs to be “applied” – nothing could be further from the point of what I believe is demanded of us than such interpretations. I would actually go so far as to say that demanding that philosophy be “relevant” or “applied” signals its death, not the assumption of its deepest responsibility in the world. Rather, this realization – something one finds Foucault thinking about a great deal and through a variety of sources in which we find the practice of “spiritual exercises” – is a matter of what Risser has emphasized, it is a matter of changing “the habits of mind that hold us hostage.”

This demand that thinking be realized in the world, that it not remain an “abstraction” is a constant concern throughout the history of philosophy. One sees it expressed in Plato by the need for the one who exits the cave to return into it and by the image of the birth of souls that brings the *Republic* to a close.⁷ Likewise, one finds it expressed by Kant when, after the claim – so well known to us all – that “two things fill the mind [Gemüt] with ever new and increasing wonder the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: *The starry sky above me and the moral law within me*” – Kant then says, “I do not need to search for them [the starry sky and moral law] as though they were veiled in obscurity or in a transcendent region beyond my horizon; I see them before me and connect them immediately with the consciousness of my existence.”⁸ In other words, these “two things” are bound to my own self-awareness and understanding immediately, that is, they belong to and constitute the consciousness I have of my existence. In short, they change me insofar as they “fill the mind.” Finally, one also sees this sense that to fulfil its own nature, this experience of thinking needs to realize itself in existence, in life when Heidegger comments that,

completely appropriately corrected – schooled in the best way possible – by my friend and colleague (and former student of long ago) Shannon Mussett who pointed out the importance of teaching and the way in which universities remain a refuge for a sort of experience and opportunity not found elsewhere. It was a well-made point and one that I know came from a teacher of philosophy who has transformed the lives of her students. And so I happily stand corrected – at least on this point of teaching – on the topic of the relation of philosophy to the university. I do remain convinced that this topic is an important one and is one that we ought not dodge.

- 7 Baracchi points out the many different ways in which is described by Plato as a matter of circular motions that “nourish, regenerate, and re-energize life in a way that defines the human being in its very being.”
- 8 Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (Hamburg, Meiner Verlag, 1972), AK 161–162.

“Philosophy ... takes its departure from the hermeneutic of Dasein, which, as an analysis of existence has fastened the end of the guideline of all philosophical inquiry at the point from which it arises and to which it returns.”⁹ This is the same point he makes when he speaks of the “Zurückschlagen der Philosophie in die Existenz” [“the recoil of philosophy into existence”].¹⁰ But this return, this fold into life, is no simple matter and it is easily forgotten as a problem. So, immediately after arguing for the gravitational pull of the good upon all things, Aristotle presents an image of human life as like an archer and, as Aristotle notes, the archer needs to see the target – to have the good in view – if s/he is to hit the goal.¹¹ But what Aristotle does not emphasize is that knowing where the target is does not suffice to hit the target – nor does knowing the good suffice to bring us to enact the good – one needs more. An archer needs to breathe, be steady, understand how to respond to the bow – and much more that I do not understand. But here we come to understand the problem of folding this pull of the good that draws one back into life.

The point of these comments is to call attention to a demand, a responsibility, or what Risser calls “the ethos” of a philosophical life. That the task of philosophy is not a cognitive matter, its aim is not knowledge, but what Gadamer, following and pressing forward from Heidegger, called “understanding” – it is something that Jim Risser has far more appropriately called the “life of understanding” (a phrase that emphasizes the deep identity of life and understanding for human being, an identity that Heidegger presents by finding “understanding” to be one of the three primary existentialia of the way of human being in the world).¹² One might simply say that, given the elemental way in which understanding belongs to the way in which we go through life and disclose the world, understanding does not leave life untouched, unchanged – we live in the world “understandingly.”¹³ Above all, it changes the one who understands. Crudely put, one might say that the claim is that truth changes us. For those who dispute the idea that thinking is wedded to the good, this claim must sound like non-sense. But there is a long tradition – ranging from Paul and Meister Eckhart to Kant, Nietzsche, and Heidegger – that points to a thought,

9 Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, GA 2 (Frankfurt: Klostermann Verlag, 1976), 38.

10 *Ibid.*, 39.

11 *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094a6.

12 See James Risser, *The Life of Understanding* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

13 Saying this does not in the least suggest that understanding is always appropriate or a disclosure that does not conceal. Baracchi makes this point well when she says “that such the effort to understand opens a field of imponderable variations, tensions, warps. A fluctuating space” to which “elements of unrest and distortion” belong as well.

an experience of thinking in the extreme, that must if it is understood change one who thinks it. Such at least is the optimistic way of thinking about why philosophy, why this intensification of thinking – this effort aimed at understanding and not simply at cognizing the world – matters.

I have long held fast to this optimistic sense of philosophy as a way of life. However, I have come to believe that the evidence against it now feels almost overwhelming. Setting aside the news of today – if one can do that for an imaginary moment – one needs to concede that the moral blindness of philosophers who have undeniably opened up an understanding of the world is harsh and damning evidence against the claim that philosophy matters. Jim Risser speaks about this as a matter of the “corruptibility of human reason” and he says clearly that “one needs more than arguments governed by the law of reason to change one’s life.” Both Baracchi and Risser refer to way in which a crisis can summon the need for the promise of philosophy. Risser refers specifically to the ways in which Sartre, Heidegger, and Gadamer address the crisis of post-war Europe, while Baracchi refers to the more sweeping ways in which we witness “the destructiveness that human beings bring upon themselves. And each other.”¹⁴ Such crises, such violence and destruction that we bring into the world and unleash upon ourselves, will not be answered by new technological advances, strategies, or even laws unless those efforts are driven by understanding. A responsible answer to the mess of the world is one that first makes an effort to understand. And to do this is the task of philosophy, or at least it has always been the promise of philosophy.

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Both Baracchi and Risser recognize that for philosophy to respond to this crisis and to live up to its promise, then it must be opened up in new ways and our understanding of what it means to think needs to be expanded. Baracchi makes this point when she suggests that truth can no longer be “under the sole control of *logos* ... that is aligned with the corrective orthopaedics of discourse and a regime of truth as *adaequatio*.” Risser issues the same sort of challenge to the idea of philosophy when he says that “the language of concepts is insufficient for articulating the thinking [that can measure up to] the sensibility of life [itself]. ... [as Gadamer argues, what is needed] is another critique of reason.” Both Risser and Baracchi identify a number of difficulties of the present

14 See also her very important treatment of the idea of war in Claudia Baracchi, *Of Myth, Life, and War in Plato's Republic*, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2002).

age as both indicators and instigators of the stultification that defines philosophizing in the present age: the “colonization and inhibition” of the imagination by the way technological developments have addicted us to the spectacle of images (Baracchi), and by the “calculations and convictions of power” that dominate our view of the world (Risser). But what is most important – and again, this is something shared by both Baracchi and Risser – is the need for philosophy to open itself and to recognize as much as possible the limits of its own assumptions. In particular, what needs to be overcome is the way in which philosophy is governed by the idiom of the ideal – the language and law of the concept which structures and shapes every philosophical discourse. By virtue of the sort of language it speaks – its mother tongue, the concept – philosophy cannot resist laying down the law, even if “only” as a “categorical imperative.” It is this habit of laying down the law, of issuing imperatives, that needs to be broken and in this task, both Baracchi and Risser argue that the work of art presents the sort of challenge and opening that philosophy needs precisely because the work of art emerges out of and is riveted to the singular, to the idiom, and in this way does not submit to the law of the ideal, to the language of the concept. There is an expression, a principle in law that says “*De minimus non curat lex*” [“The law does not care about nuances”]. Here Nietzsche, who makes a similar appeal to the work of art – “we have art, lest we perish from the truth”¹⁵ – makes a remark that is the perfect rebuttal to this rule of the law: “*Ich bin eine Nuance.*”¹⁶ Here we find the crux of the problem of one who would live responsibly as a thinking being. As Kant reminds us, we live in a kingdom of such nuances, a kingdom of idioms. Coming to this realization is the point at which something like an ethics begins, but it is also the point at which philosophy, in some sense, comes to an end insofar as it reaches the point at which it finds resistance to its very idea and to the mother tongue in which it speaks. It is precisely at this point of philosophy reaching its own limit that one faces a choice: to stubbornly hold fast to an idea, to cling ever more tightly to the *logos*, to the language of the concept, or to – as Baracchi suggests – to “open itself up to an alterity other than the *logos.*” The first choice, a choice – the resistance of thinking to the need that it open itself – that can culminate in the confident righteousness of the philosopher king or the rector of a university, leads to a sort of moral blindness. The second, the deepening of a sense of the limits of one’s understanding and the insurmountable finitude that defines a thinking

15 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe* Bd. 13, hrsg. Coli u. Montinari (Berlin: deGruyter, 1988), 1888, Aphorism 822.

16 Friedrich Nietzsche, “Der Fall Wagner,” in *Kritische Studienausgabe* Bd. 6, hrsg. Coli u. Montinari (Berlin: deGruyter, 1988), 362.

being, necessarily entails a sort of humility, a recognition as Socrates reminds us of our essential ignorance. This humility, which is a marker of the limits of what one can expect of philosophy, is what resists the righteousness those who would lay down the law.¹⁷ This second choice, this readiness to be humbled, changes us in a way that Risser makes clear when he says, “one can say that conscience is the self-learning that occurs in the breakdown of understanding, and at the same time being called to be answerable for one’s way-making in life.” One might say that the most radical fidelity to thinking, to the effort to understand, calls attention to the limits of that effort – that there is a resistance of life to thinking – and that this “breakdown” opens us and enlarges the world if we are up to it, if we take it to heart. And it is a moment of real vulnerability because one needs to begin anew. In a strange sense, philosophy, this intensification of attention to life that claims a peculiar kindship with the good, only enters into a realm we might – for the lack of a better word – call “the ethical” at the point of its dissolution, at the point it discovers its limits and the *logos* necessarily becomes a *logos praktikon*. But this is also the point at which it becomes evident that thinking does not prevent moral blindness, that just like Oedipus, we can have the truth right before our eyes and still not see. In the end, there is no safeguard against our own failure to see what matters most: our own limits.

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In order to conclude, let me finally turn to the point that I have assiduously avoided thus far: the point that both Baracchi and Risser make about the importance of the work of art – I would prefer to say: the importance of aesthetic experience – for the question of how we are to live as moral beings. Both of them argue, rightly I believe, that as Baracchi writes “[that] casting light on such limits [of philosophy] means infusing the philosophical discourse, or more broadly the domain of thinking, with the perturbing elements of the experience of art.” The argument, as Risser notes, is that “unlike the theoretical that does not have an effect on the individual and the individual’s doings, art can change the habits of mind that hold us hostage.” Understanding why this is so is key.

17 Heidegger says this as well after the war when addressing the question of whether the idea and tradition of philosophy might be a resource for understanding the crisis of the times: “it is time finally to break the habit of overestimating philosophy and of asking too much of it,” Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, GA 9, 364.

The discourse character of the *logos* in philosophic texts undoubtedly helps one make sense of what one needs to understand. Such language can clarify and gather together issues under ideas, and in doing so expose the wider extend of what one needs to understand. Strangely though, it seems that few minds are changed or opened up by such discourse. Against what one might hope, it is often the case that such discourse reaffirms one's convictions as much as it might challenge one's beliefs. Reason is oddly stubborn. And yet, words do have an extraordinary capacity to affect and change us. They can move us to understand something in a new light and shake us free.

I believe my first experience of such language was when I was 15 – it was a line from a Greek tragedy that gripped me. It happened on April 4th 1968, and was something I heard on the news that night. Martin Luther King had been assassinated earlier that day. The news reports showed Bobby Kennedy arriving at an airport in Indianapolis where he announced the news to a crowd gathered for his presidential campaign. Bobby Kennedy spoke from the heart about violence and hatred and rage. He spoke of race and of his brother's assassination, and he spoke of compassion and love and understanding. And then he said this: "My favorite poet is Aeschylus and he once wrote 'In our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of god.'"¹⁸ Those words moved me then and they still do that today. Those words did not make sense of the non-sense of that violence, but they gave me something to understand. They awakened something for me and asked, somehow, for me to respond. What they awakened needed to be thought about and this is where philosophy has a role. Its role is to interpret, to critique, to unfold what is dense and yet goes to the heart of what matters. In some sense philosophy, this other relation to thinking an event, comes after the fact, it is not the first response that matters – that is why Hegel said that "the owl of Minerva only begins its flight as dusk begins to fall."¹⁹

Adorno wrote that "to write poetry after Auschwitz was barbaric."²⁰ I would prefer to say that anything less than poetry is insufficient. Likewise, Heidegger

18 Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 174–183. The line reads: στάζει δ' ἀνθ' ὕπνου πρὸ καρδίας μνησιπήμων πόνος· καὶ παρ' ἄκοντας ἦλθε σωφρονεῖν. The translation that Kennedy used, by Edith Hamilton, is problematic and alters some of the words. In the end, this quibble about which I once expressed concerns, misses the point of the passage that Kennedy read and that did not need to be other than it was in that moment.

19 G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), p. 28.

20 Theodore Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 10.1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), 30.

wrote “Wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?” [“What are poets for in times of need?”] – but, as I’ve been suggesting through these remarks, I believe that the question we really need to ask is “Wozu Philosoph in dürftiger Zeit?” – what are philosophers for in times of need? But in the end, what I have come to believe is that both poetry and philosophy *need* one another if either is to help us to respond to the world we find and to live responsibly.

It is important to recognize how it is that aesthetic experience educates us in a way that we as philosophers would do well to try to recognize and take to heart. This, of course, is a large topic, but some hints might help as one moves forward on this point. Here, as both Baracchi and Risser have noted, Kant is decisive and provides a clue that we need to pursue. More precisely, in his effort to understand the quite unique pleasure that we take in the beautiful – in the experience of the site that Plato suggests is where the good is sheltered²¹ – Kant claims that this pleasure is really a matter of the “feeling of life” [“das Lebensgefühl”] and that what we sense is the “quicken of life” [“Belebung des Lebens”].²² His remark calls to mind the phrase that Gadamer uses to describe how aesthetic experience expands the world, namely it is he says “ein Zuwachs am Sein” [“an increase in Being”]²³ – where one thinks of the expression in German “ein Zuwachs bekommen” [to welcome a child into a family]. It is also a phrase that calls to mind Heidegger’s comment in *Being and Time* where he says that “das Dasein existiert gebürtig” [“Dasein exists as being born”].²⁴ All these remarks speak about the intensification of life itself, of a sense of the world as that which exceeds us and grows beyond our understanding, and that yet – when we are attentive – draws us ever closer to what matters. This reference to birth, to the arrival of life itself, and its pleasure, the incalculable increase in the world it signals, is what the aesthetic experience can bring forward as a reminder for those who make the effort to understand and respond to the world. Kant speaks about this astonishing pleasure that goes to the heart of being human in the world. It is a pleasure that exceeds the merely human and brings us before our most incomprehensible limits and, as Baracchi says “[that] there is nothing ordinary [about] ordinariness.” But this pleasure, this beauty, as Kant reminds us, “that we belong in the world”²⁵ and that we do so as moral beings.

21 Plato, *Philebus*, 64d.

22 Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 2001), AK 204.

23 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: Mohr Verlag, 1990), 145.

24 Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 2 (Frankfurt: Klostermann Verlag, 1976), 374.

25 Kant’s remark is: “Die schöne Dinge zeigen an, daß der Mensch in die Welt passe” in his *Reflexionen zur Logic*, 1820A, 16: 127.

Here to conclude at last, I confess that I wonder – more than I wish – if beauty remains for us. I do ask myself if we have perhaps destroyed something precious, if we have broken the bond that nourished philosophy – the bond between thinking and the good – and shut down the paths of the pleasure we take in life. It is a sad thought, but one that needs our attention if we are to respond to the world as we find it.

I have tried to respond to Jim Risser and to Claudia Baracchi, and while I am sure I have not done their efforts justice, I hope I have displayed my deep, deep gratitude to each of them and what they have helped me understand.