

Introduction

This book is an attempt to grasp what human adulthood is. When we study anything, though, we need first to have a reasonable sense of what the *phenomenon* is that we are trying to make sense of, and so, similarly, before we can dive into our *interpretation* of adulthood we need to have a rough-and-ready sense of what the basic phenomenon of adulthood is. For that reason, I will begin with three vignettes—three little dramas about real human situations. The narration of the three vignettes will bring forth, I hope, some of the most salient features of adulthood and help us to conjure up in imagination what it is like to live an adult life.

Vignette #1: The Generation Gap

Sitting in a coffee shop on a Saturday (actually, in *Coffee Matters*, in St. John's Newfoundland), I notice a striking difference. Some students, probably in their late teens, are talking animatedly with each other. Also, two women, probably in their forties, are sitting at another table, chatting with each other. The striking difference is between the content and style of the conversations in the two groups. I can overhear the students speculating excitedly—the table is virtually “bubbling over”—about which of their friends will be at some upcoming event, while the two older women are calmly discussing renovations to their houses and how much those renovations will cost. The dress of the members of each group is similarly different: the students are wearing a colorful mix of T-shirts, sleeveless blouses, ripped blue jeans, short skirts, and sweatpants, while the older women are wearing well-tailored, businesslike clothes. These two groups look, sound, and act like radically different *kinds* of people;

and that, furthermore, is not just how they appear to others—on the contrary, that is, presumably, how these groups look to themselves and to each other. The reason these differences are interesting, though, is that not that many years ago the older women looked and acted like the young students and not that many years from now the young students will look and act like the older women; in other words, though they *seem* like radically different kinds of people, each is, in fact, simply a version of the other.

This familiar scene draws attention to the phenomenon of age, by which I mean not just the fact that the different people involved have lived for different numbers of years, but the fact that those different numbers of years bring with them social, cultural, and behavioral meanings, such that being “eighteen” implies a recognizable lifestyle, and one recognizably different from the lifestyle of a forty-year-old. Presumably, this is something we all recognize easily enough, but it is a dimension of our existence that, though we ourselves live through it, we typically do not really comprehend. Indeed, the very fact that the eighteen-year-olds have no real interest in the forty-year-olds and, reciprocally, that the forty-year-olds have no real interest in the teenagers underlines the relative insularity with which we typically inhabit our “ages,” for those in each group do not *see themselves* in the members of the other group.

Surely, we are all familiar with situations like this, and we can easily imagine that members of either group would attempt to explain their lack of interest in the other as a “difference in generations.” This expression is no doubt correct, but perhaps not quite in the sense in which it is intended: the younger people likely attribute the boring appearance of the older people to the fact that those older ones like the things people liked in the '80s, and they imagine there is something objectively less interesting about the music, the dress, or the pastimes of the past, while the older ones reject the younger interests that they perceive to be rooted in the culture of the early twenty-first century, imagining there is something objectively less interesting about the music, the dress, and the pastimes of the present; the truth, however, is that each group likes what was popular in their own youth. In other words, while there may indeed be something that is more or less intrinsically interesting about those two historical periods, that is not really what explains the interest or lack of it that the members of each group experience.

It is not just the historical era that each group belongs to that seems alien to the other group; instead, for each group, the actual practices the

other is engaged in seem boring, and this is the deeper meaning of the “difference in generations.” The women in their forties are not excited to speculate about who will be at the mall and those in their teens do not find discussions of home renovation engaging. But though the “grown-ups” would not really want to deal with teenage conversations again, they probably are nostalgic for what they perceive as the lost vibrancy of their youth, and though the teenagers similarly would not really want to sit through the adult conversations, they nonetheless do anticipate such a future for themselves, and they find some excitement in imagining themselves as adults with families and careers. The difference in generations, then, is not so much a difference of historical era as it is a difference in the *time of life* in which the members of each group participate, and the difference *between* these different groups of people is actually a difference *within* the lives of the members of each group—the difference between their own younger and older “selves.”

This typical scenario—the first of my three vignettes—is helpful, therefore, for reminding us of the pivotal change that happens in our lives, somewhere between the ages of eighteen and forty, that involves a fundamental change in our sense of who we are: it is a change in our interests and values, a change in our companionships, and a change in the worldly form of our activities. And one of the biggest aspects of this change, implied in the adult discussion of home renovations and finance, is the change from the openness of youthful expectation to the specificity of adult commitment.

Vignette #2: Worldly Engagement

Emma Goldman was born on June 27, 1869, in the city of Kovno, in what is now Lithuania and was then part of the Russian Empire. She was the daughter by a second marriage of an Orthodox Jewish woman named Taube Bienowitch who already had two daughters from her first marriage. Taube’s marriage to Emma’s father, Abraham Goldman, had been arranged by her family, and it seems generally to have been a site of unhappiness for Taube and especially for Emma. The family struggled constantly with poverty and throughout her young life Emma also struggled constantly with her father—and, indeed, with her teachers—as she attempted to get an education. In response to the limitations to her formal opportunities for education and because of her great emotional independence, Emma

did her best to educate herself. Eventually, deeply frustrated with her social, familial, and personal situation, Emma, at the age of sixteen and against her father's wishes, emigrated to the United States.

In the United States, Emma lived initially with her sisters in the vicinity of Rochester, New York, and subsequently the rest of her family joined them, as they fled the threatening culture of Russian anti-Semitism that was developing around them. Emma took factory work as a seamstress, which she found stultifying. Though she married shortly after arriving in the United States, she divorced her husband within a year, and this resulted in her rejection by her parents. During this time, she became increasingly focused on politics and especially the activism that grew in response to the aggressive repression of workers and "anarchists" following the "Haymarket Affair" in Chicago in 1886, a public protest against the suppression by the police of labor organizing—a protest that resulted in the police openly firing into the civilian crowd, leaving eleven dead and more than a hundred injured. In the face of her parents' rejection of her, Emma struck out on her own and moved to New York City, where she met and became the close associate of Johann Most, who became her political mentor. Under the influence of Johann, Emma developed as a charismatic speaker, urging activism in response to the capitalist oppression of workers and the correlated domination by the state, and especially advocating for the persuasive power of violent acts.

Over the next fourteen years, Emma, who identified herself as an anarchist, was an active agitator for change, and she was involved in a number of prominent revolutionary activities. With Alexander Berkman, whom she met upon her arrival in New York City and who remained her close companion for decades, she plotted to assassinate Henry Clay Frick, the manager of the Carnegie Steel Company who had hired strikebreakers and private armed guards to oppose striking workers—a policy that resulted in armed conflict that left both striking workers and guards killed. Emma and Alexander had hoped that killing Frick would frighten exploitative industrialists and galvanize workers to resist them but Alexander's botched assassination attempt, on July 23, 1892, did not in fact win the support of the workers' movement. Alexander was sent to prison for twenty years for attempted murder and Emma was investigated as an accomplice, though no evidence was found and she was not charged. Emma continued to agitate for revolutionary social action and in the following year she was charged with "inciting to riot" after speaking to a crowd of three thousand people in Union Square in New

York, on August 21, 1893, urging workers to take action in resistance to the economic depression known as the “Panic of 1893”; she was sentenced to a year in prison. In 1901, the American president William McKinley was killed by a man named Leon Czolgosz who, under interrogation, claimed that he was an anarchist and that it was Emma’s public speaking that had inspired him to action. Emma was again investigated for her possible involvement, though again no evidence was found to support charging her. Emma did not criticize Czolgosz’s actions, however, and this led to her alienation from other anarchists and, though she was not charged in relation to the assassination, she was denounced in the press as a dangerous anarchist, and, subsequently, Theodore Roosevelt, who replaced McKinley as president, announced as his policy the suppression of anarchists and “all active and passive sympathizers with anarchists.”

After the assassination of McKinley, and in the face of her denunciation by the press and anarchists alike, Emma withdrew from public life and took work as a nurse. Two years later, she returned to public activism, however, in the context of substantial public opposition to the U.S. government’s new Immigration Act of 1903, which identified anarchists as inadmissible for immigration. Over the next ten years, she demonstrated her strength as an electrifying speaker to packed rooms across the country, and she simultaneously became progressively more involved in coordinating activities between different activist groups. She also wrote regularly on political themes—including anarchism, marriage, and women’s suffrage—for *Mother Earth*, a magazine she had co-founded in 1906.

When the United States entered World War I, Emma and Alexander, who had recently been released from prison, formed a group resisting conscription. In 1917, they were both arrested after a raid on their offices and charged under the Espionage Act of 1917 with conspiracy to induce persons not to register. They were both found guilty and sentenced to two years in the penitentiary. In 1919, J. Edgar Hoover, then head of the General Intelligence Division of the United States Department of Justice, focused his attention on Emma and Alexander, whom he identified as “two of the most dangerous anarchists in the country”; they were both deported to Russia in November 1919. Though Emma was sympathetic to the principles of the Russian Revolution of 1917, once in Russia she found the government to be unresponsive and repressive, and in 1921 she and Alexander left, settling for a time in Berlin and then, in 1924, moving to London. In 1925, she married a Scottish anarchist in order

to acquire British citizenship, which she used to travel to Canada and France. In 1936, in the context of the Spanish Civil War, she went to Spain to work with the anarchist workers' party, but after their brutal suppression in 1937, she returned to London and then, in 1939, moved to Canada, where she died in 1940.

I have included Emma Goldman's story as my second vignette because it demonstrates so powerfully the place of individual initiative and commitment in our lives, while simultaneously putting prominently on display the ways that the fabric of our personal lives is woven from worldly materials. Goldman's is a story of a unique individual, shaping her own life on her own terms, but this personal story cannot be told except as a story of her family life, the capitalist economic system and the political events of the day. Throughout the entirety of her life, she was oriented by the relatively simple goal of living her own life freely, but her circumstances made it clear to her that such freedom is possible only with the support of one's surrounding world, and she was in fact surrounded with inhibition rather than facilitation. Initially her family, that formative home base that we all depend upon to shelter us from adversity and to nurture our growth, was itself a force resisting her development: though she needed her family to support her, she also needed to escape her family if she was to have a fulfilling life as a free individual. The traditional views of her parents confronted her early with the oppressive and misogynistic dimensions of patriarchal culture, the values she came to fight against in her subsequent advocacy of free love and women's rights, and as she subsequently became aware of the pervasive and powerful roles that governments and business—like family—have for shaping our lives and of how these can be unhealthy and unjust, she accepted the responsibility, as an individual, for addressing these issues. Her story prominently demonstrates that individuals are not “uncontextualized,” but are themselves *intimately* defined by the realities of family and society, and that individual agency is a matter of how we embrace these realities: Do we own up to the responsibilities intrinsic to them, and work actively to address the injustices we find around us, or do we passively acquiesce to the *status quo*, allowing ourselves the immediate satisfactions our circumstances afford while tacitly endorsing the continued supremacy of the existing power structures? Emma Goldman was surely more of an “agent” than almost any of us will ever be—indeed, the fact that she acted on the “world” stage is why we remember her as a historically significant figure—but though she is thus on a different

scale than most of us, she shows something of the reality that is true for all of us and thus something of the possibility that defines all adult life.

Vignette #3: Mortality and Character

In the first book of his *Republic*, Plato (c. 427 BC–c. 347 BC) portrays a conversation between the Athenian philosopher Socrates (c. 469–399 BC) and Cephalus (c. 495–c. 420 BC), an immigrant to Athens who ran a prosperous shield-manufacturing business. At the time of the conversation, Socrates is a man of about fifty and Cephalus is on “the threshold of old age,” that is, he is a man who is nearing death. In Plato’s dramatization, Cephalus’s son Polemarchus brings Socrates to his house, and Cephalus expresses his desire that Socrates visit more frequently for the sake of talking. Socrates responds:

For my part, Cephalus, I am really delighted to discuss with the very old. . . . Since they are like men who have proceeded on a certain road that perhaps we too will have to take, one ought, in my opinion, to learn from them what sort of road it is: whether it is rough and hard or easy and smooth. From you in particular I should like to learn how it looks to you, for you are now at just the time of life that poets call “the threshold of old age.” Is it a hard time of life, or what have you to report of it? (*Republic* I.328d-e)

Cephalus then describes his experience. First he notes that other friends his age lament their loss of youth, “reminiscing about sex, about drinking bouts and feasts and all that goes with things of that sort” (*Republic* I.329a). Cephalus himself, however, identifies a different reason for why one will or will not be happy in old age: the cause, he says, is

not old age, Socrates, but the character of the human beings. If they are orderly and content with themselves, even old age is only moderately troublesome; if they are not, then both age, Socrates, and youth alike turn out to be hard for that sort. (*Republic* I.329d)

Socrates then challenges Cephalus’s (self-)assessment:

Cephalus, when you say these things, I suppose that the many do not accept them from you, but believe rather that it is not due to character that you bear old age so easily but due to possessing great substance. They say that for the rich there are many consolations. (*Republic* I.329e)

Cephalus grants that there is some truth to this perception, and affirms that both issues—wealth or poverty and whether or not one is “a decent sort”—are essential axes for determining whether one will be happy in old age.

Finally, Socrates asks Cephalus what in particular is the greatest good that has come to him through his possessing of great wealth. Cephalus replies:

What I say won't persuade many, perhaps. For know well . . . that when a man comes near to the realization that he will be making an end, fear and care enter him for things to which he gave no thought before. The tales told about what is in Hades—that the one who has done unjust deeds here must pay the penalty there—at which he laughed up to then, now make his soul twist and turn because he fears they might be true. . . . Now the man who finds many unjust deeds in his life often even wakes from his sleep in a fright as children do, and lives in anticipation of evil. . . . For this I count the possession of money most wroth-while [*sic*], not for any man, but for the decent and orderly one. The possession of money contributes a great deal to not cheating or lying to any man against one's will and, moreover, to not departing for that other place frightened because one owes some sacrifices to a god or money to a human being. (*Republic* I.330d–331b)

Their conversation does not continue far after this point, for Polemarchus intervenes in the conversation and Cephalus departs. This short conversation, however, is quite rich in the further light it sheds on the realities of adult life and the experience of aging in particular.

Cephalus's initial emphasis on the disappearance of sex, drunkenness, and festivity from old age underlines simultaneously the irreducibly bodily character of our aging—specifically, the diminution of our bodily

powers—and, by implication, the otherwise prominent place of sex, intoxication, and playful celebration in a happy life. Cephalus makes an important point about the *place* of these pleasures in our lives, however: we do not all automatically adopt the same attitude toward them. Thus, he notes, whereas his friends are made unhappy by their disappearance from their lives, he remains content. What is at issue, in other words, is, as he says, our *character*. Whether or not we endorse Cephalus's specific views about what constitutes a good character, it is nonetheless clear that he has identified one of the most crucial parameters of adulthood: to a very great degree, healthy adulthood is a matter of developing within ourselves a *way of behaving well* in situations, and this healthy cultivation of character—*maturity*—is largely a matter of learning how to maintain a commitment to important values in coping with the challenging or tempting features of the situations in which we find ourselves involved.

It is not just the case that different individuals can have different attitudes *toward* pleasure and hardship, however; it is also the case that different individuals can face dramatically different situations *of* pleasure and hardship, whether because of issues of illness or disability, gender- or race-discrimination or poverty. Socrates's challenge to Cephalus's rather generous self-appraisal underlines in particular that being rich changes significantly the situations one faces as an adult and the resources one has for dealing with them; though Cephalus insists that, in his case, the significance of his wealth is subordinate to the significance of his character, we might nonetheless wonder whether his great wealth actually allows what is really a rather poorly developed character to masquerade as virtue. This last point is perhaps suggested in the final theme raised in this conversation, namely, the confrontation with death and the anxiety about "final judgment."

With his aging, Cephalus has been brought to recognize his mortality, and this recognition of his death—and the stories he has heard about a possible afterlife—has encouraged him to reflect upon his life *as a whole* and to assess its worth. His approach to this self-evaluation, however, sounds more like bookkeeping than morality: his wealth, he says, has allowed him to remain debt-free, and he includes in this his "paying off" of the gods through sacrifice. Facing one's mortality and trying to assess honestly the worth of one's own life is again a significant dimension of any adult life, though ideally we can imagine more profound ways to approach these matters than what Cephalus puts on display.

The Plan of the Book

Socrates's remark at the beginning of the conversation I quoted above is worth noting. It is interesting to talk with the very old, he says, because "they are like men who have proceeded on a certain road that perhaps we too will have to take." Old age, in other words, is not a fixed reality; instead, the experience of any person will be their taking of a path—a "way"—and though it is possible, it is not necessarily the case that their path will be ours (indeed, Cephalus himself implies as much in saying that his view of aging differs from that of others he knows). This point about aging is, I think, true of adulthood in general. For each of us, our experience of "growing up" and growing old is a kind of mystery and though the experiences of others definitely provide important guidance for us, we must, each of us, wait to find out for ourselves what our life will be like—we must find out *by living it*. Our own future confronts us, so to speak, with the ultimate "problem of induction," for this, our own most intimate reality, is never something the meaning and significance of which can be "derived" from any amount of evidence about the experience of others.

The experiences of others are nonetheless meaningful to us, though, because, however imperfect, the life of another gives one some kind of lens through which to reflect on one's own life. Indeed, perhaps this is why biographies are so popular and so interesting: the stories of others appear tantalizingly as if they held answers to the questions we are asking. It is for just that reason that I have included my three vignettes. Most broadly, these three vignettes—one an anecdote from everyday life, one a biographical sketch of a historical figure, one a scene from literature—put on display (vividly, I hope) recognizable truths about adulthood that transcend the experience of any particular individual but are characteristic of all of our lives; more specifically, they draw attention to the fact that adulthood stands in contrast to a period of adolescence, it is a time of accomplishment in a complex worldly environment, and it is inherently defined by its confrontation with death, a confrontation that draws attention to the meaningfulness of one's life as a whole and highlights the nature and significance of one's moral development. And, just as I have here tried to draw quickly some broad lessons from these vignettes, so will this book as a whole be a more systematic attempt to distill from the vast range of human experience—as that has been documented and digested in the history of psychology, sociology, anthropology,

politics and so on—the fundamental parameters that are distinctive and definitive of adulthood.

This book, however, is not itself an empirical study in psychology or sociology as such, but is a work of philosophy. What this means is that, though it draws on the rich resources of these various domains of inquiry, it is not itself an attempt to add new empirical content to our already vast knowledge about human life; instead, it is an attempt to grasp that existent empirical material as an organized whole. It is an attempt, that is, to bring together those empirical details with an insight into the basic constitution—the “first principles”—of our distinctive character as human beings, and thus to *understand* those empirical findings in light of this insight.

What are the “first principles” from which we start? The first chapter, rather than this introduction, is the place to turn for the careful answer to that question, but I can nonetheless roughly sketch here the basic idea. The fundamental insight that orients our study is that our condition as human beings is primarily that *we experience*: we are not just natural beings *to* whom something happens, but we are subjective beings *for* whom something happens: we *find* ourselves situated in the midst of a happening and our experience is our ongoing process of coming to terms with this condition. The significance of this situation is helpfully captured, I think, in a saying attributed to the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus (c. 540 BC–c. 475 BC).

In his dialogue *Cratylus*, Plato portrays a conversation between Socrates and Cratylus, who was a follower of Heraclitus. Socrates there attributes a view to Heraclitus that has become one of our most familiar sayings, though no doubt we often do not think too deeply about its meaning. Socrates says that

Heraclitus, I believe, says that all things pass and nothing stays,
and comparing existing things to the flow of a river, he says
you could not step twice into the same river. (*Cratylus* 402a)

What Heraclitus actually wrote is more likely, “On those stepping into rivers staying the same other and other waters flow” (Diels-Kranz fragment B12), but our familiar “you can’t step into the same river twice” seems to capture the point well enough: the idea is that a river *is* only the flowing water, and that water is always changing, so the water you step in will never be the same water you stepped in before. Now, as a reflection on

a river, that is an interesting enough observation, but probably not one that will grip most of us with its profundity. If we think of the river as a metaphor for life, however, we can perhaps see why this observation is so significant.

Our experience is of a constant passage, a “flow”—we call it “time”—and that flow is both the flow of our own experience and our sense of the unfolding of reality: neither “I” nor “it” ever rests in a simple, finished state, but each is instead a process—a “happening.” On the one hand, this means that we experience ourselves at the center of a happening—it is *our* experience that is flowing; at the same time, however, that happening itself presents itself to us as having *its* “center” elsewhere, which is to say we find ourselves “caught up in the flow” of *reality*. The world itself is a “river,” a changing, developing reality that we must always keep struggling to make sense of, and we ourselves age and grow, which means that we, too, never stay the same, and we must constantly be learning anew how to make sense of the changing form of our own experience. Our ongoing lives are the ongoing attempt to “catch up,” so to speak, with both of these “moving targets” and especially to hold together coherently our sense of these two flows—the subjective time of our experience and the objective time of the world. It is because that is the defining character of our experience that, philosophically, we will only understand the real meaning of the empirical details of our experience if we grasp those details in light of both of these “temporalities.”

The distinctive dual character of our experience is that it is thus defined both by the “form” of subjectivity and by the “content” of reality, and chapter 1 will focus on the careful description of this distinctive nature of our experience to define the project of studying adulthood in terms of our grappling with this need to realize an integrated and coherent sense of ourselves and the world. The simultaneously subjective and objective character of this goal entails that its accomplishment is a matter both of psychological health and of knowledge, and exploring the distinctive form that this, our definitive human path takes will be the subject of chapters 2 and 3, which study the themes raised in Socrates’s conversation with Cephalus: character and aging.

In chapter 2, we will interpret adulthood in terms of our behavioral readiness to take up reality on its own terms. We will explore the fundamental attitudes and skills that human individuals need to develop in order to succeed at this, and, drawing especially on the insights of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BC), we will identify three

fundamental “excellences” of character that are integral to a self-responsible engagement with the world: self-possession, courage, and co-inhabitation. Studying these developments of character will also make it clear that we can be “adults” to varying degrees and (as will become clearer in chapter 4) that there is significant difference between a minimal and a fuller cultivation of adulthood.

Growing up is not just a matter of psychological maturity, however; as we saw in the story of Cephalus, it is also a matter of aging, which is the philosophical focus of chapter 3. Aging is itself a physiological matter, of course, but also a matter of *how* we experience—a matter of *perspective*—and this side of our experience must be held together with the theme of our development of character. What it is to experience *as* an adult is not just a matter of the principles with which one engages with the objective temporality of the world at the present moment; it is also a matter of how one engages with one’s *own* “objectively temporal” reality, that is, it is a matter of taking up one’s own experience of the finitude, specificity, and mortality that is integral to the fact that one is a natural being. Each of us is a perspective *on* the world, but each of us is also a natural being *in* the world, a natural being that passes through a characteristic process of growth, development, and decay, and the *experience* of aging is the experience of grappling with the reality of this process.

Exploring the distinctive *form* our growth takes will lead us to what turns out to be the central theme of our study, namely, the distinctive *content* of our adult lives—our “occupations.” Our study of the form of our experience will reveal that the process of accomplishing a coherent relationship of self and world is fundamentally a matter of dealing with other people, and we will see that the issues of adult life are most centrally defined by the parameters of the social world to which we belong. Specifically, in chapter 4, which is by far the longest chapter in the book, we will identify three essential forms of intersubjective engagement: intimate interpersonal relationships, economic life, and political community. The detailed exploration of our distinctive experiences of navigating intimate, economic, and political life—the essential domains of adult life—will help us to focus on the biggest issues that we face, both individually and socially, in our efforts to live happy and just lives.

Finally, beyond navigating the demands of our immediate natural and social world, it is integral to a well-developed adult life to grapple with questions of ultimate value—the sorts of questions that Cephalus grew concerned about only with his experience of the imminence of

his death, but which others take much more seriously throughout their lives. Chapter 5 explores the meaning and nature of art, religion, and philosophy, the three distinctive human occupations that grapple with these ultimate issues. Each of these occupations has an essential role to play in the development of a healthy and full adult life, and each also has a long history, such that engaging with any one of them is on the one hand a matter of personal “calling” and on the other hand a matter of grappling with a highly developed body of work and highly structured institutional practices. Studying the relationship between the personal and the institutional meanings of art, religion, and philosophy will help us to understand what is involved in grappling with matters of ultimate value and to see why this is a matter of prime importance in both personal and social life.

This book is a complete and self-contained study, meant to be read on its own, but it is also intended as the concluding installment of a trilogy that began with my earlier books *Human Experience* and *Bearing Witness to Epiphany*. In studying the perspective of the adult, this work offers an important supplement to the understanding of our experience that is developed in *Human Experience* and *Bearing Witness to Epiphany*—which took their focus more distinctively from childhood and adolescent experience, respectively—just as those books offer insight into the essential context of personal development that is presupposed in adult life. Compared to those other two books, this book has a more fundamentally ethical orientation, whereas *Human Experience* was more epistemological and *Bearing Witness to Epiphany* more metaphysical in focus; these orientations are not ultimately separable, however, and so this work necessarily involves essential epistemological and metaphysical exploration as well. And, like those books, this is primarily a work of phenomenological philosophy, carrying on and developing further the methods and insights of Immanuel Kant and the other great European philosophers of the past two centuries; it is the founding insights of Kant, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jacques Derrida that most prominently shape the philosophical method of this work, while Simone de Beauvoir and the American philosopher John Dewey are the thinkers who have most intimately informed the philosophical study of adulthood specifically. In these ways, this book is a scholarly study. That, however, is not the primary way that I want the reader to approach it.

I have pointedly tried to write this book in a way that is accessible to any average adult reader, and not just to scholars and specialists.

I have tried to write in as plain a style as possible, and the argument and analysis thus proceed only by referring to aspects of our world with which anyone can be assumed to be familiar and rely on reasoning of which anyone is capable; consequently, the work, like traditional works of philosophy, generally does not make specific reference to the scholarly work of others except in those cases in which I directly quote from other texts. (For the reader who is interested in pursuing further study, I have included an appendix with suggestions for further reading.) The reason for writing this way is primarily for the sake of making it available to any interested reader, but there is also a deeper reason.

More than anything else, this book is intended as a work that will speak to *you* personally and, ideally, transformatively. Philosophy is not primarily a matter of scholarship—it is not a matter of communicating “information” or of “proving” something—but a matter of wisdom: at root, philosophy is the attempt to attune us more deeply to our own reality so that we might live better, both individually and culturally. Accordingly, my writing is not an academic exercise in “knowing for the sake of knowing,” but is an attempt to communicate what seem to me to be the deepest lessons our human culture has learned about living well. My belief is that anyone will benefit from taking the time to learn these lessons.