

Chapter Four Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis

I returned to North America on July 30, 1955, just thirteen months after sailing for England. The only affordable passage I was able to find was on a ship bound for Canada. Traveling in the same steerage compartment was a minister returning to Northern Canada, where he had been doing missionary work among a small community of Native Americans. As I complained loudly of the rolling of the ship, he told me tales of his heroic voyage to the South Seas, around the Horn, on the last commercial sailing ship to take that treacherous route.

On the train from Montreal back to my starting point, New York, I made a remarkable discovery. Looking out the window, I realized that in my year-long absence cars had completely changed their appearance. When I left, the family car had been a stodgy affair, with running boards, rounded rear and front, very much like the sorts of cars one sees now in old World War II movies. But there had been an automotive styling revolution. The cars were now multi-colored, and had flat fronts and rears so that at a glance it was difficult to tell whether they were coming or going. There is not the slightest significance to this fact, so far as I can see, but I still remember my shock as I looked from the train window at parking lots and automobile dealerships.

My most important task, upon returning, was to find an apartment for Charlie Parsons and me, but before going to Cambridge, I borrowed my father's car and drove up the Merritt Parkway to Westport to see whether Susie's parents could tell me whether she had indeed been divorced, and how to get in touch with her. She and Gordon had moved to Chicago so that he could attend the University of Chicago Law School, and since Susie was doing graduate work in Botany, I figured she would stay there even after the divorce.

The Shaeffers had never approved of me, in part because they thought I would never make enough money to amount to anything. They refused to tell me how to get in touch with

her, and I went back to New York

Having nothing better to do, I took the subway up to Morningside Heights and hung out on the Low Plaza at Columbia University with an assortment of students who were just killing time until the Fall semester started. Emboldened by my extraordinary adventure with Shirley B my first real *affair*, since Susie and I had never Agone all the way@ B I struck up an acquaintance with a pretty undergraduate and actually had my first and last one night stand. Two nights, if the truth be told. Sylvia is fixed in my memory as a lovely girl of twenty or so, but of course, time being what it is, she is now sixty-eight or sixty-nine. I am reminded of an eerie episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, in which Captain Picard has transferred to his mind by a space beacon the experiences of a civilization that has since died, and during a twenty minute period of unconsciousness, lives through an entire long virtual life on the planet, becoming a father and grandfather. When he awakens from the dream, he finds himself on the bridge of the Enterprise, but in his head are a lifetime of memories, as real as those of his actual past. I sometimes think idly that I shall some day awaken from this dream to find myself on Low Plaza, chatting with Sylvia and wondering what my life will bring.

I found an apartment in Cambridge without much difficulty, and moved my few belongings into it, waiting for Charlie to return from Europe. It was the third floor of an old building at 1134 Massachusetts Avenue, several doors beyond the point where Arrow Street joins Mass. Ave. The rent was \$75 a month, which meant that my share would be \$37.50. I had been awarded a Teaching Fellowship paying \$1440 for the year. Out of this, I would have to cover \$600 tuition and support myself, so finances were going to be something of a problem. As a Teaching Fellow, I would be responsible for three discussion sections of the big introductory course, Philosophy 1, that Raphael Demos had been teaching for so long that he referred to it as

APhil. A,@ its designation in some bygone pre-war era.

The apartment was hardly palatial, but for the next two years it served Charlie and me very well. At the back end of the little hall, to the Southeast, was a tiny kitchen, beyond which was an even tinier bathroom. Hot water for both was provided by a Ageyser,@ a little gas-fired water heater. At the other end of the hall, looking out on Massachusetts Avenue, was an equally small room which served us as a dining room. Off the hall were two bedrooms. I took the slightly larger back room, having got there first, and Charlie took the front room.

Charlie was a very serious, very brilliant, very compulsive young man of middle height, with sandy hair. He was an academic brat, having grown up in the family home in Belmont during the time that his father was a famous senior professor in the Harvard Social Relations Department. Talcott Parsons had been responsible for introducing American readers to the works and theories of Max Weber, the great German sociologist. But unlike Weber, whose books were deep, powerful investigations of the roots, structure, and functioning of modern bureaucratic capitalist society, Parsons produced vast, empty, classificatory schemes that were devoid of any real power or insight. Poor Charlie, who lived very much in the shadow of the great man, was in fact much smarter than his father, and I have always suspected that he knew quite well how meretricious his father=s theories were. But during all the time I knew him, he never said a word about the matter.

Charlie had inherited from his New England Puritan upbringing a pinchpenny miserliness that was famous among our circle of graduate students. When he arrived from Europe to join me in our new digs, he brought with him, as his contribution to our household, a half-used little cardboard container of pepper and a portion of a stick of butter, both of which he had carried home with him on the ship from Europe.

My first order of business was to hold office hours, and begin my duties as a Section Man. I had been having serious doubts for some time about my commitment to philosophy as a calling, but I had no doubts at all about teaching. In my letters from Europe, I had many times spoken about teaching as an activity I looked forward to, and for which I felt a natural affinity.

The burdens of a Section Man were not heavy, at least by what have come to be the standards in the Academy. That first semester, I had sections of sixteen, seventeen, and twenty-one Harvard and Radcliffe students. After all these years, I can still call to mind some of the young people who passed through my sections over the next two years: John Costonis, a serious, very smart young man, who gave every evidence of real intellectual talent; Maureen Needham, a slender, ethereal blond woman, also very gifted, but laboring under the burden of an overbearing mother who did everything in her power to deny Maureen the freedom she needed to find her own path in life. To my delight, several years later I discovered that John and Maureen had fallen in love. Jack McNees, easily the best student I had in either year, who stayed around Harvard and turned up from time to time over the next five years. Eva Augenblick, a charming round-faced girl who went on, I believe, to a distinguished medical career before passing away, much too early, several years ago. Jean Anderson, who married Juan Alonzo, and then showed up in my life thirty years later as a Radical union organizer at Raytheon. It was she who enabled me to get myself arrested in a Harvard anti-apartheid protest, thus easing my embarrassment at never having been arrested in the Sixties. Molly Jones, who was taken advantage of by a rather sepulchral junior member of the Philosophy Department, so outraging Demos, who took an avuncular interest in his students, that he successfully blocked that egregious man's hopes for tenure. I even took Mary Jo Laflin dancing one evening, though I punctiliously waited until she was no longer my student before asking her out.

I seem to recall the women more easily than the men, in part, at least, because they tended to be a good deal brighter. Radcliffe in those days successfully recruited the most talented young women in the country, gave them a superb education, and then did everything in its power to discourage them from going on to pursue successful careers.

Teaching is in my cultural heritage, if not in my genes. For my entire life, I have felt completely relaxed and comfortable in front of a class. I am blessed with the unshakable conviction, grounded in no empirical evidence whatsoever, that my students love me and are pleased to see me when I walk into the room. As a result, I feel great affection for them, a fact which I am sure is communicated by my voice and body language. I love explaining complex ideas in simple ways, finding the core idea at the heart of a difficult passage and explicating it with images drawn from fairy tales, movies, television shows, or contemporary public affairs. I assume that my students want to know about me, and I am always surprised, but undeterred, when the student evaluation forms come back with the comment, *Atalks too much about his family.*@

There has been much wringing of hands about grade inflation in recent decades. Conservative talking heads imagine that a different assignment of letter grades for student performances is somehow connected with a supposed decline in intellectual standards, their minds addled by bad economics into conflating the subject with the depreciation of the currency. That grades have changed, however, there can be no doubt. Looking back at my grade records from my first semester of teaching, I find that to my fifty-four undergraduates I awarded a total of one A, two A minuses, two B pluses, and seven B=s. There were twenty-six C=s of various sorts, and five D=s. The average across the three sections was something on the order of a C+. If I were to hand out these grades today, I would be lynched. Are students today better than students fifty years ago? Of course not. Are they worse? Also no. Does it matter at all that an A of some

sort is the customary grade at Harvard, rather than a C? Not in the slightest. No one is fooled, no one is confused, the life of the mind goes on pretty much as it has for the past two and a half millennia.

My most depressing grading experience came in my second year of teaching. The first quiz of the Fall semester posed some brief essay questions about the views Plato had set forth in the *Republic*. After I graded the quizzes and handed them back, a young man came up to talk to me, very perturbed. He was a short Freshman who was very Ashoe, @ as we said in those days. That meant that he had the look of a rich prep school student and wore the required uniform of gray flannels and white bucks.

A You gave me an A on this quiz, but you wrote at the top, >this is awful.= I don=t understand.@ I explained that it was a really high-level piece of regurgitation. He had everything exactly right, but he gave no evidence that Plato=s troubling arguments had touched him at all.

He still looked completely puzzled, so I asked him what he wanted out of life. He shot back, without a moment=s hesitation, AI want to make Phi Beta Kappa and go to Harvard Law School and become a senior partner and make one hundred thousand dollars a year like my father.@ It was clear that there was no hope for him, so I just nodded and turned away.

Demos was something of a snob, and he took a great interest in the family connections of his students. At the end of each semester, the section men would gather in his office to read out our grades as he recorded them on the official grade sheet. If a student had a last name that suggested the possibility of an important family connection, he would look up and say, AIs he a member of the Boston Cabots?@ The closest I came to the social register was Anita de Lobkowitz, who was apparently the daughter of a Polish Count, though someone explained to me

that this meant a good deal less in Poland than it might elsewhere in Europe. Demos was also rather apprehensive about the Radcliffe Deans, who were extremely protective of their charges. If a Radcliffe student received a low grade, the instructor was sure to get a call from a Dean inquiring about the precise reasons. If one of us read out a C or C minus for a Radcliffe student, he would look up from the grade sheet and ask, "Are you absolutely sure she didn't do better?"

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Philosophy 1 met twice a week in a large amphitheatrical lecture hall in Sever Hall. We Section Men sat in the last and highest row, listening to the lectures. Demos was a showman and the students clearly identified him with Socrates. Although he cultivated a grandfatherly manner, he was in fact a rather tough old bird. The summer after my Freshman year, I had taken a course with him and Donald Williams on American Philosophy. I sat in the front row, and one day another student asked me a question about logic. I started writing some symbols on a piece of paper, but before I could finish, Demos began his lecture. I completed the little proof I had been constructing, and handed her the piece of paper. Demos looked down, stopped his lecture, and to my complete mortification asked for it. While the entire class sat silently, I got up, walked to the lectern from which he was speaking, and handed him the note. After class he called me up to reprimand me. He handed the note back and said he would not read it, but that I was not to pass notes during his lectures. I desperately wanted him to open it up so that he could see that it was symbolic logic and not a request for an assignation, but he simply dismissed me with a wave of the hand.

By the time Demos got to Kant in the second semester of that first year, I was deep into my study of the *Critique* and knew a good deal about Kant's philosophy. Demos gave the students a rather standard potted version of Kant's theories which I knew to be inaccurate.

After listening for a while, I could stand it no longer, and in the midst of one of this lectures, I raised my hand. Demos looked up startled. Short of a medical emergency or a fire in the building, it was simply not done for a Section Man to interrupt a Professor=s Lecture. Rather mystified, he called on me, and I proceeded to explain why I thought his interpretation of Kant was incorrect. In what I have always considered a show of real class, Demos= response to this appalling behavior was to invite me the next year to give one of the lectures on Kant.

Many years later, after Demos passed away, Vanderbilt University, where he had spent several years post-retirement as a Distinguished Visiting Professor, established a lectureship in his memory. I had the great honor of giving the Second Raphael Demos Memorial Lecture, during which I was able to tell this story as a tribute to his generosity of spirit.

Since this is the first extended discussion in these pages of the subject of teaching, I should perhaps take the opportunity to confess just how much I hate grading. Taking all in all, the academic life is about as close as one can come these days to living in the manner that in past centuries was reserved for men and women of gentle birth who enjoyed undeservedly the fruits of the labors of others. By way of example, these memoirs are being written in the midst of a semester for which I am receiving full pay. What is more, should I be so fortunate as to find a publisher for them, I will be considered to have made a Acontribution to scholarship@ and will no doubt see my salary increased as a consequence. But I have always confronted stacks of examinations and term essays with an overwhelming aversion. I find it excruciatingly difficult not only to keep in mind what a student has *said* in response to a question, but also what the student has *neglected* to say, what has been left out of an answer. In the early days of my career, I anguished about whether I was grading fairly, and would sometimes read the entire set of papers or exams three times B first, to get a sense of how everyone was handling the questions, then to

assign grades, and then once again to make certain that I had maintained the same standard when I got to the bottom of the stack as I had adopted when I was near the top. Long experience has enabled me to reduce the process to one read through, but as I am compulsively incapable of passing over a grammatical mistake, syntactic confusion, or stylistic infelicity without making some red ink corrections, it still takes me, after half a century, a tediously long time to get through a set of papers.

Considering how much I dislike grading exams, it is strange that I actually enjoyed taking them at Harvard. A well-constructed exam would challenge me to pull together the material I had been studying and impose some coherent conceptual order on it. The final examination was for me one of the most valuable intellectual experiences of the course. This fact came to my rescue when I turned my attention to what was, after all, the most important challenge of my graduate career: choosing the topic of my doctoral dissertation.

I had gone to Europe planning to write a dissertation on ethical theory. I had made numerous references to that plan in my letters, and at one point, in Rome, had actually drafted twenty pages on the subject. Oddly enough, considering how much incidental detail made its way into my letters, I never actually mentioned what it was about ethical theory that I meant to investigate, and all these years later, I cannot for the life of me remember. But by the time I returned to the United States, I had decided that the topic would not fly, and so I needed to find something to write about.

It was at this point that I recalled an idea that had come to me while I was writing my undergraduate General Examinations. On the History of Philosophy section of the exam, there was a straightforward question about the relationship between the epistemological theories of David Hume and Immanuel Kant. Since I had studied Hume in my second year and Kant that

semester, I decided to answer it.

I knew the standard story that the question was trying to elicit. Hume, the story goes, raised skeptical doubts about the possibility of scientific knowledge in his great work, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, which he repeated and elaborated in a later work, the *Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding*. Kant became aware of Hume's arguments, and set out to rebut them in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. That was the story told in a hundred histories of philosophy, and it actually corresponded pretty well to Kant's own view of the matter. But in the course of writing the exam answer, it occurred to me that if one looked at Hume's theories in a certain way, one could see that they were actually more similar to Kant's own views than scholars had supposed. In fact, I suggested, it was much closer to the truth to say that Hume and Kant had essentially the same view of the role of the mind in the acquisition of knowledge, with the exception of a single major innovation by Kant B the introduction into the discussion of the nature and role of consciousness itself. As soon as I remembered this idea, I realized that I wanted to write a doctoral dissertation developing it.

I needed a dissertation director and a second reader. There was no question about the second reader. Henry Aiken was the department's expert on Hume, and despite our clash in his Hume course, he would have to be on the committee. But with the retirement of Lewis, there was no one in the department who knew much about Kant, or indeed had any interest in his philosophy.

This fact was actually an instance of a much larger problem that was rapidly transforming the Harvard Philosophy Department. The glory of the department during this period was its strength in two areas: the philosophical study of formal logic, and the philosophical, as opposed to the merely scholarly, study of the history of philosophy. There was not a single member of the

department who was, in the traditional sense, a scholar of some area of the history of philosophy, but almost every member of the department took a serious interest in the great figures from the past, and taught exciting courses on their works. Demos taught the Platonic Dialogues, Lewis taught the *Critique*, Aiken taught Hume not as scholars, but as philosophers who found interesting ideas in these great texts. At the same time, students were able to draw on some extraordinary scholars in other departments: Werner Jaeger in Classics, Wolfson in Semitic Languages. One by one, as these men retired, they were replaced by very bright philosophers who had little or no commitment to the history of philosophy, with the result that eventually, the department simply eliminated the requirement that graduate students demonstrate a knowledge of the great figures of the past.

Lewis had been such a towering figure in the department that when his retirement approached, he was given the opportunity to name his own successor. At that time, by a curious coincidence, his two most promising former students were both named Roderick B Roderick Chisholm and Roderick Firth. Both of them were very gifted young philosophers, but everyone who knew them recognized that Chisholm was far more promising than Firth. Nevertheless, Lewis chose Firth. When asked afterward why he had made that choice, Lewis is reputed to have answered, "Because Firth assents to more propositions to which I assent than Chisholm does." So it was that Firth spent the remainder of his career at Harvard, and Chisholm spent his career at Brown.

Firth wrote about ethics and the theory of knowledge, and did not really know anything about Kant. Nevertheless, he was Lewis's successor, and so by default he became my thesis advisor. Neither Aiken nor Lewis can be said to have guided me in the writing of the dissertation, and if I am completely honest with myself, I must admit that I probably wouldn't have wanted

them to. Over the course of the next eighteen months, I think I had a total of seventy-five minutes of formal consultation on my dissertation B forty-five minutes with Firth and thirty minutes with Aiken. But Firth did give me two invaluable pieces of advice, both of which I have passed on to my students over the years.

The first was this: A Bob, if you say something original in the thesis, put a footnote indicating that it is original, because otherwise your readers won't know that it is and won't give you credit for it. @ For the second bit of advice, Firth put a little graph on the blackboard in his office, with two lines on it. The first was a straight line that rose slowly from the origin, representing, he said, the rise in my abilities, in what I would actually produce. The second was a line that curved upward, farther and farther from the first line the longer it got. It represented the rise in my standards, my sense of what I ought to produce. A Now, @ he pointed out, A the longer you take to finish your dissertation, the bigger the gap is going to be between what you produce and what you think you should produce. There will always be a gap, but the faster you finish, the less disappointment you will suffer. @ This, as it turned out, was brilliant advice. I took it to heart, and decided to finish up in the next eighteen months.

A number of students, including Charlie, who had taken Lewis's Kant course were disturbed by the failure of the department to replace him with someone seriously interested in German philosophy, and we decided to fill the gap by getting together to read Kant on our own. Thus was born the Kant Group, which turned out to be the most exciting and rewarding educational experience of my life. Five of us met each Wednesday evening from 8 p.m. until midnight, all throughout 1955-56. Everyone of us went on to think and write about Kant's philosophy. Charlie and I were the organizers of the little group, and most of the sessions took place at our apartment. The other three were Hubert Dreyfus, Stephen Barker, and Samuel

Todes.

Bert Dreyfus is definitely in the running, after Benny Muckenhoupt, as an unforgettable character. He was a very small man, perhaps 5' 4" or so, and surely no more than 95 pounds, with bright orange hair. His brother Stuart, who was into electronics and such, was almost a carbon copy, except that his hair was closer to purple. Bert had written an undergraduate honors thesis on the philosophy of science, but he was now very much engaged with the French philosophical school called Phenomenology, and in fact the next year went off to Paris to study with Merleau-Ponty. Despite his size, Bert was a ferociously fast eater, and I credit him with my superb technique with chopsticks. Every so often, a group of us would get some money together and go to the newly opened Joyce Chen Chinese Restaurant on Alewife Brook Parkway. We would order a round of dishes, all share in them, and then split the check equally. If you were not adept with the chopsticks, you would not get your fair share of the food, and Bert was so fast that the rest of us were forced to ramp up our digital dexterity in self-defense. Bert was actually very successful with women, a fact that mystified the rest of us, and he eventually developed a relationship with a lovely young artist, Adair Moffat, who somewhat later made me a beautiful chinese screen decorated with musical motifs. Adair, as we shall see, was instrumental in my meeting the woman who eventually become my wife.

Bert's close friend, Sam Todes, was a slender man with a shock of dark hair and a raspy, ironic voice. All of stood in awe of Sam, because he seemed to have in his head an entire systematic philosophy, as elaborate in its way as that of Kant himself, which he was patiently waiting to unfold in a series of books. Bert swore that Sam had actually been born with this system in his head, and two years later, when Bert returned from his year in France, he reported that the very latest theories that Merleau-Ponty revealed to his inner circle of students consisted

of ideas that Sam had long since arrived at on his own. Eventually, in a brilliant *tour de force*, Sam wrote a doctoral dissertation that was a kind of materialist version of Kant's Transcendental Idealism, called, as I recall, *The Lived Body as the Ground of the Unity of the Material World*.

Steve Barker was a bit older than the rest of us, and far and away the sanest of the lot. A slender man with sandy hair and an air of perpetual amusement at the follies of the world, he was reputed to have accomplished the astonishing feat of scoring a perfect string of A's on the four Preliminary Examinations, a height previously scaled, to the best of our knowledge, only by Hao Wang.

The five of us would gather each Wednesday and work our way slowly through perhaps twenty pages of the *Critique*, debating their meaning, offering interpretations, puzzling over the most impenetrable passages. Despite the fact that all of us had been introduced to Kant by Lewis, we took widely divergent approaches to the text. Sam and I were the most diametrically opposed in our readings. I was dismissive of Kant's elaborate organizational schemes, which Kant scholars call his *Architectonic*, brushing them aside in an effort to get at the core idea underlying the philosophically most challenging passages. Sam insisted that the structure of the book was itself an important part of Kant's philosophical message, and he strove constantly to impute some deeper significance to the highly formulaic manner in which Kant had arranged his sections and subsections. This conflict came to a hilarious climax one evening after we had all become rather punch drunk from anguishing over a particularly intractable paragraph.

In an early section of the *Transcendental Analytic*, Kant presents a table which purports to exhibit the logically different kinds of judgments that can be made: affirmative, negative, universal, particular, and so forth. If you combined these in all the ways possible, you could come

up with twenty-seven distinct types of judgments. In the Second Edition of the *Critique*, Kant had rewritten the central passage of the entire book, and as an aid to following the argument, had divided it into sub-sections, which numbered *B mirabile dictu* B twenty-seven. In what I can only describe as a state of divine philosophical intoxication, Sam proceeded to argue that each subsection of this new version of the Transcendental Deduction corresponded exactly to one of the twenty-seven forms of judgment.

It was utterly mad, of course, a product of the sort of mind set that would, some years later, generate elaborate conspiracy theories to demonstrate that mankind's first walk on the moon had been staged in a television studio. But Sam persevered with a glint of ironic amusement in his eye, and we finally all collapsed in laughter and declared him the winner.

Those Wednesday evening meetings were the only time in my life that I have experienced the Platonic Ideal of education B a group of serious, engaged friends, debating theses and interpreting texts for the pure love of ideas. By mid-year, we had made it through the first half of the *Critique* B the sections entitled *The Transcendental Aesthetic* and *The Transcendental Analytic*. At that point we set aside the First *Critique* and turned to Kant's Third Critique, the *Critique of Judgment*. The Third *Critique* at that time was almost never paid any serious attention by students of Kant, but in the Nineteenth Century, it had actually had a wider influence, both on philosophy and on the Romantic movement in literature and the arts, than any of his other writings. It is a very odd book, a conjunction of two subjects with no apparent relation to one another: beauty in the arts and teleological explanation in the sciences. We labored over it determinedly for a semester, but to this day, I confess myself puzzled by its core meaning.

The graduate student experience is very different from that of undergraduates, even though one sometimes encounters both sorts of students in the same courses and seminars. For

undergraduates, the world is the college, but for graduate students the world narrows to the department. It was there that we focused our energies and made our lives. It wasn't all books, exams, papers, and dissertations, of course. There was a social life of a sort, though as anyone will attest who has spent time in an Arts and Sciences graduate program, there is very little of the sort of partying that seems to be the principal concern of undergraduates. For us, the locus of such collective life as we enjoyed was the graduate Philosophy Club, whose principal function was to invite outside speakers to the campus. The department gave us a budget, but it was up to us to choose the speakers, issue the invitations, and shepherd the visitors about when they showed up.

By long tradition, the members of the Harvard Philosophy Department failed to show up when a speaker appeared, a practice so at odds with the general custom in the Academy that the visitors must have been utterly mystified by it. I often wondered whether the more sensitive of them took the absence of faculty as some sort of obscure insult. But it was wonderful for us, of course, because it meant that we got to ask questions, rather than sitting plastered to our seats while the faculty hogged the discussion period.

Far and away the most memorable visit that first year actually produced a deviation from this custom. The department was seeking to recruit a junior philosopher, and asked us to invite the two candidates for talks so that the members of the faculty could size them up. The first candidate, Rogers Albritton, arrived from Cornell to give a talk on Plato. I was the Treasurer of the Club that year, and was tapped to chair the meeting. When I arrived at the room in the Graduate Center that we had booked for the talk, I discovered to my astonishment that every single senior member of the department had showed up. It was the first time that any of us had ever seen all the members of the department in one place, and judging from their subsequent

behavior, it may have been a first for the faculty as well. Aiken plopped himself down next to Firth on a couch just to the left of the speaker, and all during the talk made quite audible remarks out of the side of his mouth, while Firth, a very proper Quaker, tried by every trick of body language to communicate that he was not listening and indeed was not actually there.

Albritton was a short man with short, tightly curled white-blond hair and an odd, quirky manner that appeared to have been derived from Wittgenstein's famously idiosyncratic behavior. He was very brilliant, very convoluted, with those odd hand gestures and twistings of the wrist that Wittgenstein's disciples affected. His talk was a complex, scholarly exploration of the so-called *Third man* argument in Plato's *Parmenides*. Philosophers had been chewing over the paradoxes and puzzles in the *Parmenides* for twenty-five hundred years, and Albritton very quickly was up to his eyeballs in quibbles and cavils and digressions.

When Albritton finally ground to a halt, every single member of the faculty raised his hand to ask a question. I panicked. If I called on Firth first, Aiken's nose would be out of joint. If I called on White first, Wild would be irritated. I fell back on tradition, and called on Demos, who was the oldest member of the department now that Lewis was retired. The question period went along quietly enough until Williams offered the view that the forms could participate in themselves. At that, Quine perked up, and inquired whether that meant that the form of humanity could participate in itself. Yes, Williams replied. So the form of humanity is a man? Well, that was a dangerous path to go down, but Williams was stubborn, and stuck to his guns. Yes, he said. So then, Quine inquired quizzically, the form of humanity has arms and legs and hair and teeth? Yes, Williams insisted, steadfastly and implausibly.

Along about now, Albritton gave the appearance of fearing that he had gotten off the bus at the wrong stop and had wandered into the local mental hospital. Meanwhile, Williams and

Quine had totally forgotten that they were there to evaluate the speaker for a potential job offer, and got more and more hotly involved in their dispute, while the rest of the faculty watched what was fast becoming a blood sport.

At long last, the hour allotted for questions was over, whereupon the faculty disappeared, leaving me to guide the shaken Albritton back to his hotel for the night. He was clearly convinced that he had totally blown any chance he might have for joining the Harvard Philosophy Department, although it was difficult for him to see what he had done wrong. But the joke was on him. He got the job.

The Harvard Philosophy Club was also the site of my most brilliant triumph as a graduate student. The occasion was a talk by the famous logician, Alonzo Church. Church was a big, broad man with a large, open face and an extremely ponderous speaking manner. He uttered each word carefully and precisely, as though he were etching it with a chisel in marble. As he spoke, he wrote precise, careful lines of logic on the rolling blackboard that had been brought in for the occasion. Fairly quickly, most of the audience passed from mild interest to boredom to somnolence. Finally, with the board entirely covered with logical symbols, Church stopped speaking. There was a long pause while everybody cast about for something, anything, to ask.

I was as completely at sea as everyone else, my eye idly following along as Church wrote on the board. But I noticed that there was a right parenthesis missing from the end of one of the lines. Quine had drummed into us the importance of counting to make sure that we had the same number of left and right parentheses, not a trivial task when writing a formula with many sub-formulae nested inside the larger ones. I raised my hand, and said, "Excuse me, Professor Church, but I believe you have omitted a right parenthesis from the end of the eleventh line." Church reacted with a start, looked at the board, and then became elaborately apologetic,

thanking me for catching this significant error, as though I had actually called one of his arguments into question. He picked up the chalk and with great care, inscribed the missing right parenthesis at the end of the line.

People looked at me with a mixture of respect and awe. Bob Wolff must really know what is going on, they all but said out loud. I sat back, satisfied to have saved Professor Church from an egregious error. At that point, Quine, who was sitting next to me, asked a real question, for of course he understood perfectly what Church had been talking about, and the two of them quite happily carried on an extended colloquy. I had the great good sense to keep my mouth shut, so as not to reveal that I hadn't a clue. My reputation was made.

While I was in Europe, I had actually achieved my first scholarly publication. The only part of my undergraduate honors thesis that had been even vaguely original was a brief passage of several pages in which I showed that Gilbert Ryle, in *Concept of Mind*, was guilty of an internal inconsistency with regard to the account he gave of something he called Agitations. White had suggested that I submit it as a note to *Mind*, a leading British philosophy journal edited by Ryle. Apparently he had the reputation of encouraging young philosophers, even when they disagreed with him. It had been accepted, and appeared as Professor Ryle's Discussion of Agitations. Now some chap named Corbett had published a criticism of my criticism of Ryle, and I was given the chance to submit a two-page reply, which appeared the following year as Reply to Mr. Corbett. At long last, I had been invited to come down from the steps in my family's living room and enter the conversation.

As one might expect, the Harvard Philosophy Department drew to itself a varied and very gifted group of doctoral students, many of whom have gone on to extremely distinguished careers. One of the most unusual of our number was a Jesuit Priest who had fled from Hungary

and come to Boston. His name was Zeno Vendler B after the ancient Greek philosopher who had propounded a number of famous paradoxes, I imagine B and although he was steeped in the theological traditions of the Roman Catholic Church, his real philosophical interest was in the school of analytic philosophy that had recently come over from England under the name, AOrdinary Language Philosophy.@ This was a species of philosophical argument that made much of subtle nuances of English usage. So an Ordinary Language philosopher might devote an entire scholarly article to discussing the differences among a *mistake*, an *accident*, and a *misstep*. We could describe the decision to invade Iraq as a *mistake*, but it would clearly be wrong to describe it as an *accident*, as though we had set out to invade Syria and had become lost in the desert B that sort of thing.

Now, Zeno=s native language was of course Hungarian, and he also spoke several other European languages, not to speak of the conversational Latin that he employed as a Jesuit when traveling abroad in priestly circles. English must have been his fourth or fifth language, yet he exhibited a sensitivity to the small differences among English words that we native speakers had a hard time matching. Even though each of us was required to demonstrate a Areading knowledge@ of two languages in order to get the Ph. D., we were for the most part monolingual in the customary American fashion, and we viewed this European facility with languages with awe. Zeno was also a geography buff, something he had in common with Quine, and I can still see the two of them peering at the bas relief map of Eurasia that decorated the wall where we held our Philosophy Club meetings, competing with one another to identify obscure tributaries of Siberian rivers.

All of us were fascinated and puzzled by Zeno=s ability to keep separate the theological teachings of the Church on the one hand, which owed their philosophical underpinnings to the

writings of the great thirteenth century Scholastic St. Thomas Aquinas, and the analytic philosophy of England and America on the other, which was modern and thoroughly secular in orientation. He explained to us that he placed them in entirely separate compartments of his mind, somewhat in keeping with the medieval doctrine of the ADouble Truth.@ He would have been perfectly content to continue in this fashion, being a priest and doing philosophy, more or less like someone patting his head and rubbing his stomach simultaneously, but the Boston Irish hierarchy, lacking the refined flexibility for which their French and German counterparts were known, refused to allow it. When he tried to introduce Goodman=s writings to seminary students he had been assigned to teach, they cracked down on him and drove him from the Church. Like many other defrocked priests, he married a good Catholic girl named Helen Hennessy, who as Helen Hennessy Vendler went on to become one of America=s leading literary critics.

Money was a problem for most of us in graduate school, and even those who were fortunate enough to secure Teaching Fellowships were constantly up against it. My letters home are filled with detailed itemizations of my expenses and the bits of cash that I was able to lay my hands on. By this point, my parents were pretty comfortably fixed, inasmuch as my father was a high school principal and their monthly mortgage payment was still only \$29.27 a month, but I was determined to be financially independent, and considered it unreasonable to ask my parents for help. As a consequence, I was always on the lookout for odd jobs. Difficult as it will be for those who know me personally to credit, my most lucrative source of extra money came from serving as a male model. Here is how it happened.

When I was in school, my Aunt Rosabelle [my father=s baby sister] and my Uncle Anoch [an orthopedic surgeon] had a summer home in Brewster, New York, in addition to the house in

Jamaica that also served as my uncle's medical office. Their neighbor in Brewster was an artist named Arthur Lidov whose highly realistic paintings had on occasion appeared on the covers of *Scientific American*. Lidov fascinated me. He was a stocky man with a van Dyke beard who had gone to the University of Chicago during the glory days of Robert Maynard Hutchins, and like all graduates of Chicago, he exhibited a bookish love of ideas that I found irresistible. He and his wife Vickie became very close friends of my uncle and aunt, and served as courtesy aunt and uncle in turn to their three daughters, Miriam, Judith, and Ruth. His striking portrait of the three girls graced the dining room in Jamaica, taking on a memorial significance after Judy's tragic death in a riding accident.

Some years later, Arthur and Vickie broke up, and Vickie entered into a relationship with a commercial photographer, Walt Fischman. Vickie and Walt lived in Greenwich Village, where they came in my mind to exemplify the *avant garde* life. They took me to Chinatown and introduced me to the mysteries of chopsticks. It was in their apartment one evening that I first heard the exquisite old Dietrich Fischer-Diskau recording of Buxtehude's haunting motet, *Apperite Mihi Portas Justitiae*.@

Walt made his money from a how-to-fix-it column he wrote regularly for the *New York Daily News*, illustrated with photographs he took of projects in various stages of completion. He decided to do a column on re-upholstering an easy chair, and he wanted a nice looking pair of hands holding the upholstery tools. No faces, you understand, just hands. I wouldn't go so far as to say that my hands are my best feature, but they are not noticeably deformed or warty, so Walt offered me the job. I went down to their apartment for the day, posed holding various hammers and screwdrivers in a reasonable simulacrum of actual upholstery, and was paid the extraordinary sum of fifty dollars. This does not sound like much now, but it was well over a

month=s rent for me, for several hours of work made doubly pleasant by the opportunity to see Walt and Vickie. Over the next year and a half I posed several times for Walt. This was clearly a major step up from inventorying a Robert Hall clothing store.

All during that first year, I was steadily reading the scholarly secondary literature on Hume and Kant, in preparation for the moment when I would start writing my dissertation. I actually managed at one point to work my way through *Kants Lehre von der Doppelten Affektion Unseres Ich als Schlüssel zu Seiner Erkenntnistheorie*, by the great German Kant scholar Erich Adickes. My original plan was to spend the summer of 1956 drafting a twenty page thesis prospectus or outline, on the basis of which Aiken and Firth would examine me for two hours the following Fall, but as I tried to construct the outline, I kept finding myself putting down complete sentences on the page instead of headings and sub-headings, so I finally gave in to whatever inner need was impelling me, and began to write my dissertation.

There were typewriters in those days, of course, and perhaps even electric typewriters, though I never actually used one. But for something as important as my doctoral dissertation, I felt a need to use a pen and a pad of unlined paper. I would sit at the desk in my room, late at night, hunched over the pad, scrawling sentence after sentence. In the other room, Charlie would read Proust and Mann in the original B to brush up his French and German, he explained B or he would improve his Dutch so as to be able to study the constructivist mathematical theories of L. J. Brouwer.

This is a good a place to say something more about my roommate, for we spent a great deal of time together during the two years that we shared an apartment. Charlie had a nice sense of humor, and a razor sharp mind, but his upbringing and family experiences, I came to realize, had caused him a good deal of emotional damage, and he had a tendency to brood. From time to

time, as I was writing line after line of my dissertation, he would let out a little groan in the next room, and say, with something of a self-amused theatrical flair that nevertheless carried a tone of underlying seriousness, AOh, I am so wicked. Oh, I am so evil.@ Needless to say, this was rather unnerving for someone trying to grind out pages.

One story will give some sense of the burdens laid upon him by his parents. Our second year together, Charlie very kindly invited me to join his family for Thanksgiving dinner at their colonial Belmont home. When we arrived, we found that the party was to consist of his father, his mother, his older sister, Ann, an anthropologist who tragically committed suicide some years later, and his younger sister, Susan. Also present was his aunt. Before the meal, we sat in the living room and drank little glasses of elderberry wine that the family had made on their New Hampshire farm. This was in the days before yuppie rustication, and the farm was genuinely primitive, with no electricity and an outside privy.

A topic was proposed for discussion during the taking of the wine, and we entered into a lively debate, while papa sat in a corner with a pad and pen and wrote another book, nodding into the conversation from time to time without actually joining it. At issue was whether it would be immoral for the aunt to buy a new car before her present vehicle had entirely worn out. Strong views were offered pro and con, but in the end, a consensus was reached that this would indeed be immoral. At no time, I am happy to say, did the discussion descend to the level of considerations of prudence. It was all on a high moral plane.

Finally dinner was served. After we had seated ourselves around the table, Mrs. Parsons, who was herself a social scientist, turned to Ann and said, AAnn, would you bring in the potatoes, please?@ She then explained to me, as the guest, AIt is traditional in our family for the older daughter to bring in the potatoes.@ Next, she turned to Susan, and said, ASusan, would you

bring in the vegetables?@ Once again, she explained, AIn our family, it is traditional for the younger daughter to bring in the vegetables.@ Finally, she turned to her husband, and said, ATalcott, would you carve the turkey?@ Yet again, AIt is traditional in our family for the father to carve the turkey.@

At first, I was utterly mystified by these elaborate explanations, until, with a flash of methodological insight, I realized what was going on. This was a collection of intellectuals who had read in books that one of the latent functions of social rituals was to preserve the unity of kin structures. So they were deliberately, by the numbers as it were, reenacting a social ritual that they had self-consciously created in an effort to reinforce the ties that bound them. It was a textbook exercise, complete in every way save for any vestige of spontaneous feeling or manifest pleasure.

Professor Parsons proceeded to address the bird, a big, beautifully cooked production to which he applied a carefully sharpened carving knife. He made a series of passes that barely damaged the turkey, producing a neat stack of extremely thin slices. Each plate received one of them, together with a spoonful of the potatoes and the vegetables, a bit of stuffing, and a dollop of gravy. Then we dug in.

Coming as I do from a culture in which eating occupies pride of place among all the bodily functions, including sex, I inhaled my plate of food almost before the others had taken up their knives and forks, and looked around expectantly for seconds. But they were not to be. The turkey, still almost whole, was returned to the kitchen, and plates were ceremonially cleared, ready to be washed, though in my eyes they barely needed it.

Waste not, want not. After the Parsons family had stripped the turkey of its meat, a process that took some days, Charlie inherited the bones, which he then proceeded to attempt to

turn into turkey soup. The barren carcass must have boiled on our stove for hours before Charlie finally threw in the towel and added a can of Campbell=s turkey soup to the mix. We ate it for dinner.

Charlie=s principal academic virtue was, of course, his brilliance of mind, a quality that I came to value in our weekly meetings of the Kant Group. But as a sort of aside, he also seemed to manage to know everything. This was especially useful to someone like me who has a sieve for a mind. On days when I had sections to teach, I would sit at the breakfast table with my notes and ask Charlie, AWhen was Leibniz born?@ or AWhat was Descartes= first publication?@ Invariably, Charlie knew the answer. It was much easier than looking things up. In our circle of friends, Charlie became famous for this knack, and we developed our own theory of knowledge in response, the sole axiom of which was, AIf Charlie doesn=t know it, then you can stop looking, because it isn=t known.@

Charlie led a rather lonely life for the most part, but several months into our first year together, he developed a strong and very rewarding connection with a woman who was sharing an apartment with the woman I was seeing. He blossomed and came out of himself considerably, so that for a while, we actually double dated.

As the year wound to a close, I completed my reading of the secondary literature and began to write my doctoral dissertation. I had continued my undergraduate practice of working late into the night and sleeping in, though I had to pry myself out of bed on Thursday and Friday mornings to meet my discussion sections of Philosophy 1. As each day ended, I would compulsively count the words I had written and place a running total in parentheses in the text, at the end of the last paragraph of the day. I don=t mean that I *estimated* the number B eleven hundred, eight hundred, fourteen hundred and fifty. I *counted* each word, so the running tally

might read 5,631 or 9,442. I worried a great deal about how many words I was producing, but not at all about whether they were any good. In some obscure way that I do not really understand, this quirky habit seems to me to be connected with my equally strange competition with Barbara, which focused on how fast I was progressing rather than on how well I was doing.

There were no xerox machines in those days, and since I was writing, rather than typing, I could not make carbons of what I turned out each day. As a result, I lived in constant fear of somehow losing the sheets that contained the only record of my slowly unfolding dissertation. I began to develop the habit of carrying my dissertation around with me in my briefcase, so that even if there were a fire at 1134 Mass. Ave, I would be able to save it.

Quite often, I would take a break from writing in the middle of the night and go out for a cup of coffee. There were three all night cafeterias in Harvard Square at that time B Hayes Bickford=s, Albiani's, and the Waldorf Cafeteria. As an undergraduate, I had settled on Hayes Bickford=s as my turf, in part because it was just across Mass. Ave. from Matthews Hall in the Yard, where I had lived as a Freshman. It was in fact at Hayes Bick=s that I first learned to drink coffee, a fact that ruined me for good coffee for some time. The Bick was a Harvard institution, frequented by undergraduates as well as graduate students. It was a brightly lit, utilitarian place at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Dunster Street [I think – it is no longer there]. Plate glass windows on the street, metal tables and chairs, and a counter at the back where you could get the usual cafeteria fare.

Harvard in those days had a rather peculiar student culture, composed in equal parts of exhibitionism and studied indifference. When one student did something bizarre in an attempt to get noticed, everyone else would put on a game face and studiously pretend not to be impressed. One night, a Radcliffe undergraduate walked into the Bick with an iguana on her shoulder,

secured by a little leash. No one batted an eye. On another evening, a group of Final Club types in tails walked in, set down a linen table cloth and a pair of silver candelabra, laid out a complete formal setting of silver, and proceeded to have coffee and muffins. No one looked up. I tried turning a cartwheel on Massachusetts Avenue in full daylight, wearing the kilt I had purchased at the Edinburgh Festival B no one took any notice.

I would enter the Bick carrying my briefcase, and instead of setting it down at a table while I ordered my coffee, I would clutch it and juggle the coffee so as not to have to lose physical contact with my thesis. Like as not, I would run in to two of my fellow graduate students, Joe Ullian and Dudley Shapere, and we would spend a few moments consoling one another on the stresses of writing a doctoral dissertation.

Both Joe and Dudley were rather unusual. Joe was a logician, and actually collaborated with Quine somewhat later on, a considerable coup. His father was an engineer; his mother claimed to be the first woman ever to earn a doctorate in Economics at Harvard. Joe was a fanatic sports fan and record keeper. He attended hundreds of baseball and basketball games, sometimes flying to another city just to catch a game, and he kept complete box scores of every game he attended. He could actually tell you what a ball player was batting Afor him,@ by which he meant the player=s batting average for the games Joe had seen him play. I once went to Fenway with Joe, and he couldn=t sit in the same seat for more than an inning or two. Just as we had settled down in the left field stands he would jump up and insist that we move to short right, or behind home plate, or out to the bleachers. All the while, as we moved around, he would keep up a running commentary in a rasping, nasal voice laced with sardonic asides.

Dudley was a gaunt, sepulchral man with jet black hair and a long face rather like a Jolly Roger skull. He was a philosopher of science, a hot shot ping pong player, and during a stint in

the army, he had befriended the young Hugh Hefner, with the result that he had a courtesy gold key to the first Playboy Club.

When Dudley got engaged to Alfreda Bingham, he asked Joe and me to stand up for him at the wedding. Elfy and Dudley were as different as two people could be. She was slender, blond, pretty, and from a famous old upper crust Connecticut family. Her father, Alfred, had started the progressive magazine *Common Sense* in 1931. Her grandfather, Hiram Bingham, was descended from a seventeenth century Colonial American family. He was the discoverer of Machu Picchu, and later served in the United States Senate for eight years. Dudley was marrying royalty.

The Bingham family went in for large families. Hiram had sired seven children, all of whom had married and themselves produced many children. When Joe and I arrived at the Bingham compound, we were surrounded, not so say engulfed, by Bingham family. The compound was dominated by an authentic Japanese tea house that Hiram had brought back from his travels. He himself had died the previous year, but his widow presided over the large extended family, receiving graciously the raucous greetings of her scores of grandchildren.

This was my first encounter with the phenomenon of the WASP upper classes, and I was simultaneously charmed and apprehensive for Dudley. Everyone was engagingly friendly, quite prepared to include two strangers in their parties, swimming, dancing, and general merriment, but I had the distinct sense that if one married a Bingham, one gave up one's own identity and was simply absorbed into the collective. In a quite harmless, well-intentioned way, they were a bit like the Borg. The marriage lasted long enough for Elfy and Dudley to have a son and a daughter, but it broke up, and I lost touch with them both later on.

Writing all the while, and grading a summer school course for White to make a bit of

money, I still found time in the summer of 1956 to make my first and last theatrical appearance. The occasion was a production of John Gay=s great eighteenth century romp, *The Beggar=s Opera*, staged as part of a summer festival in Sanders Theater. Shirley Jones, of *Oklahoma* fame, had been signed up for Polly Peachum, and her new husband, Jack Cassidy, took the role of MacHeath. Daniel Pinkham arranged and wrote additional music and played harpsichord. A call went out for singers to serve as the pit chorus for the eight performances. Since the pay B one dollar per performance B did not draw a terribly distinguished group of applicants, I managed to make it past the audition. We were all fitted out with rags and fright wigs in order to appear as a mob of beggars jailed in debtor=s prison.

I have always loved the music, which consists of a lovely collection of songs that Gay adapted from Handel operas and popular tunes of the day. Cassidy was only so-so, although he sings better than Laurence Olivier did in the movie. Shirley Jones had a lovely soprano voice, and was very fetching as Polly. But the show was stolen by the basso who played her father. He was a great comic actor, as well as having a big, rich voice. Pinkham adapted a bravura Handel aria for him at the last moment to take advantage of his talents. What impressed me most was the enormous belch, clearly audible in the last row of the theater, with which he began the first act as the curtain went up.

By the end of the summer, I had written a hundred pages, consisting of most of my new interpretation of the *Treatise*. I submitted it to my committee and prepared to defend it in an oral examination. The practice of having students make a preliminary defense of a portion of the dissertation was new, having just been substituted for the older practice of requiring students to take an oral examination on some general field in Philosophy. The idea was to move students along somewhat faster, so that there wouldn=t be so many seventh, eighth, and ninth year

graduate students who had still not finished up.

As soon as the oral exam started, it was clear that there was going to be trouble. Aiken led off with some questions about Hume, and perhaps recalling our passage at arms five years earlier, he challenged my reading of a central passage in Book I of the *Treatise*. I responded by opening the book to the passage and reading it out, reiterating my interpretation. Aiken said that that was not what Hume had said. I insisted it was, and read the passage out again. Aiken said I was wrong. By now, I was getting steamed, and I jumped up, wrote the passage out on the blackboard, and pointed at it, virtually shouting, "There it is! Look at it! Do you see the words on the blackboard? That is what Hume wrote!"

It went on this way for an hour and forty-five minutes, while Firth shrank farther and farther back in his chair. Finally, Aiken subsided, and Firth asked fifteen minutes of desultory questions about Kant. I was asked to wait outside in the hall while the two of them conferred on my grade. The door opened, and Aiken said, rather sullenly, "Well, Bob, it is a pass, but it is not a distinguished pass." Then he walked off, leaving me utterly traumatized.

News of the fiasco must have circulated pretty quickly around the department, for two days later, White, now chairman, called me into his office. "Look, Bob," he said in a kindly avuncular tone, "I think you need to view Professor Aiken as an obstacle on the way to the degree, not as the audience for your dissertation. If you have to alter something in the thesis, or adjust your views somewhat, you shouldn't feel badly about it. You should just do it so that you can finish up." At the time, I did not realize how extraordinary this advice was, nor what a breach of academic decorum it was for White to talk this way to a student about another professor.

I had no intention of altering a word in my dissertation, regardless of what Aiken thought,

but that was a rather risky course of action, because a significant number of doctoral dissertations in Philosophy were actually turned down at the final oral defense, after the candidate had gone to the expense of having it typed up formally for submission. Only years later did I discover that the general practice in the Academy was quite different.

At every other university I have ever known, the candidate submits each chapter to the director as it is written, for comments, criticisms, and suggested revisions. Only when the director is ready to judge the entire dissertation as satisfactory is it typed up, submitted to the rest of the committee, and defended publicly. If a dissertation makes it all the way to the oral defense and is then rejected, that is as much a judgment against the director as against the candidate. But Harvard regularly permitted doctoral students to submit dissertations that no faculty member had vetted. Indeed, Firth actually considered it *inappropriate* for him to read a student's thesis before it was submitted. He thought that if he read a dissertation and told the student to go ahead and submit it for defense, he would thereby have compromised his objectivity and would no longer be free to vote against it at the oral. I would estimate that fully half of all the philosophy dissertations that came to the oral defense were rejected, so that the student had to go back and rewrite, hoping to make it through the next time.

People clearly remembered the story of my violent clash with Aiken at the preliminary oral, for when the time came for me to defend the entire dissertation later that next Spring, every single member of the department showed up, an unheard of deviation from the customary practice. Demos began the questioning. >Tell me, Mr. Wolff,@ he asked, Awhat got you interested in philosophy?@ The questions continued at roughly that level of difficulty for an uneventful two hours, until, with a collective sigh of relief, the faculty declared that I had defended my dissertation satisfactorily, and voted to award me the degree.

Not too long after the fight with Aiken, an entirely extraneous matter arose, one that I had long anticipated and viewed with considerable apprehension. I received a letter from the local draft board in Queens, ordering me to report for a physical, mental, and moral examination to determine my fitness to serve in the Armed Forces. I was about to be drafted.

A few words of explanation are required for those who have grown up in the era of the all-volunteer army. In the >50s, the Army was still filling its ranks with men drafted under the Selective Service system. Each man who was judged fit to serve could be drafted for two years of active duty in the Army, to be followed by three years in the Army Reserve. Young men were required to register with the Selective Service system when they turned eighteen, and were then eligible to be drafted until they were twenty-six. It was possible to get a 2-S student deferment if one was a full-time student in good standing, but once a man had received a student deferment, he was eligible to be drafted until the age of thirty-five. But the Army really had no interest in drafting men in their late twenties and early thirties. They were more trouble than they were worth. So in practice, if you got a student deferment, and managed to stay in school, renewing it year after year, until your twenty-sixth birthday, you were effectively home free.

This was the moment when my manic race to overtake my sister caught up with me. I had never needed a student deferment, because the Army, working its way down from older to younger eligible men, was tapping the twenty-two and twenty-three year olds for the draft. Since I was planning to finish up the next Spring, when I would be twenty-three, it was clear I would have to serve.

I passed the mental portion of the exam without trouble B it was little more than a test of basic literacy, and I would have had a hard time convincing the examining sergeant that a doctoral student at Harvard was not adequately literate for the Army, even if I had wanted to. I also got

past the physical, despite a letter from the doctor who had treated me for childhood asthma [adult asthma would in fact have gotten me out of serving] and a letter from Dr. Schaffner concerning my adolescent emotional problems [the Army was rather more broad-minded about these matters than Swarthmore College, and besides, considering their line of work, they did not consider fears of death irrational.] But I ran into difficulty on the moral portion of the test.

This was actually a cursory security check, consisting of a series of questions keyed to a copy of the Attorney General's List of subversive organizations. Have you ever belonged to any of the following organizations? Have you ever had any business dealings with any of the following organizations? Have you ever attended a meeting of one of the following organizations? Have you ever attended a public function sponsored by one of the following organizations? And so forth. I looked over the immensely long list. The Communist Party of the United States was prominently featured, but also included were obscure organizations that I had never heard of. Then my eye caught AYD B the American Youth for Democracy. I remembered that I had attended a Town Hall Pete Seeger concert sponsored by AYD [or maybe it was YPA B Young Progressives of America B I could never keep them straight.] So I checked the Ayes@ box next to that one.

Right in the middle of the mental test, which came next, a sergeant strode into the room where we were filling out the forms and in a parade ground voice shouted, AWolff, Robert P.@ I was pulled out of the room and asked a series of questions. A week later, two FBI agents in suits and ties showed up at 1134 Mass. Ave. and spent an hour quizzing me. They returned a week later, claiming rather implausibly that they had lost their notes, and asked me the same questions all over again, presumably to see whether I would tell the same story.

Eventually, the Army, in its infinite wisdom, decided that attendance at a Pete Seeger

concert did not make me entirely unfit for duty, although it must have raised some doubts about the extent to which I would be able to bond with my fellow recruits to achieve a militarily desirable level of unit cohesion. But along the way to this resolution of the matter, I was temporarily re-classified 4-F, and I am rather ashamed to report that this elicited from me a rather craven response. Here it is in its entirety:

1134 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge 38, Mass.

15 March, 1957

Selective Service System
Local Board #66
39-01 Main Street
Flushing, N. Y.

Sirs:

I have received official notification of the change in my classification to 4F. At present I do not know the reasons for that alteration, but the fact that I underwent a security investigation leads me to believe that the outcome of the investigation may have influenced the decision of the board. If this is the case, I should like to file a formal notice of appeal with you. I am, and have always been, a loyal citizen of the United States, and I am ready to serve my country in the Armed Forces, or in any other way that my government shall deem fit. Thank you.

Yours truly,

Robert Paul Wolff

S.S. No. 50-66-33-742

The draft board responded by informing me *both* that there was no right of appeal to a classification of 4-F, *and* that I had been re-classified 1-A. Those who have come to know me in later years as a defender of the anarchist position that no organized government is morally legitimate may well take this as clear evidence of clay feet.

Once it became clear that I would meet the April 1 thesis submission deadline for those

who wished to receive the degree at the June Commencement, I began to worry about what I would do once I had the degree in hand. The obvious answer was a teaching position at a college or university, and I asked White and Firth to put me in for such jobs as might open up. But I had been having doubts for years about an academic career, even toying with the idea of law school, and I made one effort to see whether I might be suited for something else. Through the Harvard Placement Bureau, I arranged an interview with the top-secret National Security Agency.

I was sent to a room in a downtown Boston office building. There was no name on the door, and when I entered, I found a room completely barren save for a desk and a man in a chair behind it. He asked me some questions about my education and language skills, and then asked what my eyeglass prescription was. When I replied 20/400, he shook his head. If my eyes were somewhat better, he could arrange a reserve commission in the Army for me, thereby enabling me to avoid active duty, but I was too near-sighted.

With that, he terminated the interview and had me sign a piece of paper swearing that I would never reveal what had occurred in the course of the interview. Inasmuch as nothing *had* occurred, I was rather mystified, but I signed anyway. Then I got up and walked to the door to leave. As I opened the door, I had the eerie feeling that if I were to spin about abruptly, I would find that the desk, the chair, and the man had disappeared.

A teaching job it would have to be.

Nowadays, after decades of fair employment practices laws and Civil Rights and feminist protests, the academic marketplace is governed by an elaborate system of rules designed to give every aspiring young would-be professor an equal chance to present his or her credentials for consideration. In a field like Philosophy, all available positions, even at the most prestigious schools, are listed in a publication of the American Philosophical Association called *Jobs for*

Philosophers. There are strict deadlines for the submission of applications, and the initial review of the applicant pool is followed by personal interviews at the annual professional meetings. At my own university, which is punctilious about such matters, an essential step in the announcement of an opening is a meeting with the Associate Chancellor for Equal Opportunity, who then reviews the steps the department must take to insure an absolutely fair and transparent process. Even though the current holder of that position is the Chair of my own department, we were required to meet with her before announcing an opening last year.

None of this was even contemplated by visionary reformers in 1957. The old boy network was not merely alive and well; it was the only mechanism for placing new Ph. D.=s in entry-level teaching positions. When a department had an opening, the Chair would write to the handful of graduate departments known to be turning out philosophers, and would ask whether they had anyone suitable at the moment. A few phone calls or a note to a friend would lead to an interview, and the young aspirant would be placed. It was easy, efficient, comfortable, and thoroughly unfair.

Despite my passages at arms with Henry Aiken, I had been doing well at Harvard, and my protector, Morton White, indicated that he thought I would have no trouble finding a good job. I didn=t make up a *vita*, solicit letters, or mail out my dossier. I simply waited for the department to nominate me wherever they thought I would be a suitable candidate. And nominate me they did. My name was put in at Amherst College, at Duke University, at Wayne State University, and at many other schools whose names I cannot now call up. I traveled out to Amherst to be interviewed by Joe Epstein. I had an interview with George Nakhnikian of Wayne State while sitting on a bar stool. I was very definitely in play. Indeed, White told me he thought I would, in the end, have my choice of several jobs.

But nothing happened. One after another, the schools where my name had been put in let me know that they were not interested. As the Spring of 1957 progressed, I submitted my dissertation, defended it, taught my sections of Philosophy 1, and waited. Finally, I went to see White, in despair, and asked him to level with me. "This is my career," I said, "and it is ending before it has even begun. Is there something I don't know that is blocking me from getting a job? Is it my facial twitches? Has someone written a letter for me that has killed my chances?" White insisted that he was as mystified as I. He could not understand why I was not getting any play from the schools where my name had been put in, and he reiterated that he thought I should have a choice of positions.

In the end, White was right, though not quite in the way he imagined. He did *his* part. He called together a meeting of what I have always described in my mind as the Jewish Mafia: White himself; Burton Dreben, a logician, Quine student, and former Junior Fellow, who was now an Assistant Professor in the Department; and Marvin Fox, then a member of the Ohio State department. I wasn't there, of course, but as I understand it, White said to them, in effect, "This is a nice Jewish boy. We have to find something for him."

Finally, two weeks into May, I received *two* job offers on the same day. The first was a telegram from Ohio State, offering me an Instructorship with twelve hours of teaching a week at a salary of \$4,800 a year. The second was a letter from the President of the United States, that began "Greeting: You are ordered to report for induction into the Armed Forces of the United States, and to report at Joint Examination and Induction Station, 39 Whitehall Street, N. Y. C., at 7:30 a.m., on the 27th of May, 1957 (Rear Entrance)." Over the years, I have joked about this fiasco to my students, saying that after carefully weighing the two offers, I decided that the President's had better future prospects, and so I turned down the Ohio State job. But the truth

is that when I finally came to it, I did not want to serve.

My reluctance was not motivated by a principled opposition to American military policy, nor by a fear of combat. Nineteen fifty-seven was a peaceful time in America, four years after the end of the Korean War and six years before the first Advisors[@] were dispatched by John Kennedy to Viet Nam. I simply thought that two years as a Private would be a monumental waste of time.

My first problem was to figure out some way to graduate. Harvard held its Commencements in June, and my induction date was May 27th. I petitioned my draft board to postpone my induction until after June 12th, so that I could receive my degree, and they agreed, re-classifying me 1-S-C until June 15, 1957. They turned down my request for a one-year deferment to allow me to take up the Ohio State job.

By now, with my dissertation approved and classes about over, there was nothing to do but hang out at Tullas, a coffee house on Mt. Auburn Street that had become a favorite haunt of amateur folk singers and graduate students. I was sitting there one evening, complaining about having to go off to the Army for two years, when Henry Nunberg asked me why I didn't join the National Guard. Then I would only lose six months. Since I had, as a back-up plan, applied for, and had been awarded, a Social Science Research Council post-doctoral fellowship to study political theory, I could postpone the fellowship for six months and have something waiting for me when I came off active duty. ABut I can't join the Guard,[@] I replied. AI have been drafted. You can't join the Guard if you have been drafted.[@] I pulled out the letter I had received from the draft board, granting me the delay so that I could graduate, but indicating that I would have to go as soon as the Commencement was over. Nunberg studied the letter, and then pointed out that the board had *canceled* the order of induction; they had not *postponed* it. Technically, he

said, I did not stand under an order of induction, regardless of what I and they knew they intended to do.

The very next day, I took the T to Central Square, found my way to the Guard Armory, and took an oath to defend Massachusetts from its enemies, foreign and domestic [which I interpreted to mean Connecticut.]. I was now a member of the Massachusetts National Guard, serial number NG 21-26-81-21.

On June 12, 1957, I marched in the Harvard Commencement, wearing the beautiful silk crimson doctoral robe that my parents had given to me as a graduation present. Charlie and I then closed down our apartment. He had been awarded a Junior Fellowship, and was moving to his rooms in Lowell House. He began a meticulous division of the kitchen crockery and utensils, but I told him with a wave of the hand to keep them. I put my books in storage, and waited for my induction date, meanwhile attending Tuesday evening meetings of the Guard, even though I did not yet have a uniform. On July 7th, I boarded a bus with a group of other Guard recruits for the drive to Fort Dix, New Jersey, where we would all go through Basic Training.