

## ONE



### THE PHILOSOPHERS' EYES

*The Thing is "I"*

—Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, paragraph 791

*The skull-bone is not an organ of activity, nor even a "speaking movement." We neither commit theft, murder, etc. with the skull-bone, nor does it in the least betray such deeds by a change of countenance, so that the skull-bone would become a speaking gesture.*

—Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, paragraph 333

**K**ant believed it to be a scandal of philosophy that the existence of things outside ourselves had to be taken on faith. Today, a similar "scandal" exists in moral philosophy: certainty with respect to moral categories is often reduced to subjective preferences. Within the field of moral theory, there is no way to determine wrong or right *with certainty*, nor, importantly, to trace the connection between a subject's moral deliberations and that subject's consequent actions. In each case, epistemological and moral, the scandal derives from philosophy's apparent lack of common sense. Most people have a fairly good idea about their own moral categories and have strategies for determining what to do when hard cases arise. Or, we could try again.<sup>1</sup>

People live in frameworks. They suffer through tragedies availing themselves of a variety of moral and social skills. The really difficult cases, those under which it appears moral categories are suspended, are never really addressed by moral philosophers until after the fact and then with an ease that denies the difficulty of the case. By which I mean that in many ethics classes, cases stemming from the excesses of war are usually discussed historically, as history. Current wars are rarely discussed. There are the obvious and

famous exceptions. For the most part, at colloquia say, or in other formal settings, or in classrooms, it feels rude to say things like "What about Cambodia?" Or "What about Peru?" When students offer their own examples of certain moral wrong, their examples often involve Adolf Hitler or Charles Manson. In my experience their examples rarely involve the dictator du jour. Their teachers (for instance, me) can be worse in our use of examples. I have seen cases of mass murder introduced in classrooms as a form of comic relief. How many times have the readers of these pages heard examples, in classes or other formal settings, that involve showing how a particular position is "certainly wrong" or "obviously flawed" because, well, it would allow someone to just (fill in the blank with something "universally" considered to be an atrocity) *for fun* or *for no reason*. I am thinking of the "kill the loafers or someone else?" dilemmas pored over and over again in a graduate seminar. In ethics. Guffaws abounding. "Should we keep the train on track if it would kill twelve loafers? Steer it off, it would kill just one rocket scientist? Which of these consequences is consistent with the *best* results?"

These events conspire to make ethics courses uncomfortable for both student and teacher in ways other than those that are obvious. So far, so good. Studying ethics shouldn't be comfortable and *nothing* about it should be obvious. Perhaps the dissonance of certain kinds of "jokes" shocks the class back to "natural" values. But this "perhaps" is surely false. Don't we instead become increasingly alienated from honest problems and from real political and social responsibilities? I know that the more some things are referred to in a trivial way, the more I become numb to them. It is not hard for me to imagine the initial horror of the Manson murders turning into a Saturday Night Live skit that hardly offends. "Why should I universalize to include, like Charles Manson?" starts to sound normal. Ethics classes are strange. So much must be granted. (I don't mean strange in a necessarily bad way.)

And yet, it does seem that these exercises are uncomfortable in the ways that they should be uncomfortable. It is right to feel squeamish when someone, most notably oneself, is quick to know the answer to a difficult moral or ethical question. In this respect whether intentionally or not, the ethics course replicates the discomforts of the so-called real world thereby teaching not just some canon of significant philosophical texts, but also the work and emotion of moral thinking. Then again, such courses have, on occasion, this numbing effect we've referred to. We may be desen-

sitizing our students in a far more subtle and damaging way than say, adventure films, may. We may be desensitizing ourselves by having the students dutifully weigh up hedons and anhedons in gruesome but difficult cases. There is the danger of a pretense at omniscience turning into sloppiness of thought and cowardice of action.

In most of these difficult cases, the bottom line turns out to be an appeal to some kind of intuition—whether about the case itself, the content of moral thinking in general, or about some specific moral category. Most of the time the intuitions turn out to be some variant of common sense. This is one reason why reasonable people can disagree significantly and incommensurably on significantly difficult cases. So ethics courses are sort of weird spaces where many times the things that we are saying are not the things that we mean. Their space can become only that space where we spend our working time; we can become uncomfortable about the fact that the face we put forward cannot be the true face. (Who for instance is going to admit pleasure in gratuitous violence in an ethics course? And who can deny that at least some people, some of them in ethics classes, derive such pleasure? Who is going to admit in an ethics class, for example, that vulgar act utilitarianism looks pretty good compared to some of those other theories? I mean look at what we *call* it?

“Professor? I am that person. I am that vulgar act-utilitarian.”)

Lying, according to almost any intuition, is considered to be categorically wrong. In ethics classes we talk about these sorts of things; most people agree, after thinking hard about the subject, that lying is pretty bad. They think that it is bad in a categorical sort of way. That is, most of us agree that when one is morally permitted to lie, it is as an exception to some moral rule. Even according to the prescripts of the most vulgar act utilitarianism (vulgar, vulgar, vulgar!) lying is permitted only when something “bad” will happen if one doesn’t. The presumption is always against lying *per se*. However, it is possible that common sense in this regard is wrong—it has been wrong before—and there are no more presumptive moral categories than there are epistemological ones? What, indeed, if such categories are not even certain as social constructs for any given social configuration? Indeed, what if, the very basis of existence in the world depends on dissemblance and deceit to such an extent that ethics is no more nor less than a systematic attempt to cover up something that has covered up something that has covered up something, forever?<sup>2</sup>

Philosophers have suggested such possibilities—and for a long time. Taking such theories seriously however does not necessarily lead one to the (usually) existential notion of individual responsibility philosophers (usually) lead one toward, nor does serious contemplation of a breakdown in conceptual trustworthiness lead to nihilistic denials of morality or ethics altogether. It might turn out that there is an *essential* category that has been neglected, which when uncovered will systematically explain the other coverings up. An essential category of covering, of lying, of deceit.

My project attempts to find that category. Right up front, I will acknowledge that I mourn the loss of system, of architectonic. I would prefer that foundationalism were true; I wish that a perfect system could be found that would explain everything. It is not as if I would choose the contents of God's left hand if that proverbial choice of struggle or certainty were offered me.<sup>3</sup> Still, it would be nice to believe that there were the possibility of certainty in the future. But we don't always get what we want.

This project, then, becomes a phenomenological reduction of one moral category: deceit. It becomes an attempt at an anchoring. The locution, I know, is odd. Normally one speaks of anchoring something to something else. Feeling so much at sea at the outset, I know at this point only that anchoring is desired. That finding a system is desired.<sup>4</sup> We don't really want a system *in the end*. The desire was for something much grander as Hegel reminds us repeatedly. Still, in the short term, neatness is often desired. Answers hoped for.

Initially, my aim was to discover some philosophical or rational feature in the widespread intuition that lying is wrong, while uncovering moral philosophy's inability to systematically theorize deceit. In order to accomplish this aim, it seemed clear that one needed to reconfigure the conditions of *dasein* or consciousness or existence. I will proceed with my given, not that we are subjects of desire, nor subjects who exist, nor subjects who think: instead, for me, we will begin as subjects of deceit.

I trust that this starting point will not prove over provocative. When Descartes was trying to find certainty, it made sense to start from doubt, but this beginning proved dangerous precisely because it was a deception. The solutions then become multiplications of the deception.

"Okay," he says, "assume an evil demon . . ."

Other systems have similar problems. Hegel recognizes that all beginnings in philosophy are arbitrary, that they are not real beginnings. So I am just acknowledging that beginnings are false but making that copula ontological. Another way of putting this is

that authenticity, should it prove to exist, will be the result of hard work and massive social construction. Likewise truth, ignorance, anchoring oneself through daughters, sisters, friends, sons and lovers—all these things will have to be seen as epiphenomena.

This chapter steels the eyes of the philosophers. In the first Hegel class I ever took, and for which I will remain forever grateful, I remember listening to the professor, not having prepared very well—to be honest, not having prepared at all—and not having brought my book to the lecture hour on too many occasions. I sat through lectures and discussions, hardly having any sense of the text, which in this case happened to be *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. The nature of the previous sentences captures how I felt after and during that class: one's eyes blurring, all confused and excited and jumbled. The professor went on and on about the phenomenological subject, the "I." Ill-prepared as I was, I heard that "I," as "eye." To this day my reading of the *Phenomenology* is eerily Boschian. A huge eye equal to itself traversing the fields of consciousness, looking every which way for more and more knowledge. A huge eye with multiple mouths. Voraciously feasting eyes. I'm not so sure, even now, that this reading has not stood me in good stead. Nor am I certain that it wasn't this early introduction to Hegel that has forever made me insensitive to double negations! Perhaps the reading will be good for my friendship with my daughter.<sup>5</sup> Aren't philosophers, in the end, great big eyes? And parents? Always keeping them in mind, in view? Philosophers have eyes bigger than their stomachs. I could do visuals of the bug-eyed philosophers at this point. Not cartoons but actual reproductions of lithographs, paintings, photographs, my own self-portrait, all accentuated by glasses, which to be honest are not necessary for my seeing. There are so many of us. In this cosmetic-mad era, the same would be considered unkind. I will repeat that I always wear glasses, which I don't need for seeing. Before returning to these eyes, equal to themselves in their glaring, I want to discuss the philosopher's other eyes: the mind's eyes, planted presumably in the forehead, the seat of consciousness, the eyes that see truth.

## OTHER EYES

Some philosophers have come up with theories about optics, optical theories. Hobbes, for instance. Descartes. Spinoza made lenses so that we might be better able to see. Being able to see, for some philosophers, is requisite to most knowledge. Locke, for

instance, is obsessed with the sense of sight. One could say that eyes have magical properties for some philosophers. One could say that philosophers are superstitious about eyes.

It is said that the highest chakra is the third eye. A special fount of seeing. "Th" in Sanskrit aligns with the number seventeen, which aligns with the eyes (Singh {1989} p. 144). When eyes see too much or see the wrong thing, one religion tells us to rip them out of our skull rather than pollute our insides with such bad thoughts. *MacBeth*' witches share eyes. The Cyclops and other one-eyed creatures have that eye in the middle of their foreheads. This eye could see more all by itself than two eyes could together; nevertheless, having such an eye was not broadcast as something to desire. The Cyclops is often represented as rather stupid. Some parents have eyes in the back of their heads, or so they say, and in so saying mean that it doesn't matter what you do, you are being observed.

An evil eye is a look that one can give another, thereby cursing them through the immense power of inner sight. Eyes show others things about us and receive knowledge for us. Eyes are massively beautiful with their impossibly intricate colors. Spend some time today staring into the eyes of those you love. (I'm not implying you don't!) Everyone's eyes are as differently colored as everyone's skin. Brown eyes! Hah! Green???? Eyes make you want to die they are so perfect and so perfectly unavailable to us as objects to touch. Eyes, one could argue, are more colors at once than is possible. Their existence is as impossible as that of justice. The difference is that they do exist. Here is a pair! There!

Still, our ordinary, everyday eyes, those glorious orbs of infinite communication, are insufficient to philosophy. They are not enough to see inner truths. For this, we need the mind's eye. A third eye, which shows us the highest, or third, kind of knowledge. Spinoza determines that "the highest endeavor of the mind, and the highest virtue is to understand things by the third kind of knowledge" (Spinoza, *Ethics*, Book V, Prop. XXV). Notice here that knowing in this way is not just for itself. When we know in this way, we *are* virtuous. (The equation with true, or high, knowledge, and virtue or morality is much more common in philosophy than any disjunction between the two.) Spinoza proves that really knowing something, understanding something, is the best thing we can do, in part, because it is the virtuous thing. When we know and know well, we are knowing and virtuous persons.

According to Spinoza, one of the things we are capable of knowing with the third kind of knowledge is that "the human mind



cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but there remains of it something which is eternal" (Spinoza, V, XXXI). That is, the body is temporarily held together as our form, but consciousness somehow persists. We are things with many properties. It is important that this proposition, this proposition that insures the knowledge of eternity for consciousness is known according to the third kind of knowledge. The note to that proposition's proof reads:

Yet it is not possible that we should remember that we existed before our body, for our body can bear no trace of such existence neither can eternity be defined in terms of time, or have any relation to time. But notwithstanding, we feel and know that we are eternal. For the mind feels those things that it conceives by understanding, no less than those things that it remembers. For the eyes of the mind, whereby it sees and observes things, are none other than proofs. [note to proof of proposition XXIII of Part V].

The body and the mind are sufficiently different in their temporal and spatial configurations that the body cannot remember the mind when it is not attached to the body, nor can the organs of the body remember the mind when it is not attached to the body. But the metaphorical organs of the mind do remember. They are so capable. The mind and its organs can "see" that whatever it is that they are remembering, must persist forever.

I suggest that we take this passage seriously. By which I mean, I suggest that we think about it on its own terms. To disprove the proposition on its own terms we would have to, presumably, show that the mind's eye sees no such thing. That there is no such conscious eternity to *see*. But this is very puzzling. If I am as honest as I can be with myself, I must confess that I *know* what Spinoza means by mind's eyes. I have seen things with them. My mind's eyes, for instance, can see that it is wrong to not prevent harm when one is capable of so doing. It can often see for me when I want to tell myself that I am not harming someone I am in fact harming. It can also, for instance, see a friend's pain when she is not present. It can startle me into action through its sight. I am not going to start to quibble with Spinoza about mind's eyes. By saying, for example, that they don't, or can't, exist. (By contrast, I would argue with him about souls until the metaphorical cows come home with their big gentle liquid eyes—their eyes that scare me half to death—eyes as big as houses. What eyes! Scary cow eyes.)

I'll grant the mind eyes. It is not mysterious to so grant. Still, it is difficult for me to *know* that the mind's eyes see that my mind is different from my body and that the difference is one having to do with spatio-temporal possibilities for persistence. To take Spinoza seriously, I have to ask myself, seriously, if the reason I cannot *see* this is because I am not sufficiently virtuous. That I am keeping myself in bondage. That I do not want to know this particular thing. With certainty. That it makes me queasy to think that perhaps I have the whole thing wrong. That life is not bounded by the horizon of existence: death. That life is not eternal except in the energy we leave behind us. That maybe I will be judged and that in that judgment it will count against me that I did not believe in that weird and persistent life but chose instead death. So I take Spinoza seriously. I focus my inner eye. I think about minds and souls and bodies. And after thinking and thinking and looking and looking I just can't believe in that persistence. It makes me laugh. I think: "What would be the point? What in the world would require that function of eternity?"

Yet, it is possible that I am keeping myself in bondage. If this autobiographical style annoys, I understand that. My reason for allowing myself the indulgence of an autobiographical style is that I can think of no other way to present these topics. For me, being who I am, the available performances that are also acceptable are hopelessly "not me." It is not just that I refuse to be a member in the masculinist secular priesthood, although same is at once both so true and so false, it makes me embarrassed to write it; importantly, it is that trying to be up-front about my beginnings may keep me from beginning where I am not beginning.

And you will recall similar uneasiness on both our parts when I start to do that "we" thing. The "we" thing is probably an attempt to cover up my true origins. I'm not alone in rushing away from origins. It is hard not to. Easier to sort of dance our way into beginning, into starting a little bit of a discourse. Later I plan to discuss Derrida's analysis of one of Hegel's first terms, "family." If Hegel had noticed what he was doing in positing the family that way, he most probably would have begun with the ethical instead. I maybe should have begun with "I." I can't tell from here.

To resume, it is not just possible, it is likely that I keep myself in bondage. I could be keeping myself in bondage by not ascending to an understanding of my highest chakra. I could be actively fleeing that enlightenment, I could be clogging up chakras willynilly on purpose to avoid that truth. I could be keeping myself



in bondage by failing to acknowledge eternity. I could be keeping myself in bondage by not acquiescing in the highest kind of knowledge.

The main point is that I could be hurting myself by not allowing myself to see all the ways that I am capable of seeing. That being admitted, not so hard an admission, after all, I have to further confess that it is possible that one could see with certainty that one could truly last forever in the inner sense. But this is next to nothing. What one wants is not *that*. What one wants is even the possibility that one could last forever in a body. Or, maybe not in a body but in *my* body. This body that either does or does not have chakras to block or unblock. So Spinoza has the modality wrong even when we exert ourselves to that extent. Or, in exerting ourselves in that way, we are showing yet again that we have thoroughly missed the point.

Hegel is always helpful in a muddle. Well, okay, that is not quite true, especially since he starts so many of the muddles that interest us that interest me. He is not afraid to just get right down in the mud and grapple with those things that many of us shy away from. Horses with blinders on, striking in the dust, counting out our days. (In another life Hegel might have been Andy Kaufman, say.) Hegel says in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*:

If we are not to be allowed to recall the *Notion* of the relation, then certainly experience teaches that, as it is with the eye *qua* organ that we see, so it is *not* with the skull that we murder, steal, write poetry, etc. [paragraph 328].

Sometimes when discouraged by the profession of academic philosophy, I will turn to this section of the *Phenomenology*. It is so honest. It is as if Hegel realized that shortly no one would take phrenology seriously. More importantly passages like the one just cited hit us over the head with the truth of ourselves as powerful agents. Hegel is saying to us, I know, that it looks as if I am erasing interiority. It looks as if you are allowed to forget individual responsibility. But come on, that question is not really so interesting is it? Of course when we murder, steal, and write poetry, it is "we" who do it. And of course it is with "eyes" that we "see." (Certainly experience teaches that just as Hegel realized that phrenology would not long reign as a branch of medicine, so too Spinoza did *not* realize that the eternal nature of the self would hide itself from the third eye.) It is a strikingly honest piece of work—as if, well no one

is going to read this! They will read the *Phenomenology* but they will skip over this stuff. Why not?

I fantasize about a *Phenomenology* that begins with that passage. It is perfect of course. It gives so much room for thought. It is not binding at all in its directives. The beauty of that absurd conditional! How free we feel when we accept, yes, eyes are the organs of seeing! Yes, that's right. And no, if I kill another, if I murder, it is not because of my skull bone! My skull bone does not write poetry! No! The jubilation involved in being able to assent wholeheartedly. And maybe the shape of my skull has something to do with the absence of either poetry or violence in my life. Maybe, even to *that*, I was too eager, too quick to assent. And surely when I see my haste, I see it with my inner eye.

So, of course, the abandon can only last a while. I could kill someone *with* a skull bone. Or more precisely, I hope, *one* could so kill. (What I hope just so there is no misunderstanding is that I never would kill with a skull bone or otherwise. Not that someone will actually so kill.<sup>6</sup>)

Hegel does not begin with simple truths. Perhaps he wonders about the truth of the statements that include "etc." Can something be true, he wonders, if it has "etc." in its components? It is not a ridiculous question. He answers it after all, in the preface. In the affirmative. Truths by necessity must be inclusive, must have the "etc." He says in a passage that has been endlessly elaborated that "The True is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development" (paragraph 20). If Hegel is right when he says this, then it is necessarily true that there is a sense in which Spinoza sees something actual and true when he says that the consciousness part of us is eternal. Is this the sense in which Spinoza meant "eternal?" "Consciousness?" If it is, then I say, "Yes, Spinoza, yes."

If Hegel is right when he says, also in the preface, that "the *analysis* of an idea, as it used to be carried out, was, in fact, nothing else than ridding it of the form in which it had become familiar" (paragraph 32) and that that is not the very best way to analyze, then my making unfamiliar Spinoza's reading is possibly not a true reading. How come I can't have Spinoza and Hegel here with me now to talk about this for me? I would like to know the answer to this question about analysis. I would like for philosophers to start to write Rules for the Direction of the Mind sorts of treatises again. I love those sorts of works. I would like someone from my century to offer up this gift. A secular and hypertextual Rules for the Directions of Mental Operations. How would it start?

"Attune yourself to your inner eye and then turn the page for rule number two."

In paragraph 38, Hegel concludes the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The notion, he states, is selflike. It is finished. Certainty, having been achieved, forces the question of mistakes, or falsehoods, indeed of evil. Think back to introductory level philosophy classes before naive questions became impossible to ask. After reading the *Meditations*, who among us didn't wonder aloud or to ourselves: "Well, if Descartes is right how could anyone ever be wrong?"

Or after having been given the double delight of the *Theatetus*, which of us didn't ask: "Is there a form for evil?"

How could this *not* be the question? Hegel asks the question of himself and here is his spectacularly Spinozist answer. Almost in its entirety:

'True' and 'false' belong among those determinate notions which are held to be inert and wholly separate essences, one here and one there, each standing fixed and isolated from the other, with which it has nothing in common. Against this view it must be maintained that truth is not a minted coin that can be given and pocketed ready-made. Nor is there such a thing as the false, any more than there is something evil. The evil and the false, to be sure, are not as bad as the devil, for in the devil they are even made into a particular *subjective agent*; as the false and the evil, they are mere *universals*, though each has its own essence as against the other.

. . . One can, of course, know something falsely. To know something falsely means that there is a disparity between knowledge and its Substance . . . Out of this distinguishing, of course, comes their identity, and this resultant identity is the truth. [paragraph 39].

So what does Hegel do in ethics that Spinoza had not already done? I think that with respect to this particular issue, nothing. For Spinoza, the order of ideas and things are identical, consequently everything is, in some sense, the sense of the plane of consistency, true.<sup>7</sup> "False" is an illusion. Knowing falsely becomes a moral failure as much as anything, a not pushing through to the discovery of the dialectic, for example:

Now the power of the mind is defined by knowledge only, and its infirmity or passion is defined by the privation of knowledge only: it therefore follows, that the mind is most passive,

whose greatest part is made up of inadequate ideas, so that it may be characterized more readily by its passive states than by its activities: on the other hand, that mind is most active, whose greatest part is made up of adequate ideas, so that, although it may yet be more easily characterized by ideas attributable to human virtue, than by ideas which tell human infirmity. [*Ethics*, p. 258]

We start in deceit. We start inadequately. There is a beginning and from that beginning we can only get better, we can only know more. The subject is a subject of deceit at its most passive. It is not less "true" for not being completed or perfected; it is partial, and as such, *concealing*, until that point when it becomes increasingly conscious or active. To be virtuous, to be active, is to work at knowing more, especially it turns out, about oneself. But active attributes, conscious attributes, are easier to see than passive, less conscious ones. We suppose that we begin honest, true, without guile. But this is false. We just don't see the sluggish natures of ourselves. The pull toward inaction. The relentless drive to sit still. To fail to think. To render ourselves, by whatever means necessary, unconscious and passive. Everything is stacked against us. So it is with special gratitude that we say to Spinoza, that we say to Hegel, without your eyes, inner and outer, it would be much harder to remember that it is better to know than not to know. It is better to acknowledge the deceit at our core than to continuously cover it up. It could probably be proved by science that we are at core subjects of deceit.

Spinoza gives us every reason to take him with absolute seriousness. Since he gives us everything of himself, it is almost as if we owe him a reading that takes him on as respected friend. He begins at the very beginning: "By that which is *self-caused*, I mean that of which the essence involves existence, or that of which the nature is only conceivable as existent" (Part I, df. 1). It turns out that everything *as* everything is self-caused in this manner. Everything is off and running. This seems a very honest place to start work on ethical concerns. What we know is that things are themselves the way that they are. And this is inextricably tied up with consciousness. From here, where do we get eternity? "By *eternity* I mean existence itself, in so far as it is conceived necessarily to follow solely from the definition of that which is eternal" (Part I, df. 8). When we know then, with our mind's eyes that that mind and its eyes are eternal, what we know is that existence tied up

with consciousness is eternal insofar as it is itself. I am myself just so long as I am myself as myself in existence. I can honestly agree that I see this, but it seems dishonest to suppose that that is what Spinoza meant. Still, what then could he have meant by proposition XXIII of part V? "The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but there remains of it something which is eternal."

If we take what seems to be, although plausible, a watered down version of what Spinoza meant, the question still remains, where is the body? The body with its thoughts? That body turns out to be identical to the body that has finite duration. Then, the distinction that Spinoza gives us in Proposition XXIII cannot be a real distinction and the proof, that our mind's eyes will not deceive us, is literally nonsense, since there could be no difference between our eyes and our mind's eyes. The interpretation given cannot be right. Spinoza would never make a mistake that destroyed the very distinctions he calls upon unless he literally didn't know what he was doing. In this case pace Augustine, he would be being deceitful in the unconscious way. And Spinoza is so hyperconscious. Chances are it is me. Why can't I see what he is saying? I have rarely felt so hard, so head-over-heels for a philosopher as I have for Spinoza. (Is that the right expression?) I just can't believe that my misunderstandings of Spinoza can be due to some residual *resentiment*, some vestigial hatred blocking my reading. I *love* Spinoza. Why can't I see him?

Other places, Spinoza distinguishes between inner and outer bodies differently from the passages just observed. It is as if the particular body is not necessary. We could have done without those bodies. Consciousness tied up with bodies, by contrast, is necessary. It could not be the case that bodies not be tied up with consciousness. Insofar as we can see with our minds' eyes.

What we know with our mind's eyes is true. The exercise just performed does not make me want to neglect the fact of the mind's eye. I have already indicated that I know exactly what Spinoza means by it. We are honest with ourselves and others when we work for this kind of knowledge and acknowledge it once achieved. This makes us free in Spinoza's sense. If we are ignorant, we can get confused ideas about things and this produces falsity and places us in bondage. "Falsity consists in the privation of knowledge, which inadequate, fragmentary, or confused ideas involve" (Book II, Prop. XXXV). If we do not pay sufficient attention to our mind's eyes, if we do not work to find them and acknowledge them, we

deprive ourselves of knowledge, cover over chains of causation and our "idea of freedom, therefore, is simply their ignorance of any cause for [their] actions" (p. 109).

If I think that the chain of causation that leads me to write poetry is, for argument's sake, a genetic or phrenological one, I am in bondage. But if I think that there is no genetic or phrenological chain, that too is a case of being in bondage. To be free in Spinoza's sense is to be everything from the inside out. It is to be striving to be Hegelian prior to the vocabulary that allows us to so strive.

What could be wrong with Spinoza's beginnings? Why change the beginning from existence, cleverly wrought and explicated, to an assumption that the chain of causation is already an overlay heavy with the weight of deception? That looking at it with our mind's eyes will only show us maybe two layers down? Why should anyone think that there is advancement over a Spinozist or Hegelian beginning? Two sorts of questions. Two different answers. One problem with the beginning Spinoza chooses is that a utilitarian notion of good and bad necessarily follows from it. The utilitarian notion of good and bad is countered by many people's good intentions, by their mind's eyes, so to speak.

Honesty and truth exist, preexist, in the definitions Spinoza offers which are: "By *good* I mean that which we certainly know to be useful to us" and "By *evil* I mean that which we certainly know to be a hindrance to us in the attainment of any good" (p. 190). And from this (coupled with Spinoza's discussion of freedom that: "Proposition LXXII: The free man never acts fraudulently but always in good faith" (Part IV, p. 235). But this does not quite seem true either. Of the ethical systems, Spinoza's seems truest and most honest. His free subject appears to be less of a subject of deceit than others. Still, necessary consequences of the theory are not just false, but deceitful when held. That is, if we hold Spinoza's theory to be absolutely true, we are necessarily denying our mind's eyes.

New questions. Is beginning in deceit any better? Can we say then, with the growing chorus of like-minded persons, that systematic philosophy is dead: there is no one truth, nor, trivially, is there any one way of arriving at it (Rorty, 1979). The implications of such a radical reconceptualization are only very recently finding explicit voice within the philosophical canon broadly speaking. That is, the consequences are working their way into subdisciplines within philosophy. This is no longer a primarily epistemological concern. One is judged either imperi-



alistic or naive or old-fashioned if one clings fast to the notion of certain objective truth in any subdiscipline except for moral thinking. Having "Epistemology" replaced with "epistemologies" places philosophical reasoning on the level of the "strategy" or "decision procedure," and its results to "probable outcomes." The political and social fallout is perhaps better known to the world outside professional philosophy. One has seen the claims that personal identities cannot persist (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari); people *are* not, they only perform aspects of themselves (Judith Butler); political allegiances past the point of immediate conflict don't make good sense (Jean-François Lyotard); one does not take sides, one chooses a strategy (Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault), and so on. Still in the face of the empirical fact that this is increasingly how the various disciplines describe what they are doing and that policies increasingly take on the effects of being thought through in this manner, moral theory is criticized and carried out from a standpoint that pretends none of the above has happened.

I am sympathetic to the epistemological views just described. These epistemologies have spawned political or social theories, but no new and viable moral theory is forthcoming. What moral theorists concerned with these issues find themselves doing is "teasing out" a moral stance from the works of the philosophers in question—Heidegger, Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida. As a consequence, moral theory, as opposed to ethics, is stuck with either outdated and untenable views of the self, its relation to its actions, and the connection between thinking well and living well, or it does its work by creating (some would say *imposing*) moral theories in the work of philosophers working on other problems.

I do not mean to suggest that this impasse implies that no one has seen that there is a problem. Indeed moral theorists have drawn several conclusions from this epistemological problem. Many moral theorists have decided that in order for the real work of moral thinking to be done properly, they must first solve the epistemological problem. But others believe that the epistemological problem is not to be solved. Since Hume, it is *proven*, not speculated, that certainty is impossible. The solution is to get on with the work of philosophy *sans* the category of certainty. A related solution is to show that the category of the moral is as much constructed as the categories of "self," "person," and "law."

Probably the most popular position is to say that moral truth is just a different sort of thing than scientific truth. Instead of being

objective, it is subjective. There is no way to test its validity; therefore, we can only do the best that we can do. This "solution" is the one that is most blameworthy for the stalemate of moral philosophy. The criticism that moral philosophy cannot tell us what to do is more specifically that it has no *validity* to do so. Saying that objective truth does not exist but subjective truth does, may help us understand perspective in perception, but only leads to chaos in moral life. Some people give up moral philosophy not temporarily as in the first case, but for religion or political engagement.

Finally there is a group of philosophers who use their considerable logical and rational skills to do what is called applied ethics. Here the moral theorist solves specific problems within the context of probabilities. Such a philosopher is not referred to as an applied moralist even though that is her or his work. The context of most such deliberations presupposes the old moral agent and does not confine itself to the ethical or social. I cannot understand choosing any of these "solutions." My mind's eye tells me to look deeper inside coming out.

Deceit has been unaccountable philosophically for some time. By examining the spaces left by excluding deceit from the philosophical discourse and by analyzing how ordinary discourse accommodates the term meaningfully, light flickers over morality and on epistemology. The tradition of political theory that comes from Hegel has made a massive change lately by favoring the work of Spinoza over that of Marx in articulating its theories of history and its theories of political struggle. Such a return heralds a reintroduction of the moral (not the repetition of the ethical) into the political. There is the obvious historical and hence rhetorical reason for turning ambivalent in our relations to Marxism. It is not so obvious why Spinoza would take his place. Many argue that the change began a long time ago with the work of political theorists like Marcuse whose aim was to infuse individual desire into the realm of the political. This category (desire) is virtually nonexistent in Marx, they say, and is sublated early on in the Hegelian system. Spinoza begins and ends with desire, naturally filling the "humanizing" category. Spinoza, however, fails to give sufficient notice to the category of negation, which is logically connected with the lack, which is desire. Desire together with full-blown accounts of negation needed to be brought into the conceptual framework of a morality based theory of politics.

Recognizing deceit as a phenomenological datum that presupposes some form of moral certainty, will return the subjects of deceit to the political in order that they may be identified, studied, and rationally remedied, awakened from their repression. In the end, neither Hegel nor Spinoza have any meaningful place for deceit in their systems. Allowing deceit real presence will lead to a discussion of it that renders it once again *philosophically* meaningful. That it is already meaningful in ordinary language is part of what gives one hope for the philosophical enterprise.

A natural question for the nonphilosopher to ask here is: "If deceit is unproblematically apparent in decent people everywhere, whence the philosophical need for its analysis?" The philosopher looks for reasons and the level of theory that we have at present cannot justify the censure of deceit. That deceit is popularly censured but philosophically repressed is scandalous, not just in itself, but because this impedes the development of moral, and hence political, theory in general. Of course, at this point, we have not really *begun*.

What counts as beginning, however? On our road to the phenomenology of lying, we have not yet encountered, face to face, the subjects of deceit. They are elusive, running from us at every turn, turning into something else. They will not let us into them to know them. They remind me of spiders from Mars. They cannot be counted nor can they be counted on.

Both Hegel and Spinoza have a great deal to say about desire. Hegel's subjects are weak from holding mouths open to suck the very life out of existence—their desire is all-encompassing, they want to turn themselves inside out with longing. Spinoza's subjects incorporate that desire as positive energy, they are clear-sighted and virtuous. They never do wrong knowingly unless they cover up true desire with cowardice and fear. Desire is at the root of all good and its absence or perversion the root of all evil. We must unmask desire and see if underneath there is true deceit.

To that, however, we must force Spirit's eye: "The eye of the Spirit had to be forcibly turned and held fast to the things of this world; and it has taken a long time before the lucidity which only heavenly things used to have could penetrate the dullness and confusion in which the sense of worldly things was enveloped, and so make attention to what has been called 'experience,' an interesting and valid enterprise" (Hegel {1977} paragraph 8). Deceit is becoming interesting as a valid enterprise. Let's see if we can catch some closed-eye desiring.

*Rule Number Two for the Direction of the Mind*

Together, with a friend, construct masks of each other's faces, trying to capture, not this face now, but a face that rarely surfaces for you. A face that asks later, as you're painting it, after the plaster has dried:

"Who are you? Where are your eyes?"

## CLOSED-EYE DESIRING

Desire may well be the most basic ontological category. Which is to say, it is hard to think of an organizing component of human cognition more basic than desiring. The astute reader is pulling his or her hair out. Why would "ontological" indicate "the organizing component of human behavior?" That reader may be asking: "Even if I grant her this leap, this connection, why desire? Why not motion? Or sexual difference?"

These thoughts make sense. I ask the reader to think: "What could be more basic than desire?" I can't think of anything. Isn't motion itself desire? Sexual difference is already so, how shall we say it, artificial. Obviously artificial? Well, watch me track myself moving toward some object of my desire. A bottle of perfume, say, in a department store, hidden between layers of glass and cardboard. A bottle of perfume shaped like the headless torso of a woman. Is it, in fact, my true desire to embody this perfume? This bottle?

Once, at a Jethro Tull concert in an abatoir in Paris I drank a bottle of perfume so that I wouldn't be so god dammed hyperconscious. I nearly killed myself from the desire to be just a little bit muddled. (I couldn't find anyone to buy me a drink or pass a little puff my way, being with my then stupid and boring boyfriend. I was only fourteen, give me a break!) The common denominator here in all the actions is of course desire. Motion is not the only thing in desire.

Spinoza has a lemma. Lemma III of axiom II under Proposition XII in Part II of the *Ethics*. He says: "Bodies are distinguished from one another in respect of motion and rest, quickness and slowness, and not in respect of substance."

What if I were to say: "Bodies are distinguished by desire. Once the desired object is appropriated, it ceases to be distinct until it is desired anew"? It would be like the ready-to-hand/already alongside complement, which we find in Heidegger. It is

quite possibly immoral for me to bring out philosophical terminology in this way—with no explanation. I write here as I teach: to show a distinction but never to explicate the same. If the distinction is made clear, it will erase what is distinct. I am quite serious about this. Important distinctions are known, when they are, only somatically.

Off the mad-tracking of desire, we come up against what is more pressing. What is most pressing is deceit. What might the connection be between desire and deceit? Let us say that I am desiring sleep. To desire sleep, one cannot be asleep. Thus, to desire in this case is to want to be something that one is not. On a somatic level, this may well be a longing for lying. Don't you think? The koanlike style irritates me too. It is flip in certain ways, but I don't "mean" it that way. How should I say this? It is very hard to try to pretend to be writing without the anchor of tradition pulling me someplace where I'm not but where I can't help but be. There is a cleverness to the notion that when one desires, one is always already in deception because one is already admitting or noticing or becoming different from what one *is*. One is already alongside that which is not ready-to-hand. One is distinct, somatically, from other states. And as colleagues have pointed out to me when I talk this way: being different from what one was is not the same as being deceitful. They will point out that if I grow up a little bit, *physically*, I am not deceiving anybody with anything. That is, when I was eight years old I was shorter than I am now. Really. So I moved into a bigger size. There is a case of motion that is only tangentially desire. Although desire was present. I desired to move into a different and bigger size. And motion is always already there pulling one's head higher and higher away from one's feet. So my colleagues remind me that it is weird to blur the difference between motion, desire, and deceit. They remind me that to be deceitful, one has to intend to "trick" someone, to "pull the wool over her eyes, over his eyes." One has to *mean* what one says in order to not mean what one is saying I feel like saying to them. I don't say this.

I don't say this because, of course, they are right, these colleagues. But listen with your mind's ear, for just a moment. Indulge me. Let's say that I want to be asleep. I want to be other than what I am here and now. The desire presupposes negation. Why not, then, just follow Hegel? Why go this next step and make what looks like old-fashioned negation, dissemblance, or deceit? Why not say: "Sure, sense-certainty implies the other state, perception.

The next state. Perception with which, Hegel reminds us, comes deception." Why not leave it at that? With Hegel? The negation is not proof of lying, of deceit.

Two reasons come to mind when I think of returning to Hegel, just like that. First, one is never becoming what one *truly* is. One is becoming what one is already not and never will be. Thus, the assumption that one is only telling a lie, only being deceitful, presupposes that the universe in repose is *truthful*. That intentions are some place "honest" or even "true." My position, here, is much less arbitrary than that! (OK. So you're right. That is not a very good argument. It is not enough to show that one of many competing views is also absurd. How did I sink to such an argument as this? But wait! It *is* a good argument. Both positions, the truthful repose of sense-certainty, and the deceitful beginnings of a phenomenology of lying, admit that they are *chosen*. That is, they are chosen in order to facilitate self-understanding.)

Second, closing my eyes to deceit is not what I wish to do. In other words, the second reason to allow myself this luxury of playing with deceit and desire and motion is that I want to. I desire it intensely. To be frank, intellectual desirings wane as we age. We have less time to be all tied up in the desire toward truth. I want to work on this as a problem. I don't have forever. To be extra frank, I don't believe what I said about age. I'm just afraid of getting old. I don't know how to do it with grace.

When we desire something intensely, it is not uncommon to close our eyes. "I could faint from desire," she said, her eyes fluttering in and out, and then allowing themselves blessed closure. "I am weak with desire," he moaned, his legs giving way to an urge to collapse to the ground as if asleep, or dead. "I am only a desiring machine," they said, eyes staring wide awake into a manic speed-rushing bout of language transmission. Closed-eye desiring is what, for instance, readers of Hegel might think of when he writes about desire. In class, closed-eye desiring is imagined. "For Hegel," a teacher might say, "subjects are foremost subjects of desire."

The teacher can go on to discuss the coming out of oneself for-others, but as she goes on and on the glassy other-directed eyes of her students lead her to suspect that some other notion of desire is being played with. On she goes, about desire to be an "I," while she is thinking, not of desire for this and that, her or him, not this time, instead she is thinking, why desire? Why not deceit? Why blessedness and affirmation and acquiescence? Why not cussedness and negation and refusal? Why not indeed?