

(ZEN AND THE ART OF) POST-MODERN PHILOSOPHY: A PARTIALLY INTERPRETED MODEL ¹

Monk: "Master, if a tree falling in the forest is heard by no one, does it make a sound?"
Master: "I know of no such tree."
Monk: "Yet, given such a tree, must it not either make a sound or fail to do so?"
Master: "Such, perhaps, is your choice."
Monk: "And what is your choice, Master?"
Master: "Why must you insist I choose?" ²

What follows may well be labeled a philosophical essay. I consider it to be a prose poem. You, the reader, may name it prose or poem, noun or verb, stone or setting, as you wish. ³

Many years have passed since Hilary Putnam first asked us to suppose ourselves to be "brains in a vat." ⁴ According to Putnam, we in no way appear to ourselves to be in a vat because we are subjected to a collective hallucination imposed upon us by an evil scientist who has so obliterated our memories that we are unable to recall

¹ Analysis, analytic philosophy, the analytic paradigm – these terms are used interchangeably herein to refer to that cluster of metaphilosophical methods which collectively define modern philosophy, a methodology logically implied by those theories of reality which take the world to be a single great analyzable complex. Such theories share a single assumption, that of a demonstrable isomorphism between language and the world, and a single ultimate methodological concern, that of clarifying the fundamental structure of language. ^{1.1} Historically, the analytic agenda has manifested itself most overtly in logical positivism's search for a systematic presentation of the syntax of the ideal language; and, the failure of positivism may be taken to have signaled the logical closure (if not the actual end) of the analytic paradigm. Today, nearly a century after the fall of positivism, a new generation of philosophers continues the search for alternative paradigms, while philosophy itself continues to muddle in the ruins of the old.

² Cf., "But if someone were to say 'So logic too is an empirical science' he would be wrong. Yet this is right: the same proposition may get treated at one time as something to test by experience, at another as a rule of testing." (Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* [1969]. ^{2.1})

³ The present work consists of at least two distinct narrative threads. The first of these dominates the text proper and extends into the footnotes, while the second, a set of formalized fragments elucidating or commenting on selected elements of the dominant thread, is **bolded** and limited almost exclusively to the footnotes. These two, intertwined threads are comprised of at least seven discrete *levels* of discourse, beginning with the text proper and continuing through the six levels of footnotes beneath it. Finally, a series of bolded, bracketed, numerical citations (e.g., '[10]'), located exclusively in the work's closing pages, reference entries in the attached "**APPENDIX**", making it possible for the reader to explore what might be treated as a third narrative thread, another level of discourse or, perhaps, merely an odd, subterranean commentary on the present work. ^{3.1}

⁴ See, "Brains in a vat", in Putnam's *Reason, Truth and History* (1981).

^{1.1} The earliest assertion of such an isomorphism within the generally accepted boundaries of the Western tradition is found in Plato's *Cratylus*, written in the 4th century B.C.E., wherein Socrates, here serving as Plato's mouthpiece, states that "a name is an imitation, just as a painting or portrait is." Much later, in his posthumously published *Ethics* (1677), Baruch de Spinoza maintained that "[t]he order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things." And, more recently, in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, first published in 1921, Ludwig Wittgenstein proclaimed that "[a] proposition is a picture of reality. ¶ A proposition is a model of reality as we think it is." (Tractatus 4.01.) Although the first of Wittgenstein's above-quoted statements fails, at least as it is intended in the *Tractatus*, the second has yet to be seriously challenged.

^{2.1} Wittgenstein drafted the individual notes comprising *On Certainty* over the eighteen-month period immediately preceding his death, making the last such entry just two days prior to his passing on April 29, 1951. Accordingly, subsequent citations herein date the work to 1951.

^{3.1} A note toward deconstruction: the text proper can be read without reference to either the formalized fragments or the footnotes and should be the sole focus of a first reading, leaving incorporation of the footnotes in their various levels for a second, the formalized fragments for a third, and the bolded, bracketed cross-references to the **Appendix** for a fourth.

any life but that of the vat. Thus, we not only seem to ourselves to be as we ‘actually’ are, we seem so to others as well. That is, the hallucination we are to suppose has been imposed upon us is that of the ‘external’ world; and now, of course, the question is whether we can ever be certain this supposition is not, in fact, so.⁵

Putnam’s answer is that we *can* be certain. He points out that if I *am* a brain-in-a-vat the proposition ‘There is a tree in front of me’ when uttered by me does not refer to an actual tree but to a tree “in the image.” That is to say, the statement is framed in “vat-English” and is true (in vat-English) if and only if I am presented with an *image of a tree*. The fact that there is no ‘real’ tree in front of me has no bearing on the truth-value of the

⁵ **The present work outlines an epistemological framework coalesced out of the West’s slowly evolving understandings of such concepts as the observer,^{5.1} the reality observed,^{5.2} and the symbol or sign,^{5.3} and of the interwoven relations among these three.^{5.4} Accordingly, the question of whether we are, in fact, brains-in-a-vat is, as treated herein, only *secondarily* a metaphysical question.**

^{5.1} See, e.g., as to ‘**the observer**’, the historical arc beginning with the Cartesian Cogito, i.e., “*Cogito ergo sum*”, or, “*I think, therefore I am*” (Rene Descartes, “*Discourse on Method*” [1637]), and continuing on to “[the self is merely] a bundle or collection of different perceptions which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement” (David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* [1739]), then to “[t]he subject who knows cannot be known precisely as such, otherwise he would be known by another subject” (Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea II* [1844]), and, finally, to both “*I is another*” (Arthur Rimbaud, in correspondence [1871]) and “[t]he I in solipsism shrinks to an extensionless point and there remains the reality co-ordinated with it” (Tractatus 5.64 [1921]).

^{5.2} As to ‘**the reality observed**’: “[I]n common talk, the objects of our senses are not termed ideas but rather things. Call them so still: provided you do not attribute to them any absolute external existence. . . . ¶ I am not for changing things into ideas, but rather ideas into things; since those immediate objects of perception, which according to you, are only appearances of things, I take to be the real things themselves” (George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous in Opposition to Sceptics and Atheists* [1713]); “Physical objects are conceptually imported into the situation as convenient intermediaries – not by definition in terms of experience, but simply as irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer. . . . [I]n point of epistemological footing, the physical objects and the gods differ only in degree not in kind. Both sorts of entities enter our conceptions only as cultural posits.” (Willard Van Orman Quine, “*Two Dogmas of Empiricism*” [1951]).

^{5.3} As to ‘**the symbol or sign**’: “The world is the totality of facts. . . . ¶ We make to ourselves pictures of facts. . . . ¶ That the elements of the picture are combined with one another in a definite way, represents that the things are so combined with one another. . . . Thus the picture is linked with reality; it reaches up to it” (the early Wittgenstein, in the Tractatus 1.1, 2.1, 2.15, and 2.1511 [1921]); “The mistake we are liable to make could be expressed thus: We are looking for the use of a sign, but we look for it as though it were an object co-existing with the sign. . . . ¶ [But] [t]he sign (the sentence) gets its significance from the system of signs, from the language to which it belongs. . . . ¶ [O]ne is tempted to imagine that which gives the sentence life as something in an occult sphere, accompanying the sentence. But whatever accompanied it would for us just be another sign” (the later Wittgenstein, in *The Blue Book* [1934]); “It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid” (the last Wittgenstein, in *On Certainty* [1951]).

^{5.4} And, as to ‘**the interwoven relations among them**’: “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (Tractatus 5.6 [1921]); “The fact of the matter is that the ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same worlds with different labels attached” (Benjamin Lee Whorf, “*Science and Linguistics*” [1940]); “One often hears that successive [scientific] theories grow ever closer to, or approximate more and more closely to, the truth. Apparently, generalizations like that refer not to the puzzle-solutions and the concrete predictions derived from a theory but rather to its ontology, to the match, that is, between the entities with which the theory populates nature and what is ‘really there.’ . . . ¶ Perhaps there is some other way of salvaging the notion of ‘truth’ for application to whole theories, but this one will not do. There is, I think, no theory-independent way to reconstruct phrases like ‘really there’; the notion of a match between the ontology of a theory and its ‘real’ counterpart in nature now seems to me illusive in principle” (Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* [1962]).

vat-English proposition.⁶ By the same reasoning, Putnam concludes that in vat-English the term ‘vat’ refers not to external world vats but to vats in-the-image. Consequently, the thought experiment’s foundational supposition, my statement that I am a brain-in-a-vat, is (if true) framed not in English but in vat-English; and, according to Putnam’s analysis, the truth-conditions of this vat-English proposition could be satisfied only if it were to appear to me (from the perspective of the vat) that I *am* a brain-in-a-vat. However, it does *not* appear to me that I am a brain-in-a-vat.⁷ Rather, it appears that I possess a physical body, whole and complete, with a full array of sensory

⁶ “[W]hen the brain in a vat (in the world where every sentient being is and always was a brain in a vat) thinks ‘There is a tree in front of me’, his thought does not refer to actual trees. On some theories that we shall discuss it might refer to trees in the image, or to the electronic impulses that cause tree experiences, or to the features of the program that are responsible for those electronic impulses. These theories are not ruled out by what was just said, for there is a close causal connection between the use of the word ‘tree’ in vat-English and the presence of trees in the image, the presence of electronic impulses of a certain kind, and the presence of certain features in the machine’s program. On these theories the brain is *right*, not *wrong* in thinking ‘There is a tree in front of me.’ Given what ‘tree’ refers to in vat-English and what ‘in front of’ refers to, assuming one of these theories is correct, then the truth-conditions for ‘There is a tree in front of me’ when it occurs in vat-English are simply that a tree in the image be ‘in front of’ the ‘me’ in question – in the image – or, perhaps, that the kind of electronic impulse that normally produces this experience be coming from the automatic machinery, or, perhaps, that the feature of the machinery that is supposed to produce the ‘tree in front of one’ experience be operating. And these truth-conditions are certainly fulfilled.” (*Reason, Truth and History*.)

⁷ “By the same argument, ‘vat’ refers to vats in the image in vat-English, or something related (electronic impulses or program features), but certainly not to real vats, since the use of ‘vat’ in vat-English has no causal connection to real vats (apart from the connection that the brains in a vat wouldn’t be able to use the word ‘vat’, if it were not for the presence of one particular vat – the vat they are in; but this connection obtains between the use of *every* word in vat-English and that one particular vat; it is not a special connection between the use of the *particular* word ‘vat’ and vats). Similarly, ‘nutrient fluid’ refers to a liquid in the image in vat-English, or something related (electronic impulses or program features). It follows that if their ‘possible world’ is really the actual one, and we are really the brains in a vat, then what we now mean by ‘we are brains in a vat’ is that *we are brains in a vat in the image* or something of that kind (if we mean anything at all).” (*Reason, Truth and History*.)

contacts with the external world. Putnam, thus, concludes that the supposition that we are brains in a vat is not only false, it is *necessarily* so.⁸

Putnam's argument rests on the claim that – in order for 'vat' to refer to the vat in which I am attempting to suppose that I reside – the supposition itself would have to be false, since (according to Putnam) the term could so refer *only* if I were not residing in such a vat. This claim, however, rests on a 'causal' theory of reference, which theories are problematically reliant on a *de facto* endorsement of logical positivism's (in)famous

⁸ "[W]e aren't brains in a vat in the image (i.e. what we are 'hallucinating' isn't that we are brains in a vat). So, if we are brains in a vat, then the sentence 'We are brains in a vat' says something false (if it says anything). In short, if we are brains in a vat, then 'We are brains in a vat' is false. So, it is (necessarily) false." ^{8.1} (*Reason, Truth and History*.)

^{8.1} A statement may be asserted to be necessarily false on a variety of grounds. According to Putnam, the supposition that we are brains-in-a-vat is necessarily false because it is, in a specific way, self-refuting: "A 'self-refuting supposition' is one whose truth implies its own falsity. For example, consider the thesis that all general statements are false. This is a general statement. So if it is true, then it must be false. Hence, it is false. Sometimes a thesis is called 'self-refuting' if it is the supposition that the thesis is entertained or enunciated that implies its falsity. For example, 'I do not exist' is self-refuting if thought by me (for any 'me'). So one can be certain that one oneself exists, if one thinks about it (as Descartes argued). ¶ What I shall show is that the supposition that we are brains in a vat has just this property. If we can consider whether it is true or false, then it is not true (I shall show). Hence it is not true." ^{8.11} (*Reason, Truth and History*.)

^{8.11} Setting aside the question of whether Putnam's analyses are correct even *within* the limitations of his stated framework, alternative frameworks *are* available. Thus, for example, on the **p system** analysis discussed below, even the general statement 'all general statements are false' would not, in at least certain instances of its use, be considered to be necessarily false. Rather, it would be treated as a **metaⁿ-p** statement uttered with reference to general statements contained within one or more lower-order systems, i.e., within **metaⁿ⁻¹-p systems** and below. ^{8.111} (See further, footnote 24, below.)

^{8.111} This preclusion of self-reference also means that the liar paradox and its structural analogs cannot be coherently posed within the version of the **p system** framework employed herein. ^{8.1111} This is not to say that the present text includes a solution to the liar paradox. It does not. But not every paradox need be treated on each occasion of its acquaintance as a puzzle to be solved, and not every paradox impacts equally each and every philosophical explanation in which it might be encountered.

^{8.1111} Thus, consider the statements 'The following statement is true' and 'The preceding statement is false'. Let us call the first of these 'x₁' and the second 'x₂'. Within the **p system** framework employed herein, x₁ may be true only if it is a member of a **p system** 'higher' than that **p system** of which x₂ is a member. In that event, however, x₂ does not and cannot refer to x₁ at all, since the **p system** framework employed herein does not permit propositions of a given **p system** to refer to propositions which are members of a higher-order **p system**. That is, if x₁ successfully refers to x₂, then x₂ does not and cannot successfully refer to x₁. Moreover, an analogous breakdown occurs if, as with one's first encounter with an M.C. Escher print, one begins one's analysis from the other end, starting with x₂ rather than x₁.

verifiability principle,⁹ which in its strongest forms, at least, may be taken as holding that only empirically verifiable

⁹“The supposition that such a possibility [i.e., that we are, in fact, brains in a vat] makes sense arises from a combination of two errors: (1) taking *physical possibility* too seriously; and (2) unconsciously operating with a magical theory of reference, a theory on which certain mental representations necessarily refer to certain external things and kinds of things. ^{9.1} ¶ There is a ‘physically possible world’ in which we are brains in a vat – what does this mean except that there is a *description* of such a state of affairs which is compatible with the laws of physics? Just as there is a tendency in our culture (and has been since the seventeenth century) to take *physics* as our metaphysics, that is, to view the exact sciences as the long-sought description of the ‘true and ultimate furniture of the universe’, so there is, as an immediate consequence, a tendency to take ‘physical possibility’ as the very touchstone of what might really actually be the case. Truth is physical truth; possibility physical possibility; and necessity physical necessity, on such a view. But we have just seen, if only in the case of a very contrived example so far, that this view is wrong. ^{9.2} The existence of a ‘physically possible world’ in which we are brains in a vat (and always were and will be) does not mean that we might really, actually, possibly *be* brains in a vat. What rules out this possibility is not physics but *philosophy*. ¶ Some philosophers, eager both to assert and minimize the claims of their profession at the same time (the typical mind of Anglo-American philosophy in the twentieth century), would say: ‘Sure. You have shown that some things that seem to be physical possibilities are really *conceptual* impossibilities. What’s so surprising about that?’ ¶ Well, to be sure, my argument can be described as a ‘conceptual’ one. But to describe philosophical activity as the search for ‘conceptual’ truths makes it all sound like *inquiry about the meaning of words*. And that is not at all what we have been engaging in. ¶ What we have been doing is considering the *preconditions* for *thinking about, representing, referring to*, etc. We have investigated these preconditions *not* by investigating the meaning of these words and phrases (as a linguist might, for example) but by *reasoning a priori*. Not in the old ‘absolute’ sense (since we don’t claim that magical theories of reference are *a priori* wrong), but in the sense of inquiring into what is *reasonably possible assuming* certain general premisses, or making certain very broad theoretical assumptions. ^{9.3} Such a procedure is neither ‘empirical’ nor quite ‘a priori’, but has elements of both ways of investigating. In spite of the fallibility of my procedure, and its dependence upon assumptions which might be described as ‘empirical’ (e.g. the assumption that the mind has no access to external things or properties apart from that provided by the senses), my procedure has a close relation to what Kant called a ‘transcendental’ investigation; for it is an investigation, I repeat, of the *preconditions* of reference and hence of thought[.]” ^{9.4} (*Reason, Truth and History*.)

^{9.1} To be clear, it is not the element of necessity in the so-called magical theories of reference that Putnam finds most problematic but, rather, the absence of the element of causality: “One of the premisses of the argument is obvious: that magical theories of reference are wrong, wrong for mental representations and not only for physical ones. The other premiss is that one cannot refer to certain kinds of things, e.g. trees, if one has no causal interaction with them, or with things in terms of which they can be described.” (*Reason, Truth and History*.) However, Putnam’s injunction against taking physical possibility ‘too seriously’ is misleading, in that it seems to incline him to believe that by de-emphasizing physical possibility while simultaneously decrying magical theories of reference he can somehow thread the unthreadable needle. But what is ‘causal’ supposed to mean in this setting, if not something which would imply some version or another of the verifiability principle?

^{9.2} It is wrong, though Putnam has not demonstrated it to be so via his brains-in-a-vat thought experiment. He is completely correct, however, in his insistence that philosophy is more than science’s wretched stepsister.

^{9.3} Putnam’s announcement that what he is seeking to establish is merely that it is not ‘reasonably possible’ we might be brains in a vat is in some ways akin to Descartes’ attempt, in the wake of the Cogito, to reconstruct the external world on the shaky foundation of the statement ‘God is no deceiver’. In neither instance does the ‘explanation’ further its stated purpose. In the case of the Cogito, one cannot (at that stage of the analysis, at least) shore up a dubitable assertion by simply inserting beneath it an even more dubitable assertion. In either instance, one may justifiably feel the philosopher has somehow missed the full implications of his own argument. With Descartes, the matter can be resolved by simply ignoring the flimsy, after-the-fact, reconstructive argument (which some consider nothing more than political camouflage, anyway). ^{9.31} The situation with Putnam, however, is more complex. (See, footnote 32.3, below.)

^{9.4} Again, Putnam’s arguments and conclusions as to such ‘preconditions’ are inextricably bound up with his ‘causal’ theory of reference, which itself cannot be explicated in a way so as not to import into his argument one or another version of positivism’s verifiability principle.

^{9.31} The greatest significance of the Cogito lies in its conclusive demonstration of the fact that the power of our critical tools so far outstrips that of every other tool at our disposal as to necessitate, for any who would not be forced into an absolute scepticism, the adoption of one or more **fundamental propositions** (each of which must originate in a vision, intuition, or understanding, a leap of faith, or an arbitrary assignment), on the basis of which we must all, philosophers and non-philosophers alike, construct our worlds. Whether any given instance of such adoption is properly treated as philosophically legitimate depends on the use to which the adopted proposition is put, i.e., on the role it plays in a person’s life.

statements are cognitively meaningful.¹⁰

¹⁰ Beginning in the late 1920s, and arguing largely on the basis of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, the logical positivists maintained that appropriately strict applications of the verifiability principle demonstrate the impossibility of metaphysics and that empirical science is, accordingly, the only method by which we can gain knowledge of the world. However, it was subsequently determined that strict application of the principle as effectively demonstrates the meaninglessness of various propositions essential to the establishment of empirical science as it does those of metaphysics.^{10.1} Thus, the later history of positivism became the story of a series of retreats and failed retrenchments behind successively weaker versions of the principle.^{10.2} The fall of positivism completed the principle's slide into disrepute; and, it is now considered by many to be invalid in all its forms. In point of problematic fact, the verifiability principle remains one of critical philosophy's most indispensable tools.^{10.3}

^{10.1} *The following comment regarding the verifiability principle, from A.J. Ayer's Language, Truth & Logic (1935), is indicative of both the positivists' aims and the problems they encountered in implementing them: "[I]f we accept conclusive verifiability as our criterion of significance, as some positivists have proposed, our argument will prove too much. Consider, for example, the case of general propositions of law – such propositions, namely, as 'arsenic is poisonous'; 'all men are mortal'; 'a body tends to expand when it is heated.' It is of the very nature of these propositions that their truth cannot be established with certainty by any finite series of observations."*^{10.11}

^{10.2} *By the late 1940s, logical positivism had largely run its course, with every attempt to salvage any version of either a verifiability or a falsifiability principle sufficiently strong to further positivism's goals having seemingly failed. Accordingly, in a short paper published in 1950, Carl Hempel sought to chart a new way forward for the empiricist movement more broadly, locating the failure of positivism in its reliance on natural language as the starting point for its analysis: "[A]s long as we try to set up a criterion of testability for individual sentences in a natural language, in terms of logical relationship to observation sentences, the result will be either too restrictive or too inclusive, or both. . . . ¶ The predicament would not arise, of course, in an artificial language whose vocabulary and grammar were so chosen as to preclude altogether the possibility of forming sentences of any kind which the empiricist meaning criterion is intended to rule out. Let us call any such language an empiricist language. . . . ¶ Now theories of the advanced type here referred to may be considered as hypothetico-deductive systems in which all statements are logical consequences of a set of fundamental assumptions. Fundamental as well as derived statements in such a system are formulated either in terms of certain theoretical constructs which are not defined within the system and thus play the role of primitives, or in terms of expressions defined by means of the latter. Thus, in their logical structure such systems equal the axiomatized uninterpreted systems studied in mathematics and logic. They acquire applicability to empirical subject matter, and thus the status of theories of empirical science, by virtue of an empirical interpretation[,] [with the result that] . . . ¶ a sentence [is properly considered to be] cognitively meaningful if its non-logical constituents refer, directly or in certain specified indirect ways, to observables."* ("Problems and Changes in the Empiricist Criterion of Meaning" [1950].) ¶ *Hempel's analysis not only marked the historical endpoint of positivism; it also set a minimum standard for future empiricist theories, establishing that any such theory, in order to be considered successful, would have to adequately explicate the supposed relation between the 'non-logical constituents' of certain 'sentences' in an 'axiomatized propositional system' and the 'observables' to which either (i) those non-logical constituents, (ii) the sentences in which they occur, or (iii) the propositional system in its entirety is supposed to 'refer'.*

^{10.3} *Unfortunately, because use of the principle today is frequently unacknowledged by both writers and critics alike, the question of whether any given instance of its application will be accepted by any significant portion of the philosophical community now depends almost entirely on sociological factors surrounding the specific circumstances of its use.*

^{10.11} *This characteristic of universal generalizations led Karl Popper, the 20th century's pre-eminent philosopher of science, to place falsifiability rather than verifiability at the center of his deeply influential mid-century philosophical analyses of the practice of science. However, because existential generalizations – e.g., 'There is at least one red swan' – are no more capable of being falsified than universal generalizations are of being verified, every attempt to substitute falsifiability for verifiability in the positivist analysis failed.*^{10.111}

^{10.111} *What is fatal in one context, however, is not necessarily so in another, even where the principle at issue is or appears to be the same. Thus, well after the collapse of logical positivism, Popper addressed both the critical role played by falsifiability in the practice of science and the continuing role played by the falsifiability principle in his philosophy of science by noting that there is an asymmetry between existential and universal generalizations, such that the latter "are never derivable from singular statements, but can be contradicted by singular statements."* (The Logic of Scientific Discovery [1959].)

That Putnam's analysis is both misleading *and* mistaken can be demonstrated as follows: Consider the vat dweller's utterance of Putnam's vat-English proposition ¹¹ 'There is a tree in front of me.' In that situation in which the speaker is presented with the image of a tree, his utterance of the proposition is true whenever he is engaged, merely and accurately, in reporting this sense impression. That is, his utterance is true on precisely those occasions on which he intends to refer *only* to the *presented-image*. The reverse is the case with regard to the speaker's utterance of the vat-English proposition 'I am a brain-in-a-vat.' Uttered with the intention of referring *only* to the presented-image, this latter proposition is, as pointed out by Putnam himself, simply false.

A more philosophically significant utterance of the latter proposition, however, is that in which the speaker hypothesizes a *frame of reference* exceeding any *perspective* ¹² available from the vat. ¹³ For instance, the speaker may state that he is a brain-in-a-vat with the intention of claiming that Putnam's evil scientist has, indeed, removed his brain and is engaged in imposing various hallucinations upon him. Let us further suppose that this is, in fact, the case. The speaker's utterance, though true, ¹⁴ cannot be determined to be so by anyone lacking access to the requisite *bird's-eye view* ¹⁵; and, because neither the speaker himself nor any other member of his linguistic community has such access, the truth-value of the utterance might 'properly' be *treated* by them as undetermined, though only contingently so. ¹⁶ Nevertheless, and contrary to

¹¹ Unless specifically noted otherwise, and to the greatest extent possible, the terms 'proposition', 'statement', 'sentence', and their near synonyms are intended to function interchangeably throughout the text proper and each of its various levels of footnotes, including the formalized fragments.

¹² For informal definitions of both these italicized terms, see footnote 44, below.

¹³ Let us define a 'p system' as a 'propositional system containing one or more *fundamental propositions*' ^{13.1} and a 'metaⁿ⁺¹-p system' ^{13.2} as 'any p system which includes within itself one or more propositions *referring to* a metaⁿ-p system, whether such reference be global or to an individual proposition (or set of propositions) within such system.' This definition of metaⁿ⁺¹-p systems is specifically intended to include systems standing in a comprehensive, umbrella-like embrace of another p system, metaⁿ-p, such that a given speaker, properly considered to be a fluent speaker, need not (for the purposes of everyday speech) be cognizant of which of his or her utterances are members of metaⁿ-p and which are members of one or another higher-order p system.

¹⁴ Putnam himself, however, being committed to the claim that the term 'vat' in vat-English can only be used to refer to vats in-the-image, denies that the speaker's utterance would, under these conditions, be true. Thus, Putnam's denial constitutes an endorsement of one of the stronger versions of the verifiability principle, specifically one on which any utterance not immediately verifiable by the utterance's speaker, or, at least, by some actual member of the speaker's linguistic community, expresses a metaphysical proposition and is, as such, meaningless. ^{14.1}

¹⁵ That is, lacking access to a perspective from which the utterance's truth-value could be determined.

¹⁶ Since the evil scientist could at any moment restore the speaker to his body, thereby giving him access to the previously unavailable bird's-eye view and allowing him to state, at that later point in time, that his earlier assertion of the proposition, 'I am a brain-in-a-vat', had been, at the time of its utterance, true.

^{13.1} *The concept of a fundamental proposition, like that of referring to, is largely explicated herein through the contexts of its usage; one might note, however, that the concept is similar (though not identical) to that of a 'primitive proposition' as that term is used by Hempel (see, footnote 10.2, above), and that the statement 'I am a brain-in-a-vat' is, under some-but-not-all conditions of its utterance, a fundamental proposition.*

^{13.2} *All p systems designated 'meta⁰-p' are specifically excluded from this definition, in that no proposition within any such system may refer to any other p system, whether in whole or in part. (See further, footnote 19, below.)*

^{14.1} *It should be noted that such instantiations of the principle are (arguably) themselves metaphysical propositions and, therefore, (arguably) subject to their own, reflexive, sanction. (Cf., footnotes 34 and 34.1, below.)*

Putnam, so long as a possible bird's-eye view exists, the statement itself, it would seem, must *be* either true or false.¹⁷ That is, so long as there exists a logically possible perspective from which the proposition's truth-value *could* be determined, the merely contingent fact of such a perspective's inaccessibility to a given speaker is irrelevant to the metaphysical fact of the proposition's truth-value.¹⁸

Although the possible truth of the vat-speaker's utterance is, of course, logically inconsistent with Putnam's conclusion, simply pointing this out is not in itself sufficient to refute his position. We must address the essential point of Putnam's thought experiment. Were the speaker above to gain access to the appropriate bird's-eye view, he would find the issue of whether he is ultimately a brain-in-a-vat to be in no way settled, for the supposition that he is such a brain could be immediately reformulated and stated again. Although access to a previously unavailable bird's-eye view perspective would give such a speaker a privileged position relative to his former abode (that is, the vat), making available to him a frame of reference within which determination of the truth-value of his *original* utterance of the supposition would be possible,¹⁹ his ability to determine the truth-value of the *newly re-uttered* supposition would be in no way enhanced.²⁰ Thus, our discussion above concerning the truth-conditions of bird's-eye view utterances would appear to miss the mark. What we want to know, and what Putnam denies is possible, is whether we might *really* be brains-in-a-vat. That is, our interest is in those propositions whose frames of reference go beyond the provisional frameworks discussed above, to an ultimate metaphysical reality.

Consider again the vat-English proposition 'There is a tree in front of me,' in this instance uttered *with* metaphysical emphasis. The proposition no longer claims only that there is a tree in front of me in-the-image, or even that there is a tree in front of me in that sensible world which is external to the evil scientist's vat. Rather, it may be taken to be a far more ambitious statement, a response to the fundamental Cartesian query, that is, as a statement asserting that there is a tree in front of me *in some metaphysically ultimate reality*. Similarly, when so emphasized, the vat-English proposition 'I am a brain-in-a-vat' makes an assertion concerning my own ultimate metaphysical status, claiming that I am *really* a brain-in-a-vat.

¹⁷ Let us define a 'quasi-fundamental proposition' ^{17.1} as 'a proposition, the truth-value of which cannot be determined within the limitations imposed by the perspective(s) available to a given speaker or set of speakers (though such truth-value may well be arbitrarily assigned) but *could* be determined from some contingently unavailable meta-perspective.' ^{17.2}

¹⁸ It should be noted, however, that this claim rests on a pair of well-established logical conventions only qualifiedly endorsed herein – the first being that any sentence expressing a meaningful empirical statement must necessarily be either true or false, the second being that ontology is independent of epistemology. The discussion below will ultimately restrict the valid scope of both these principles.

¹⁹ Let us consider meta⁰-p to be our object language, a system which (i) (by previous definition) includes within itself no proposition(s) referring to meta⁰-p globally or to any of the individual propositions of which meta⁰-p is comprised, and (ii) neither includes nor embraces any proposition(s) referring to any *other* propositional system globally or to any proposition(s) contained in any other propositional system.

²⁰ Again, suppose the evil scientist has returned him to his body. He may still be inclined to wonder if the vat he *now* looks down upon is real or merely another hallucination imposed upon him by the same (or still greater) scientist.

^{17.1} ***The class of quasi-fundamental propositions and the class of fundamental propositions are discrete classes.***

^{17.2} The present text, with its self-swallowing conventions and logically indeterminate propositions, may fairly be considered to owe something to Kurt Gödel's first and second incompleteness theorems,^{17.21} which are frequently taken to establish that: (i) for any consistent formal system of sufficient power and scope, there must be at least one sentence that is formally undecidable (i.e., neither provable nor refutable) within such system, and (ii) the consistency of any such formal system cannot be proved within the system itself. Any such debt, however, is spiritual only, in that the concepts of logical indeterminateness and undecidability are distinct.

^{17.21} In "On Formally Undecidable Propositions of Principia Mathematica and Related Systems I" (1931).

Notice, however, that determination of the truth (or falsity) of such a proposition would require access not merely to a bird's-eye perspective but to a *God's-eye* perspective;²¹ and that, should any such God's-eye perspective exist, it must necessarily stand in a relation *either* congruent with some correspondingly ultimate propositional system *or* supra-linguistic to any and all possible systems. Yet, neither disjunct is realizable: the ultimate propositional system of the first²² is a straightforward logical impossibility, since to every possible propositional system **[metaⁿ-p]** there stands a possible meta-propositional system **[metaⁿ⁺¹-p]**; and, since truth-value, though a metaphysical property, is a property which can only be determined within the context of propositional systems, satisfaction of the second disjunct would, by locating the God's-eye view in a linguistically inaccessible plane, render also any such perspective necessarily inaccessible to the process of determining propositional truth-value.²³ Thus, the truth-value of this, and every other, metaphysically emphasized utterance is *logically* indeterminate.²⁴

²¹ That is, to a perspective co-extensive with that metaphysically ultimate reality referenced above, of which co-extensiveness, it should be noted, the speaker is also somehow aware.

²² Such a system would, presumably, be identical to the 'ideal' language long sought by such spiritual successors to the logical positivists as Carl Hempel, whose discussion of a 'hypothetico-deductive', 'artificial' language in footnote 10.2, above, serves to illustrate both the post-positivist quest and the philosophical agenda which drove it.

²³ Regardless of whether one is inclined to seek one's metaphysical beginnings 'in heaven or on earth',^{23.1} Wittgenstein's private language argument delineates the limits of that quest.^{23.2}

²⁴ Suppose now a series of hypotheses, a series of H-type propositions, each of which states that the truth-value of any fundamental proposition is logically indeterminate. Let us now explicitly state that a proposition cannot be a member of any p system to which that proposition refers.^{24.1} Thus, being about metaⁿ⁻¹-p systems, where 'n' represents that system of which a given H-type proposition is a member, H-type propositions are possible members of only meta¹-p systems and higher. That is, H is a possible member of meta¹-p systems, H' is a possible member of meta²-p systems, H'' is a possible member of meta³-p systems, and so on.

^{23.1} That is, whether in the supra- or ante-linguistic.

^{23.2} "Let us imagine the following case. I want to keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation. To this end I associate it with the sign 'S' and write this sign in a calendar for every day on which I have the sensation. – I will remark first of all that a definition of the sign cannot be formulated. – But still I can give myself a kind of ostensive definition. – How? Can I point to the sensation? Not in the ordinary sense. But I speak, or write the sign down, and at the same time I concentrate my attention on the sensation – and so, as it were, point to it inwardly. – But what is this ceremony for? For that is all it seems to be! A definition surely serves to establish the meaning of a sign. – Well, that is done precisely by the concentrating of my attention; for in this way I impress on myself the connexion between the sign and the sensation. – But 'I impress it on myself' can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connexion right in the future. But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'right'." (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.)

^{24.1} From this it follows that the p system model employed herein does not permit self-referential propositions.^{24.11} Instances of apparent self-reference are treated the same as are H-type propositions above. For example, consider the sentence 'This sentence contains five words.' Pursuant to the version of the p system model here employed, the sample sentence – let us call it 'proposition G' and designate it a member of system metaⁿ-p – would refer not to itself but to a G-type proposition in another, lower-order p system, metaⁿ⁻¹-p.^{24.12} (See, further, 8.11 et seq., above.)

^{24.11} The p system model's handling of seemingly self-referential statements is somewhat similar to that of Alfred North Whitehead's and Bertrand Russell's theory of types, which asserts that because a class is of a different logical type than its members and because logical types must not be confused or intertwined, no class can be a member of itself.^{24.111} However, there are significant differences between the problems the theory of types was intended to solve and the circumstances the p system model is here employed to illustrate.

^{24.12} This preclusion of self-reference is, of course, contrary to the accepted conventions of natural language; and, accordingly, one might well prefer an attempt at incorporating self-reference into an alternative version of the p system model. However, such alternative analyses, when conducted competently and in good faith, do not arrive at materially different conclusions from those arrived at herein; they merely arrive there via different paths.^{24.121}

^{24.111} In *Principia Mathematica* (1910).

^{24.121} The treaded ground is not new. Numerous reasons (beyond those discussed herein) have been given historically for denying the possibility of genuine self-reference, many of which have little on their surface to do with propositional self-reference at all. One of the more resonant of these is Schopenhauer's assertion regarding self-knowledge, that "[t]he subject who knows cannot be known precisely as such, otherwise he would be known by another subject." (The World as Will and Idea II.)

The possible truth-value assignments for the vat-English proposition ‘I am a brain-in-a-vat’ can now be summarized as follows: A given utterance of the proposition is (i) false, where its frame of reference is limited to the presented-image; (ii) either true or false, though which is not verifiable by the speaker, where its frame of reference exceeds the presented-image but stops short of metaphysical emphasis; and, (iii) logically indeterminate, where such metaphysical emphasis is given. That is, if we consider vat-English to be a **metaⁿ-p** system and assume the statement to be uttered *without* metaphysical emphasis (as in (i), above), then the statement is plainly false, and could be known by the speaker to be otherwise, *only if* he somehow appeared to himself to be a brain-in-a-vat. If, on the other hand, we assume the statement to be uttered with reference to a bird’s-eye view perspective *contingently* unavailable to the speaker²⁵ (for example, the perspective of Putnam’s evil scientist) (as in (ii), above), the truth-value of the statement is either true or false, but which of those two values is unknown to the speaker. Thus, any version of the statement ‘I am a brain-in-a-vat’ uttered with reference to a bird’s-eye view perspective of the sort posited by Putnam is neither plainly false nor logically indeterminate, in that the truth-value of any such utterance might possibly be discovered to be true (if, for instance, the evil scientist later placed the speaker back in his ‘real’ body).²⁶ Finally, if we assume the statement to be uttered *with* metaphysical emphasis (as in (iii), above), it is a fundamental proposition, the truth-value of which could be ascertained only from within the logically impossible, ultimate propositional system, **meta^x-p**.²⁷

Returning to Putnam and his thought experiment, then, the fact that we presumably refer to ‘real’ trees and vats when we describe our phenomenal world, while the vat speaker is able to refer only to trees and vats in-the-image, is ultimately not significant. Although this fact, if true, implies that we have access to a bird’s-eye view (that is, a perspective) unavailable to the vat speaker, it does not imply that we successfully refer to *anything* in the metaphysical sense. Nor could such reference be analytically validated if it did occur. Putnam’s failure to fully grasp the implications of these two points constitutes the essential mistake in his analysis.

Putnam maintains that the *entry-and-exit rules*²⁸ by which we relate language to the world allow us to refer to real trees (unless we are, in fact, brains-in-a-vat, in which case they allow us to refer to trees in-the-image). What these rules do *not* allow us to do, according to Putnam, is refer to extra-linguistic objects existing beyond reach of the rules. For instance, because the vat dweller cannot “point” to the vat in which he dwells, he is unable to refer to that vat. His metaphysically speculative utterance ‘I am a brain-in-a-vat’ is, therefore, false (or meaningless) in the only language available to him. As noted in footnotes 9 and 9.1, above, for Putnam the vat dweller’s belief that his utterance is intelligible is the result of two fundamental errors: (1) The acceptance of one

²⁵ That is, from a perspective associated with a **p system** of higher-order than **metaⁿ-p** but of lesser-order than the logically impossible, ultimate **p system**, **meta^x-p**, referenced in the immediately following sentence of the primary text.

²⁶ Let us now consider H', a possible member of meta²-p systems. Because H' is itself a member of meta²-p, it cannot refer to the propositions of meta²-p. The referential scope of H' is limited to those fundamental propositions which are members of the meta¹-p or meta⁰-p systems embraced by the meta²-p system(s) of which H' is a member. Thus, in order to demonstrate the lack of a logically determinate truth-value for a given fundamental proposition which is a member of meta²-p, it would seemingly be necessary to demonstrate the truth of H', the H-type proposition which is a possible member of meta³-p systems.^{26.1}

²⁷ Or, to put it another way, from within the ideal language associated with the linguistically inaccessible God’s-eye view perspective discussed in footnotes 21-24, above, and their related sections of text and footnotes.

²⁸ The most widely accepted examples of such rules center around the ostensive definitions by means of which we learn our native languages as children, and on which we continue to rely as adults to relate word to object. This much is seemingly fact. And yet, the *roles* played by such definitions in the acquisition and use of language are both mysterious and deeply problematic. See, e.g., footnote 23.2, above.

^{26.1} While any given H-type proposition is properly classified as a quasi-fundamental proposition, the set of H-type propositions, taken as a whole, may be understood to imply a fundamental assertion. Where the speaker’s utterance of an H-type proposition is with metaphysical emphasis, the speaker may be taken to intend to assert that each fundamental proposition in every possible p system lacks a logically determinate truth-value, the truth-value of which assertion is, of course, itself logically indeterminate.

or another ‘magical’ theory of reference²⁹ and (2) the belief that the possibility of ‘causal interaction’ is unrelated to the preconditions of reference.³⁰

²⁹ “Some primitive people believe that some representations (in particular, *names*) have a necessary connection with their bearers; that to know the ‘true name’ of someone or something gives one power over it. This power comes from the *magical connection* between the name and the bearer of the name[.]”^{29.1} (*Reason, Truth and History*.)

³⁰ In fact, Putnam goes further, suggesting it is not *possible* but *actual* causal interaction that is a necessary precondition of reference, that is, the word, ‘x’, must *actually* (in some, unspecified way) *causally interact* with the extra-linguistic object, x.^{30.1}

^{29.1} The first modern theory of reference was put forward in the last decade of the 19th century, when Gottlob Frege drew a distinction between an expression’s sense (i.e., connotation) and its reference (i.e., denotation), asserting that a sentence may be meaningful even where one or more of its component expressions lacks a referent, so long as we are able to grasp the sense of the denotatively empty expression: “It can perhaps be granted that an expression has a sense if it is formed in a grammatically correct manner and stands for a proper name. But as to whether there is a denotation corresponding to the connotation is hereby not decided.” (“*Sense and Reference*” [1892].) A Fregean analysis would, thus, attribute the intelligibility of such false existential statements as “The largest prime number is even” to our ability to grasp the sense of the expression ‘the largest prime number’ despite the fact that the expression has no referent. However, the Fregean analysis of such sentences was considered inadequate by some; and, in 1905’s “*On Denoting*”, Bertrand Russell took up the matter again, using the sentence “The present King of France is bald” as his working model. According to Russell, this sentence conjunctively asserts three distinct things: (i) that there is an x such that x is presently the King of France; (ii) that, for any x and y, if x is currently King of France and y is currently King of France, then x = y; and (iii) that, for every x that is currently King of France, x is bald. On Russell’s analysis, the entire statement is false, because the first conjunct is false.^{29.11} ¶ The theory of descriptions introduced in “*On Denoting*” marks a significant step in the development of propositional logic and, as importantly, of logical atomism, the metaphysical and methodological model suggested (if not logically implied) by Russell’s and Whitehead’s propositional logic. Logical atomism posited a ‘mapping’ or ‘mirroring’ relation between language and world, as in the ‘picture theory’ of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, referenced in footnote 1.1, above.^{29.12} However, in the years immediately following atomism’s development, neither Russell nor Wittgenstein sought to demonstrate the existence of the supposed ‘picturing’ relation between word or symbol, ‘x’, and the extra-linguistic object, x. In fact, it is Wittgenstein’s much later acknowledgment (in the *Philosophical Investigations*) of the impossibility of such demonstration which stands as the clearest line of demarcation between his early and later work.^{29.13}

^{30.1} Setting aside for the moment the question of whether a coherent and non-circular explication of the concept of causal interaction in the context of a theory of reference is even possible, while simultaneously acknowledging that Putnam’s focus is on empirical statements, it is still at this point worth noting that, with regard to certain specific propositional types,^{30.11} one may well demonstrate the truth-value of an entire class of propositions, some members of which correspond to unavailable frames of reference (such unavailability presumably precluding any ‘causal interaction’ whatsoever, regardless of the term’s explication), from the values of those particular members of the series whose truth-values are fully determinable from within the available frames of reference.

^{29.11} Russell’s three-part conjunctive statement can be represented in a variant of the propositional logic he himself played a significant role in developing as ‘ $\exists x\{[Kx \ \& \ \forall y(Ky \rightarrow y = x)] \ \& \ Bx\}$ ’. Although Russell tends to receive the lion’s share of the credit for the development of modern symbolic logic, he did not accomplish the task alone. Alfred North Whitehead, co-author with Russell of *Principia Mathematica*, the first comprehensive work on the subject of symbolic logic, was a full and equal partner in the work.^{29.111} Moreover, many of Russell’s and Whitehead’s conclusions were significantly dependent on the work of others, most notably for present purposes the mathematician David Hilbert. ¶ Over the course of the two decades preceding publication of *Principia Mathematica*, Hilbert had made a series of breakthroughs relating to axiomatic mathematical systems, including the identification of such now familiar elements of propositional systems as the well-formed formulae or grammatical correctness requirement (i.e., the concept of propositional *syntax*), the requirement that a proposition functioning as an *axiom* in a given propositional system not be derivable from other propositions which are members of the system (i.e., the concept of *independence*), and the *internal consistency* requirement, meaning that it must not be possible to derive a contradiction from a system’s axioms.^{29.112}

^{29.12} Russell first discussed the principles of logical atomism in a 1911 paper published only in French titled “Le Réalisme analytique”; but the ideas therein were not made readily available to the English-speaking public until 1918, when Russell delivered a series of lectures titled “The Philosophy of Logical Atomism”, which lectures were then published in England later that same year. This later version of logical atomism, however, was significantly influenced by the thinking of Russell’s former student, Wittgenstein, whose working notes for the *Tractatus* go back to at least 1914.^{29.121}

^{29.13} See, e.g., footnote 23.2, above, and footnote 31.1, below.

^{30.11} See, e.g., footnote 26.1, above, regarding H-type propositions.

^{29.111} Whitehead, the older of the two by more than a decade, came first to the subject, publishing his *A Treatise on Universal Algebra* in 1898, with the younger Russell not publishing his own *The Principles of Mathematics* until five years later. Shortly thereafter, the two men began collaborating on what would become the massively ambitious *Principia Mathematica*, the first volume of which was published in 1910.

^{29.112} Russell and Whitehead incorporated each of these rules into the propositional logic of *Principia Mathematica*, wherein they claimed to have reduced mathematics to logic. This claim was soon determined to be mistaken. However, the system of propositional logic they developed continues, with very minor changes, to be commonly employed today.

^{29.121} See, Wittgenstein, *Notebooks*, 1914-1916.

It is Putnam, however, not the vat dweller, who is mistaken. Putnam fails to realize that it is not only so-called ‘magical’ theories of reference which are precluded; Wittgenstein’s private language and beetle-in-a-box arguments demonstrate that *all* theories of extra-linguistic reference, including Putnam’s own ‘causal interaction’ theory, are equally ‘magical’.³¹ Thus, unless we are willing to *assume* the existence of an *unverifiable* relation between word and object, we cannot even endorse the first step in Putnam’s analysis – i.e., the claim that we refer to real trees, or even that vat speakers refer to trees in-the-image.³²

^{31.1} That is, the causal interactions which Putnam would permit, on which his theory relies, and to which his entry-and-exit rules would apply, are as inherently speculative as any other alleged relation between word and extra-linguistic object.^{31.1}

³² Putnam, like the later Wittgenstein (though to somewhat different purpose), maintains that it is language use, not the private or inner experience, which constitutes understanding, that to understand a sentence means to be master of a technique.^{32.1} However, as Quine’s *principle of the indeterminacy of translation*^{32.2} suggests, another’s use of a word is ultimately no more accessible to us than is his or her inner meaning or experience.^{32.3} Moreover, the principle applies not only to ‘translations’ of the sort Quine discusses but to every possible entry-and-exit rule, not even excluding those ostensive definitions which have, we must yet believe, enabled each of us to learn his or her native language.^{32.4}

^{31.1} See, again, the private language argument, footnote 23.2, above; see also, the beetle-in-a-box argument: “Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a ‘beetle.’ No one can look into anyone else’s box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at his beetle. – Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing. – But suppose the word ‘beetle’ had a place in these people’s language? – If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a something: for the box might even be empty.” (Philosophical Investigations.)

^{32.1} “[N]o matter what sort of inner phenomena we allow as possible expressions of thought, arguments exactly similar to the foregoing will show that it is not the phenomena themselves that constitute understanding, but rather the ability of the thinker to employ these phenomena, to produce the right phenomena in the right circumstances. ¶ The foregoing is a very abbreviated version of Wittgenstein’s argument in Philosophical Investigations. If it is correct, then the attempt to understand thought by what is called ‘phenomenological’ investigation is fundamentally misguided; for what the phenomenologists fail to see is that what they are describing is the inner expression of thought, but that the understanding of that expression – one’s understanding of one’s own thoughts – is not an occurrence but an ability.” (Reason, Truth and History.)

^{32.2} “[M]anuals for translating one language into another can be set up in divergent ways, all compatible with the totality of speech dispositions, yet incompatible with one another.” (Quine, Word and Object [1960].)

^{32.3} In fact, Putnam’s concept of use as here employed serves a philosophically illegitimate function. Like Descartes attempting to reconstruct the world on the basis of God’s being no deceiver (discussed in footnote 9.3, above), Putnam introduces an unexplained explainer, i.e., a weight-bearing element of explanation which is at least as problematic as that which it purports to explain.^{32.31} However, the same element that is illegitimately employed when used to surreptitiously plug a gap in a philosophical explanation may be transmuted when employed openly, as road signage, to mark the spot where a leap of faith, an intuition, a vision, or a moment of understanding is required if explanation is to be meaningful.

^{32.4} Quine’s essential point may, perhaps, be best understood if we imagine (with Quine) attempting to establish first contact with an isolated tribe, the members of which speak a language utterly unrelated to any previously encountered. Here, translation must begin not with words but with sentences having a comparatively direct relation to those conditions that we, the translators, suppose stimulated the speakers’ utterances. That is, we are forced to hypothetically equate segments of native speech with English words and phrases. We might, for example, translate the native utterance ‘Gavagai’ as ‘Rabbit’. Unfortunately, we find there are many possible sets of analytic hypotheses that fit all observable native speech behavior yet lead to mutually incompatible translations of this native utterance.^{32.41} As a matter of fact, each and every hypothesis we record turns out to be subject to the same uncertainties as afflict our translation of ‘gavagai’. Quine concludes that there is an infinite multitude of possible ‘manuals of translation,’ each equally consistent with the speech dispositions of a given linguistic community, and that we cannot, therefore, ever be certain of the meaning of any specific native utterance.^{32.42}

^{32.31} Each and every philosophical explanation necessarily incorporates at least one such element. Precisely *which* concept(s) in a given philosophical explanation, and for a given writer or reader, so functions often depends on the order of operations employed by the person seeking to craft or grasp the explanation.

^{32.41} “Who knows but what the objects to which this term applies are not rabbits after all, but mere stages, or brief temporal segments of rabbits? In either event the stimulus situations that prompt assent to ‘Gavagai’ would be the same as for ‘Rabbit’. Or perhaps the objects to which ‘gavagai’ applies are all and sundry undetached parts of rabbits; again the stimulus meaning would register no difference. When from the stimulus meanings of “Gavagai” and ‘Rabbit’ the linguist leaps to the conclusion that a gavagai is a whole enduring rabbit, he is just taking for granted that the native is enough like us to have a brief general term for rabbits and no brief general term for rabbit stages or parts.” (Word and Object.)

^{32.42} See also, Henri Poincaré, in *Optics and Electricity* (1913): “If, then, a phenomenon admits of a complete mechanical explanation, it will admit of an infinity of others, that will render an account equally well of all the particulars revealed by experiment.”

The problem with Putnam's claim that the proposition 'I am a brain-in-a-vat' is either false or self-refuting can now be stated directly: Where the proposition is uttered under the conditions defined by his thought experiment, Putnam is committed to denying the truth of the proposition in *each* of the three possible contexts of utterance enumerated on page x, above. The first context need not present Putnam with any difficulty: Where the speaker's frame of reference is (i) limited to the presented-image, the utterance may simply be taken (for the moment) as simply and plainly false.

Putnam's problem, however, becomes evident when we examine the other two possible contexts of utterance, namely, where the speaker either (ii) intends a frame of reference that exceeds the vat but stops short of metaphysical emphasis³³ or (iii) utters the statement *with* metaphysical emphasis. Here, too, Putnam is committed to maintaining that the proposition is false or (self-refuting). But, as has been shown over the course of the immediately preceding paragraphs, the only grounds which would support Putnam's position with regard to both (ii) and (iii) are much too powerful for his purpose, in that they would imply a broad-based scepticism incompatible with Putnam's analysis.

Although the unverifiable nature of *any* claim of reference to the extra-linguistic object itself (as established by the private language and beetle-in-a-box arguments) offers an analytic basis for Putnam's claim, that basis is inconsistent with his first disjunct (i.e., his claim that the proposition is demonstrably false in significant contexts of its utterance) and incompatible with any meaningful interpretation of his second disjunct (i.e., his claim that the proposition is self-refuting), for it would imply the meaninglessness of 'I am a brain-in-a-vat' in *every* context of its utterance, including when uttered by the vat speaker with reference to the presented-image only, i.e., under the conditions of (i), above. Accordingly, since it is clearly not his intention to embrace absolute scepticism, but rather to assert the meaningfulness (and truth of) such everyday empirical utterances as those, Putnam's analysis gets us nowhere.³⁴

Wittgenstein once wrote, "a wheel that can be turned though nothing else moves with it, is not part of the mechanism."³⁵ Perhaps Putnam's essential point, like that of Wittgenstein and others both before and after, is only that metaphysical emphasis cannot be meaningfully given. Yet, it is not *meaning* that metaphysically emphasized utterances have been shown to lack, only the traditional, and unnecessarily restrictive, true or false truth-value; and, though logically indeterminate, such utterances

³³ That is, for example, where the speaker intends to assert that there is an evil scientist who has removed the speaker's brain from his or her body and placed it in a vat, but stops short of asserting that he or she is a brain-in-a-vat in any metaphysically ultimate reality.

³⁴ Putnam's claim that the proposition 'I am a brain-in-a-vat' is either false or self-refuting in both of these two later possible contexts of utterance [i.e., (ii) and (iii), above] rests on his denial, in those contexts only, of any possible *causal interaction* between language-user and extra-linguistic object, i.e., between word and object. However, each and every ground on which such interaction could be denied, for example, the inaccessibility of the extra-linguistic object to the speaker generally, would apply equally well to the first possible context of utterance [i.e., (i), above], and even to such everyday ordinary English real-world observations as 'There is a tree in front of me.'^{34.1}

³⁵ *Philosophical Investigations*.

^{34.1} See further, "Introductory Comments to Dissertation Defense," The Linguistic Limitation, Mark A. Koehn, unpublished dissertation, University of Iowa (1987): "I will save my opponents the trouble and openly admit that the argument is, in some sense, self-refuting. If the argument's scope were not universal, the accusation of self-refutation could be a serious criticism. However, the argument is, in effect, a reductio of each and every set of premises. My working assumptions are assumptions that my opponents cannot give up without accepting my conclusion. The only constructive or positive claim that I make is that of the proof's conclusion: 'There can be no legitimate fundamental philosophy.' To point out that that claim is self-refuting is no criticism of my view." ^{34.11}

^{34.11} Cf., "Every noble and gifted man . . . when he reaches the periphery of the circle of science and sees, to his horror, how logic here turns back upon itself and bites its tail, breaks through to a new form of experience – *tragic experience* – which requires, in order to be endured, the shelter and remedy of art." (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* [1872].)

need not be so either *psychologically*³⁶ or *sociologically*.³⁷ In fact, were we to somehow become capable of *treating* the

³⁶ *Psychologically*, a given individual's belief in the truth of certain metaphysically-emphasized propositions is the first step in the creation of a mythology.^{36.1} Although such mythologies serve a multiplicity of functions,^{36.2} their *origin* is singular, being rooted in the individual's acceptance as true of a set of logically indeterminate propositions.^{36.3} Both vat- and ordinary English are, in this sense of the term, mythological systems, as also each and every **p-system**, the analytic paradigm itself, and this very text.^{36.4}

³⁷ *Sociologically*, the periodic waxing^{37.1} and waning^{37.2} of cultural mythologies parallels that of the analytic paradigm (see, footnote 38, below), the cyclic rise and fall of which is perhaps the inevitable consequence of the deep grammar of the human brain, through which the world is perceived as a template for language.^{37.3} While social change is made possible only by the uprooting of previously unquestioned absolutes, i.e., by the transgressing of that which was once taboo, this process brings with it not only the realization of new possibilities but the erosion of societal belief systems, the passing of traditional institutions, and, in the individual, a decline in the efficacy of moral stricture. It may, consequently, be argued that our present societal value crisis, that all too familiar clime of epistemological, metaphysical, and ethical scepticism, in which little is certain and nothing, certainly, is sacred, is a necessary byproduct of what we, in the West, commonly term 'progress'.

^{36.1} "‘Truth’: this means, in my way of thought, not necessarily the opposite of error but, in the most fundamental cases, only position of different errors relative to one another. Perhaps the one is older and deeper than the other, and hence uneliminable because an organic being of our sort cannot live without it. Other errors, meanwhile, do not tyrannize over us as conditions of life . . . [and] can be laid aside or contradicted" (Nietzsche, Nachlass [circa 1880-1889]); "But I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness . . . No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false. . . . The propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology."^{36.11} . . . It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened and hard ones became fluid. . . . The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift. But I distinguish between the movements of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other. . . . And the bank of that river consists partly of hard rock, subject to no alteration or only to an imperceptible one, partly of sand, which now in one place now in another gets washed away." (On Certainty.)

^{36.2} "Mythology has been interpreted by the modern intellect as a primitive, fumbling effort to explain the world of nature (Frazer); as a production of poetical fantasy from prehistoric times, misunderstood by succeeding ages (Müller); as a repository of allegorical instruction, to shape the individual to his group (Durkheim); as a group dream, symptomatic of archetypal urges within the depths of the human psyche (Jung); as the traditional vehicle of man's profoundest metaphysical insights (Coomaraswamy); and as God's Revelation to His children (the Church)." (Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* [1949].)

^{36.3} "There are no facts, only interpretations." (Nietzsche, Nachlass [circa 1880-1889].)

^{36.4} That is, the truth-values of the fundamental propositions upon which is based this text's assertion of the logical indeterminacy of fundamental propositions are as logically indeterminate as those of any other fundamental propositions.^{36.41}

^{37.1} "At the beginning of every springtime period, philosophy, intimately related to great architecture and religion, is the intellectual echo of a mighty metaphysical being, and its task is to establish critically the sacred causality in the world-image seen with the eye of faith." [1] (Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* [1918/1922].)

^{37.2} "This is a matter not of mere political and economic, nor even of religious and artistic, transformations, nor of any tangible or factual change whatsoever, but of the condition of a soul after it has actualized its possibilities in full." [2]^{37.21} (The Decline of the West.)

^{37.3} See further, footnote 1, above.

^{36.11} Here, Wittgenstein goes on to say: "And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be learned purely practically, without learning any explicit rules." As noted above, this emphasis on the *use* or *practice* of language is an aspect of the later Wittgenstein's thought adopted, modified, and then heavily relied on by Putnam in his analysis of the brains-in-a-vat scenario. The problem is not that what Wittgenstein says about *use* is wrong; it is not. Rather, it is that Putnam's *employment* of the concept does not further either Putnam's own explanation or, more pertinently, the project of the present work.

^{36.41} One might be tempted at this point to echo Wittgenstein, objecting that a doubt which would call into question the truth of the very propositional system of which it is a part need not be heeded, that even doubt requires a context. In the present instance, however, this reflexive doubt or uncertainty as to truth-values has a context, one forced upon us by the system itself.

^{37.21} Spengler's *theory* of history is, perhaps, permanently out of fashion, but the *poem* that is *The Decline of the West* should not be. In it, Spengler articulates a *vision* of the great Culture-Civilizations as organisms, subject to a natural arc of development and decline, passing from youthful vigor (Culture), through the slow decline and increasing rigidity of middle- and old-age (Civilization), before ending in a second barbarism. [3] Spengler was not the first to articulate such a *vision*, of course. Giambattista Vico, for one, anticipated much of Spengler by nearly two hundred years, though the two differ on one important point. Vico, too, foresaw a second barbarism, *but* one that will be worse than the first, because the people of the second barbarism will lack even the simple virtues of the first: "Men first feel necessity, then look for utility, next attend to comfort, still later amuse themselves with pleasure, thence grow dissolute in luxury, and finally grow mad and waste their substance." [4] (Vico, *The New Science* [1725].)

truth-values of certain of our metaphysically-emphasized propositions as undetermined, all of our epistemological edifices would tumble down about us.³⁸

It is only the act of interpreting propositions creates meaning; and, the interpretation of any propositional system requires the interpreter to *take* as true (or false) one or more *primitive* propositions the truth-value(s)

³⁸ Here, at the intersection of metaphysics and epistemology, we find the solipsistic I, the very cornerstone of both modern philosophy and most institutionalized monotheisms.^{38.1} Yet, it is the solipsistic I which in its articulation most obviously violates the private language argument's stricture against criterionless reference,^{38.2} the solipsist whose every word must somehow refer to that which is linguistically inaccessible. Nevertheless, the solipsist has available the reply of silence, a *silence*^{38.3} which shrouds equally the blank slates of absolute solipsism and pure realism. Through silence, the absolute *I* of solipsism becomes the eye of realism^{38.4} and, no longer visible to itself, vanishes from the realm of discourse,^{38.5} only to be reborn, again and again, at the correspondent point of successive incarnations of the analytic paradigm.^{38.6} [8]

^{38.1} Cf., "*The I makes its appearance in philosophy through the world's being my world*" (Notebooks, 1914-1916); "*I am the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.*" (Revelation 22:13.)

^{38.2} That it was not the private language argument but the color exclusion problem which marked the fall from grace of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is a matter of historical accident. Confronted with the color exclusion problem, Wittgenstein need not have rejected the Tractarian position. He might as easily have denied that the Tractarian object can be colored at all, or that a color can constitute such an object, maintaining instead that the object is nothing more than an unspecified, metaphysically irreducible referent of the ideal language.^{38.21} ¶ No such object, however, could have played any part in scientific explanation. Endorsement of it would have created an unbridgeable gap between philosophy and science, making the question of the relationship between Tractarian objects and colors (or physical objects in general) unanswerable in principle. But, acceptance of such an object would have had other consequences as well. ¶ Such a view, by virtue of the Tractarian object's continuation as the eternal foundation of each and every language-game, would also have carried forward later into the 20th century, and in far stronger form, Western philosophy's historical insistence on a strong (though now completely invisible) link between the metaphysical and epistemological realms.^{38.22}

^{38.3} "*In fact what solipsism means is quite correct, only it cannot be said, but it shows itself.*"^{38.31} (*Tractatus* 5.62.)

^{38.4} Cf., "*Standing on bare ground, my head bathed by blithe air and uplifted into infinite space, all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing, I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God*" (Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* [1836]); and, from Emerson, it is only a short step to Thoreau, who wrote, "*There is nothing inorganic; this earth is not, then, a mere fragment of dead history . . . but living poetry like the leaves of a tree – not a fossil earth – but a living specimen*" [5] (Henry David Thoreau, *Journal*, February 5, 1854).

^{38.5} "*Here we see that solipsism strictly carried out coincides with pure realism. The I in solipsism shrinks to an extensionless point and there remains the reality co-ordinated with it.*"^{38.51} [6] (*Tractatus* 5.64.)

^{38.6} The role of the verifiability principle parallels that of the solipsistic I. Implicit application of the principle leads inevitably to scepticism, while explicit application subjects the principle to its own reflexive sanction. And yet, it gets at something. ¶ Viewed in the context of the principle's ultimate failure, this isomorphism might be taken to reveal the principle as the I's assertion of its own exclusivity, an exclusivity so all-encompassing as to ultimately allow the intelligible assertion of neither the principle nor the solipsistic I itself.

^{38.21} See, footnote 44.22, below, for an outline of the beginnings of such a position.

^{38.22} **Any proposition asserting the existence of any such link, and, too, any proposition asserting the nature of any such link, or any link whatsoever between word and object, would of course itself be a fundamental proposition.**

^{38.31} Cf., "The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao; the name that can be said is not the eternal name" (Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching* [circa 500 B.C.E.]); "He has a form whereby the universe is preserved, and yet has no form, because he cannot be comprehended" (Moses de Leon, *Zohar* [circa 1275]); "For he can well be loved, but he cannot be thought" (Anonymous, *The Cloude of Unknowing* [circa 1375]).

^{38.51} Cf., "When the pot is broken, the space within it is absorbed in the infinite space and becomes undifferentiated" [7] (Dattatreya, *Avadhuta Gita* 1.31 [circa 900]); "The 'I' does not at all exist as its own reality" (Nāgārjuna, *Madhyamaka* [circa 150]).

of which cannot otherwise be determined intra-systemically.³⁹ If this act of interpretation is to be anything but arbitrary, the interpreter's assignment of truth-value to such propositions must be guided in some way or another by a *something-I-know-not-what exceeding the scope of the system itself*.⁴⁰ [10]

Where the propositional system to be interpreted is embedded within another system, however, it may well be that the only *immediate* requirement for interpretation is *conventional* knowledge, i.e., propositional knowledge rooted in *a* system, just not *this* system. But an embedded system does not function independently of the system(s) in which it is embedded; and, thus interpretation finds no resting point there. It must continue; and, at *some* point, the interpreter will reach a system that is *not* wholly embedded, where interpretation can *only* be guided by a *vision* or *intuition* of the beetle-in-the-box – that is, by an *understanding* of that which is not itself the meaning of anything, but upon which the very *possibility* of meaning depends.⁴¹ And to what-

³⁹ Let us now consider a community of speakers^{39.1} to whom all metaⁿ-p (and higher) frames of reference are unavailable. Let us further suppose that the members of this linguistic community behave as if they hold the H-type proposition which is a member of metaⁿ-p to be strongly false. That is, the speakers of this community treat every fundamental proposition within the frame(s) of reference available to them as being, by necessity, either true or false.

⁴⁰ This *something*^{40.1} and the means by which it is apprehended – call it *vision*, *intuition*, *understanding*, or what you will – may be pre-, post-, or non-linguistic, and our awareness of it is distinguished on that basis from conventional *knowledge*, which is propositional in nature and possible only *within* linguistic or representational systems more generally.^{40.2}

⁴¹ Cf., “The first, and perhaps the only, outcome of man's will-to-understanding is faith. “I believe” is the great word against metaphysical fear, and at the same time it is an avowal of love. Even though one's researches or accumulation of knowledge may culminate in sudden illumination or conclusive calculation, yet all one's own sense and comprehension would be meaningless unless there were set up along with it an inward certainty of a ‘something’ which as other and alien is.”^{41.1} (*The Decline of the West*.)

^{39.1} *This might almost be our own linguistic community or, at least, one of them. But, do the speakers of this community also agree as to the specific truth-value to be assigned to each and every such proposition? If so, what mechanism(s) do they use to make and maintain such assignments? ¶ The set of propositions a given speaker, in any community, treats as fundamental – meaning here, ‘the set of propositions a given speaker treats as logically indeterminate or subject to a somewhat personal assignment of true/false truth-value’ – on any particular occasion of utterance is unlikely ever to be identical to the set so treated by any other speaker, or even by that same speaker on any other occasion. ¶ In the end, then, the supposition that any actual p system of significant scope might be shared by an entire community of speakers breaks down and must be understood as a fiction posited for illustrative purposes only, i.e., a stepping-stone of sorts. [9]*

^{40.1} “There is to be sure the ineffable. This shows itself, it is the mystical.” (Tractatus 6.522.)

^{40.2} One might say that at the root of every **p-system**, prior to both epistemology and metaphysics, there must be at least one point where that which is known is made so only by that which sees, intuitively, or understands.^{40.21}

^{41.1} Cf., “I wish to stress that the true meaning of life is to be discovered in the world rather than within man or his own psyche, as though it were a closed system. . . . [B]eing human always points, and is directed, to something, or someone, other than oneself – be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter. The more one forgets himself – by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love – the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself.” [11] (Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* [1946].)

^{40.21} Cf., “The supreme task . . . is to arrive at those universal elementary laws from which the cosmos can be built up by pure deduction. There is no logical path to these laws; only intuition, resting on sympathetic understanding of experience, can reach them” (Albert Einstein, “Principles of Research” [1918]); “Continued appeals to . . . intuition are necessary. . . . [This] follows from the fact that for every axiomatic system there are infinitely many undecidable propositions of this type” (Gödel, “What is Cantor's Continuum Problem?” [1947]).

ever extent such *intuition, vision, or understanding* can be made public, it is made so only indirectly, ⁴² *as reflected in a given speaker's (i.e., interpreter's) endorsement of certain metaphysically-emphasized propositions.* ⁴³

Thus, contrary to the quotation from Wittgenstein, metaphysically emphasized propositions *are* meaningful, and they are so precisely because they *are* a part of the mech-

⁴² Cf., “I certainly have composed no work in regard to [the actual nature of things], nor shall I ever do so in the future, for there is no way of putting it in words like other studies. Acquaintance with it must come rather after a long period of attendance on instruction in the subject itself and of close companionship, when, suddenly, like a blaze kindled by a leaping spark, it is generated in the soul and at once becomes self-sustaining” (Plato, “Seventh Epistle” [circa 400 B.C.E.]); “My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: Anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as senseless, when he has used them – as steps – to climb beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) . . .” (*Tractatus* 6.54).

⁴³ With this assertion the analytic paradigm has been left behind, for this act of interpretation is both creative and extra-linguistic, and that which is beyond words must remain forever beyond the scope of the paradigm. ^{43.1}

^{43.1} Cf., “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent.” (*Tractatus* 7.)

anism. They reflect the inarticulable value choices⁴⁴ upon which our propositional systems rest, choices each must make if

⁴⁴ The *vision, intuition, or understanding* on which is based a given interpretation of a propositional system may be said to define a *perspective*, while the set of primitive propositions belonging to such a system (that is, the *articulation* of this vision) defines a *frame of reference*.^{44.1} Every frame of reference so defined is a partial model of a possible world, and a given individual's experience of such a frame of reference may be said to define a *metaphysical space*.^{44.2} While a single individual may occupy a variety of such spaces in the course of even a single day, no two individuals *ever* occupy identical metaphysical spaces for even a single moment.^{44.3}

^{44.1} *Far from contaminating the philosophic process, such vision, intuition, or understanding is essential to it, in that it is only to the extent that the primitive propositions of such a system reflect an actual speaker's or community's vision, intuition, or understanding that the propositional set as a whole may be said to be scientifically, mathematically, or philosophically justified. (See, footnote 40.21, above.)*

^{44.2} *For this reason, an authentic philosophy, no less than an authentic art, is always personal, developing always to meet a personal need; ^{44.21} and, just as an artist may well articulate multiple, seemingly exclusive visions, so too may a scientist, mathematician or philosopher.*^{44.22}

^{44.3} *Nevertheless, it is the act of articulating such a space, of giving public expression to the private experience, which defines the proper realms of science, mathematics, philosophy, and art.*^{44.31}

^{44.21} "Gradually, it has become clear to me what every great philosophy has been: namely, the personal confession of its creator and a kind of involuntary and unperceived memoir." (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* [1886].)

^{44.22} We must be able to speak to and for ourselves before we can speak intelligibly to others. Such space defining speech is sometimes thought to be solely the task of the religious visionary or the artist^{44.221} rather than of the mathematician, scientist, or philosopher.^{43.222} But the borders marked by these terms are neither fixed nor precise, so that such speech can *always* be read philosophically, just as it can *always* be read artistically:

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 1 | A sign may be understood as a substitute for an object, but it may also be understood as the means of the object's creation. |
| 1.1 | By 'object' I mean not a physical object but a logico-metaphysical object. |
| 1.2 | Each instance of a sign's use is an act of metaphysical creation. |
| 1.3 | All words are signs, but some signs are not words. |
| 1.31 | All signs, and metaphysically all signs equally, bear many of the properties traditionally associated with names. |
| 1.4 | What can, or cannot, be said is a function not of signs but of speakers. |
| 1.41 | That speakers imbue signs with meaning is a given. The question of <i>how</i> they do so is a meaningless question. |
| 1.411 | A meaningless question is a question whose answer is a meaningless proposition. |
| 1.4111 | A meaningless proposition is a proposition whose truth-value can be ascertained only from the perspective of an unavailable <i>metalanguage</i> , a term which must be defined in relation to the object language in which the proposition at issue is framed. |
| 1.4112 | A meaningless proposition is not necessarily a proposition without sense. |
| 1.41121 | Sense, too, is imbued by speakers. |
| 1.41122 | Propositional truth-value is the primary concern of the philosopher, propositional sense that of the poet. |
| 1.41123 | The concepts of <i>truth-value</i> and <i>sense</i> are not wholly distinct. |
| 1.4113 | A proposition whose truth-value can be ascertained only from the perspective of a <i>logically</i> unavailable metalanguage, a God's-eye view, is a proposition of <i>fundamental</i> philosophy. |
| 1.41131 | The propositions of fundamental philosophy are meaningless. |
| 1.41132 | If there were objects more simple than those referred to by language (and which, perhaps, might be thought to be the constituent elements of referenced objects), the truth-value of any proposition asserting the existence (or, the non-existence) of such objects would be a proposition of fundamental philosophy. |
| 2 | What-is is a subset of what-is-possible, and what-is-possible is made so only by its articulation. |
| 2.1 | Language, including here any system of signs, is the means by which the what-is-possible is made so; and, it is a part of both the what-is-possible and the what-is. |
| 2.2 | The creation of language is an artistic task. Where the system is linguistic, it is a poetic task. |
| 2.21 | A poem may be understood as the point of entry into a <i>metaphysical space</i> . |
| 2.22 | The poetic creation of language does not create the world but creates, instead, the what-is-possible, the possible worlds of which the what-is is but one. |
| 2.3 | The what-is-possible is made the what-is by means of the articulation, whether to others or to oneself, of a private vision. |
| 2.31 | The act of reading is also an instance of the act of speaking. |
| 2.32 | Because language creates objects (that is, creates the what-is) only when it represents the articulation of a private vision, a poem has no truth-value unless it is given such by an individual speaker. |
| 2.321 | A poem <i>does</i> have sense. |
| 2.3211 | That is, the poem does not assert, it expresses; it does not say, it shows. |
| 3 | 'I' is a literary construct, both in literature and in life. |
| ... | ... |

^{44.31} Cf., "[T]he background linguistic system . . . of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual's mental activity, for his analysis of impressions, for his synthesis of his mental stock and trade. Formulation of ideas is . . . part of a particular grammar, and differs, from slightly to greatly, between different grammars. . . . ¶ We are thus introduced to a new principle of relativity, which holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated." (Whorf, "Science and Linguistics" [1940].)

^{44.221} See, "[A]rt, if it means awareness of our own life, means also awareness of the lives of other people – for style for the writer, no less than color for the painter, is a question not of technique but of vision: it is the revelation, which by direct and conscious methods would be impossible, of the qualitative difference, the uniqueness of the fashion in which the world appears to each one of us, a difference which, if there were no art, would remain forever the secret of every individual. Through art alone are we able to emerge from ourselves, to know what another person sees of a universe which is not the same as our own, and of which, without art, the landscapes would remain as unknown to us as those that may exist in the moon. Thanks to art, instead of seeing one world only, our own, we see that world multiply itself and we have at our disposal as many worlds as there are original artists, worlds more different one from the other than those which revolve in infinite space, worlds which, centuries after the extinction of the fire from which their light first emanated, whether it is called Rembrandt or Vermeer, send us still each one its special radiance." (Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past* [1913-1927].)

he or she is not to be reduced to the impossibility of absolute scepticism.⁴⁵ Such utterances are, in

⁴⁵ Cf., “Ethics must be a condition of the world, like logic. Ethics and aesthetics are one.”^{45.1} (*Notebooks, 1914-1916.*)

^{45.1} Cf., “In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, ‘tis necessary that it should be observed and explained; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. But as authors do not commonly use this precaution, I shall presume to recommend it to the readers; and am persuaded, that this small attention would subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceived by reason.”^{45.11} (David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* [1739].)

^{45.11} This is Hume’s is-ought fallacy, known to those familiar with the work of G.E. Moore as the ‘naturalistic fallacy.’ It arises from the failure to recognize what is sometimes referred to as the ‘is-ought gap’, i.e., the failure to recognize that the *fact* asserted by an *ought* statement cannot be derived from an *is* statement.^{45.111} It was his own recognition of this gap, coupled with his commitment to the central importance of ethics to *life*, which led the early Wittgenstein to identify ethics as a transcendent ‘condition of the world.’ Here, we might opt to state it only slightly differently: The gap between *is* and *ought* statements cannot be *bridged*; if the gap is to be crossed at all, it must be *leaped*. [12]

^{45.111} The is-ought gap is well known in philosophical circles; but most such gaps are not, though they are everywhere. In fact, there are at least as many instances of such gaps as there are philosophical explanations. Every explanation, not excluding that (or those) of the present work, has embedded within it at least one **fundamental proposition**, arrived at and assigned a truth-value by fiat, faith, vision, intuition, or understanding.^{45.1111} (See further, footnote 9.31, the primary text on page xvi, and footnote 44, above.) For each such proposition, we choose whether to believe it or not; and, it may well be the wholly contingent tendency toward an incidental consistency in our day to day choices is sufficient to explain our otherwise illusory sense of even our own persisting underlying selves. [13] Reason can guide us forward from such choices, but it does not and cannot guide us in the choices themselves.

^{45.1111} The last three terms above have been used largely interchangeably herein, though one might well distinguish among them. In some usages, for example, ‘vision’ and ‘understanding’ are tinged with an air of certainty less commonly associated with ‘intuition’. With that in mind, it is worth noting that debate as to the proper role of *intuition* in the realms of science and mathematics is long-standing.^{45.11111}

^{45.11111} Intuition’s role in the identification of the axioms on which a given propositional system is to be founded may be either restrictive or expansive, and for either good or ill. Thus, for instance, the parallel postulate was identified by Euclid and included in his geometry in approximately 300 B.C.E., on the basis of intuition; but, it was also intuition which served over the ensuing millennia to prevent the serious consideration of alternatives to the parallel postulate. It was not until 1830, when János Bolyai and Nikolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky, working and publishing separately, founded the field of hyperbolic geometry, now known as Bolyai-Lobachevskian geometry; and 1854, when Bernhard Riemann founded the field of elliptic geometry, now known as Riemannian geometry, that it was discovered that geometries rejecting Euclid’s parallel postulate were not necessarily inconsistent; and, the discovery and development of those geometries, too, was driven by intuition.

fact, the very heart of the mechanism, the shapers of every propositional system, the wheels in whose turnings are created the interwoven universes of actuality and possibility,⁴⁶ and, of them, one might even say: *'Tis neither the Eye of God nor His Voice*

⁴⁶ For any system interpreted in accord with the broad linguistic conventions discussed in footnote 39, and subject to the limits of both the system's specific conventions and its speakers' criteria for assignment of truth-value, there exists more than one equally satisfactory assignment of truth-values to the system's propositions.^{46.1}

^{46.1} *Although the precise number of truth-value assignments possible to any particular p system's propositions is incalculable absent specific information regarding the conventions and criteria affecting that particular system, there exist 2ⁿ possible combinations of truth-value assignments to the fundamental propositions included within a given p system, where (1) 'n' represents the number of fundamental propositions which are members of that system and (2) the truth-value assignments allowed to a given proposition within the system are limited to either true or false.*^{46.11}

^{46.11} Cf., "Perhaps we need to be much more radical in the explanatory hypotheses considered than we have allowed ourselves to be heretofore."^{46.111} Possibly the world of external facts is much more fertile and plastic than we have ventured to suppose;^{46.112} it may be that all these cosmologies and many more analyses and classifications are genuine ways of arranging what nature offers to our understanding,^{46.113} and that the main condition determining our selection between them is something in us rather than something in the external world."^{46.114} (E.A. Burtt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science* [1925].)

^{46.111} See, e.g., "[T]he Hopi language contains no reference to 'time,' either explicit or implicit. ¶ [Yet], the Hopi language is capable of accounting for and describing correctly, in a pragmatic or operational sense, all observable phenomena of the universe. . . . Just as it is possible to have any number of geometries other than the Euclidean which give an equally perfect account of space configurations, so it is possible to have descriptions of the universe, all equally valid, that do not contain our familiar contrasts of time and space. The relativity viewpoint of modern physics is one such view, conceived in mathematical terms, and the Hopi *Weltanschauung* is another and quite different one, nonmathematical and linguistic."^{46.1111} (Whorf, "An American Indian Model of the Universe" [1936].)

^{46.112} "[I]s sensory experience fixed and neutral? Are theories simply man-made interpretations of given data? The epistemological viewpoint that has most often guided Western philosophy for three centuries dictates an immediate and unequivocal, Yes! . . . Yet [the Cartesian framework] no longer functions effectively, and the attempts to make it do so through the introduction of a neutral language of observations now seem to me hopeless."^{46.1121} . . . ¶ [T]hree centuries after Descartes our hope for [such a language] still depends exclusively upon a theory of perception and of mind [that is failing]." (Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* [1962].)

^{46.113} Cf., "What is the relationship between hallucination and worldview? . . . [R]eality 'in itself,' as Kant put it, is really unknown to any sentient organism; the categories of organization, time, and space are mechanisms by which the living percept-systems, including the portions of the brain that receive the 'raw' sense data, require the imposition of a subjective framework in order to turn what would otherwise be chaotic into an environment that is relatively constant, with enough abiding aspects so that the organization can imagine, on the basis of memory (the past) and observing (the present), what the future probably will be. . . . ¶ A good deal of this organization is done within the percept system itself; that is, by less-than-conscious portions of the neurological apparatus, so by the time the 'self' receives the sense data it has so to speak been automatically structured into the idiosyncratic worldview. The self. . . is therefore presented with material a good deal of which originated within its own being, at one level or another. In the light of this, the idea of hallucinating takes on a very different character; hallucinations, whether induced by psychosis, hypnosis, drugs, toxins, etc., may be merely quantitatively different from what we see, not qualitatively so. . . . No-name entities or aspects begin to appear, and since the person does not know what they are – that is, what they're called or what they mean – he cannot communicate with others about them. . . . ¶ But the crucial question as to where, at what stage, these perplexing aspects, augmentations, or warpages away from the commonly shared view begin, is not answered by any of this. . . . Up until the last three or four years it would have been generally agreed that these invasions of the orderly continuity of world experience beyond doubt originate in the person, at some level of the neurological structure, but now, for the first time, really, the body of evidence has begun to swing the other way. Entirely new terms such as 'expanded consciousness' are heard, terms indicating that research, especially with hallucinatory drugs, points to the probability, whether we like it or not, that . . . the percept system is overperceiving . . . but the overperception emanates from outside the organism. . . . The problem actually seems to be that rather than 'seeing what isn't there' the organism is seeing what is there – but no one else does, hence no semantic sign exists to depict the entity and therefore the organism cannot continue an empathic relationship with the members of his society. And this breakdown of empathy is double; they can't empathize his 'world,' and he can't theirs." (Philip K. Dick, "Drugs, Hallucinations, and the Quest for Reality" [1964].)

^{46.114} "May the universe in some strange sense be 'brought into being' by the participation of those who participate?"^{46.1141} (Charles W. Misner, Kip S. Thorne, John Archibald Wheeler, *Gravitation* [1973].)

^{46.1111} Whorf ultimately concluded that (1) all higher levels of thinking are dependent on language and (2) the structure of the language within which one habitually thinks influences one's understanding of one's environment (i.e., 'the world'). Different natural languages may, then, be associated with discernibly different understandings of the world; and, multiple understandings may be equally, though differently, successful.

^{46.1121} See, footnote 10, above.

^{46.1141} Cf., "It's as though the world were a dream dreamed by a single dreamer in which all the dream characters dreamed you." (Joseph Campbell, in conversation with Bill Moyers, aired as *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth* [1988], paraphrasing from Schopenhauer's "Transcendent Speculation on Apparent Design in the Fate of the Individual" [1851].)

creates the world, but the tongue of man;⁴⁷ or, if God it is, a god residing in the dreams of men.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ One might here argue, of course, that man's freedom is constrained by the limitations of his tools, that his language, and the logic arisen therefrom, has a metaphysical bias. And, this much, at least, must be admitted: The omnipresent I is not an accidental god of analysis, to be easily left behind in the ruins of the analytic paradigm;^{47.1} its ghost haunts each language without exception, and each and every logical system; that is, man's very soul. [15]^{47.2}

⁴⁸ Cf., "In the beginning was the Word,^{48.1} and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (*John 1:1*); but see: "... and, when I say that I believe in Him, I mean that I believe primarily in his words and only secondarily in the man; and, when I say that I believe in the Word, I mean that I believe primarily in that which it represents and only secondarily in the words themselves; and, when I say that I believe in that which must remain beyond the grasp of words, what can I say?"^{48.2} (Johnson Hanson, *Truth, Man & God in Post-Modern America* [1983].)

^{47.1} *The I's privileged position, however, is limited to the epistemological realm. The self is neither more nor less sacred metaphysically than are time and the object, the other two points of the modern ontological tripod.*^{47.11} *Berkeley's refutation of the object is beyond dispute; and, Hume's refutation of the I is similarly unassailable.*^{47.12} *Taking these refutations as his beginning, Jorge Luis Borges goes further, offering a refutation of time,*^{47.13} *in which (he states) he does not believe, but which is, nevertheless, as effective in its way as those of Berkeley and Hume, who of course did not themselves believe in their own sceptical refutations.*^{47.14}

^{47.2} "That the world is my world shows itself in the fact that the limits of the language (the only language which I understand) mean the limit of my world." (Tractatus 5.62.)

^{48.1} Cf., "In the universe now there was no longer a container and a thing contained, but only a general thickness of signs superimposed and coagulated, occupying the whole volume of space; it was constantly being dotted, minutely, a network of lines and scratches and reliefs and engravings: the universe was scrawled over on all sides, along all its dimensions. There was no longer any way to establish a point of reference: the Galaxy went on turning but I could no longer count the revolutions, any point could be the point of departure, any sign heaped up with the others could be mine, but discovering it would have served no purpose, because it was clear that, independent of signs, space didn't exist and perhaps had never existed."^{48.11} [16] (Italo Calvino, *Cosmicomics* [1965].)

^{48.2} Cf., "Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net which has been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out infinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of deities, the artificer has hung a single glittering jewel in each "eye" of the net, and since the net itself is infinite in dimension, the jewels are infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering like stars of the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now arbitrarily select one of these jewels for inspection and look closely at it, we will discover that in its polished surface there are reflected all the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an infinite reflecting process occurring" (Francis H. Cook, recounting the story of Indra's net, a story first documented in the *Atharva Veda*, dating from approximately 1200 B.C.E., in his *Hua-Yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra* [1977]).

^{47.11} Some might expect that *causation*, *causal interaction*, or *causal connection* should be added to the set or substituted into it in replacement of one of those identified above. However, Hume as effectively disposes of *causal connection* as he does of the I, pointing out that no such connection is ever observed, only a 'constant conjunction' of one event with another: "It appears that, in single instances of the operation of bodies, we never can, by our utmost scrutiny, discover any thing but one event following another, without being able to comprehend any force or power by which the cause operates, or any connexion between it and its supposed effect. . . . ¶ One event follows another; but we never can observe any tie between them. They seemed conjoined, but never connected. . . . ¶ It is allowed on all hands that there is no known connexion between the sensible qualities and the secret powers; and consequently, that the mind is not led to form such a conclusion concerning their constant and regular conjunction, by anything which it knows of their nature."^{46.211} (Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* [1748].)

^{47.12} See, respectively, footnotes 5.2 and 5.1, above.

^{47.13} "Each moment is autonomous. Neither vengeance nor pardon nor prisons nor even oblivion can modify the invulnerable past. To me, hope and fear seem no less vain, for they always refer to future events; that is, to events that will not happen to us, who are the minutely detailed present. I am told that the present, the specious present of the psychologists, lasts from a few seconds to a minute fraction of a second; that can be the duration of the history of the universe. In other words, there is no such history, just as a man has no life; not even one of his nights exists; each moment we live exists, but not their imaginary combination. . . . ¶ [T]he number of . . . human moments is not infinite. The elemental ones . . . are even more impersonal. . . . ¶ [W]e can postulate, in the mind of an individual (or of two individuals who do not know of each other but in whom the same process works), two identical moments. Once this ability is postulated, one may ask: Are not these identical moments the same? . . . ¶ Is not one repeated term sufficient to break down and confuse the history of the world, to denounce that there is no such history?" (Borges, "A New Refutation of Time" [circa 1945].)

^{47.14} The point being that it does not matter *which* concept(s) we might seek to take as our foundation: Because *none* of them will hold, we must learn to live without foundations. [14]

^{48.11} A note as to attribution: Excepting a single, intentional instance, the *words* of others when used herein are invariably cited as such, the *ideas* of others perhaps less perfectly so, but with the same good intention. It is possible, however, that some of the external sources cited are not genuine.

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APPENDIX

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[1] Walt Whitman: Here I Am *

"I am large, I contain multitudes." - Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself"

Here I am,
Waking with a laugh and a smile!
Opening my merry eye, my rising sun,
Casting my warmly glistening nets, singing
Here I am!
My toes spread wide against bare sand,
Chest rising falling with deep windy breaths,
Greeting everyone I meet
Here I am! Here I am!
Rippled abdominals and raised veins
On heavy hands, with labor-thickened thumbs,
Here I stand, fist on one raw hip,
Pouring sweat and shouting
Here I am! Here I am! Here I am!

Here I am,
Sunset firelight caressing my face,
Illuminating
My last waking whisper
Here I am,
Slipping off to sleep.

*Mountain View, California
October 2-6, 1992*

* *"In the far South the sun of Autumn is passing/ Like Walt Whitman walking along a ruddy shore./ He is singing and chanting the things that are part of him./ The worlds that were and will be, death and day./ Nothing is final, he chants. No man shall see the end./ His beard is of fire and his staff is a leaping flame." - Wallace Stevens.*

[2] Eliot, the Elder (1961): London

*I am moved by fancies that are curled
Around these images, and cling:
The notion of some infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering thing.*

T.S. Eliot – “Preludes” (1917)

A sober man,
His weathered face shadowed by some deep regret,
Stares steadily in front of him, and draws upon his cigarette:

*One cannot say; no, one certainly cannot say
I lacked the courage of my convictions;
For did I not choose the Church of England
Over the foolish fancies of my youth?
Have I not foregone romantic fantasy
For intellectual honesty? In truth,
There are some who say I have chosen
The Church of England over God himself.*

*Well, if so, what of it?
As if God were somehow available,
Were somehow one's own to choose!*

Blue smoke drifts up to wreath his face:

*Of course, there are always, will always be
Those who accuse the righteous, the few,
Of some shadowy weakness of the will.
The age of revelations is not ours.
Can it be weakness to face the truth?
To hold fast to what is left
In an age not granted, so seldom granted,
The tokens of proof?
And yet . . .*

And yet,
Something in this small vignette
Offers me a mortal glimpse
Of hopeless and peculiar grace,

And something else I can't relate.

**Rapid City, South Dakota
July 9-23, 2004**

[3] Marguerite Yourcenar: The Last Testament of Hadrian

*Just when the gods had ceased to be, and the Christ had not yet come, there was a unique moment in history, between Cicero and Marcus Aurelius, when man stood alone. **

When I look back on my life, a single face appears to my mind's eye, a single form, caught in countless images of activity and repose. – And yet, memory, when quarried too often, ceases to be the means to what was, becoming instead yet another funeral mask interposed between the living and the dead. . . . At times, I feel I am no longer the man, Hadrian, who loved a boy, Antinous. That man remains in Egypt, holding a still and lifeless body, trapped in a silent, unabating scream, while I have been changed into someone else, an older man, separated from both my former self and the boy by time – and by my own memories. . . . This older man I have become, does he relate the story as the younger would have? I am sure he does not, for I have left many Hadrians in my past, but only one Antinous. . . .

To tell my life as a story – is it to *find* form in, or to *give* form to, that which has engaged me these many years? – Historians have already recorded the details of my life, and I shall not quibble with them at this late date. Let it suffice to say that I was granted a childhood far from the environs of Rome, though privileged by the standards of the ordinary citizen; that my early adult years were spent enjoying not only the material and sensual riches, but also the responsibilities and fears that accompany the status of being but *one* of an aging emperor's favorites; and, that I have in the years since the Emperor Trajan's death been the undisputed ruler of the known world. – These are the essential *facts* of my life; but, no mere recitation of facts can reveal a life's *meaning*. Still, it is in such facts as these I must look to find my beginnings.

* * *

As a child I dreamed of being a hero, of giving my life for Rome. This, I believed, would be the ultimate sacrifice. But the hero's feats cost him little; when he dies, he dies a hero's death, his soul, if not his body, unmarked. As a soldier I learned, only too well, of other, more difficult forms of courage, exacting a far greater price. – In the Germanic wars, where I served as a young officer, our enemies tortured their prisoners, releasing them outside our encampments so that we might watch them die. We, in turn, lined the palisades of those same encampments with the severed heads of the hostages we had taken. Where the inhabitants were suspected of sympathy with the Roman cause, the enemy burned entire villages; we burned villages in return. Women and children were put to the sword by both sides, each insisting it was responding to the atrocities of the other. – I have inflicted death and, more importantly, torture. I have used terror as a tool. Thus is war fought, requiring from its protagonists either the brutality of the beast or that harder

* Marguerite Yourcenar, quoting from the correspondence of Flaubert, in her "Reflections on the Composition of *Memoirs of Hadrian*".

courage of which the hero knows not. – On my return to Rome, I prayed, my prayers made the more fervent by my fundamental scepticism, that I would never again be forced to discover whether the capacity for *either* such brutality *or* such courage still lay within me. My prayers, of course, went unanswered.

It was during the Germanic wars that I first encountered the cult of Mithras. Brought back from the Asian campaigns, it survived transplant to Europe in the shape of a secret society of young officers. Through a succession of hot, humid summers and bitterly cold winters, I discovered that its ascetic teachings – transmitted amid the trappings of blood and iron – brought me ever closer to that soldier's god which unites slayer and slain. Such identification grants the god's followers a special strength, preparing them equally to kill or be killed, requiring of them only that they be prepared to perform *either* task with equal distinction. – My own religious beliefs did not survive my career as a soldier. Yet, I have continued to believe that our *experience* of the sacred is genuine; it is only the *interpretations* we give to such experience that are false, perhaps necessarily so. Accordingly, it has been my policy throughout my reign to honor the religious beliefs of the various peoples over which I rule, in the conviction that each man should be permitted to worship at that altar *he* has found to be sacred.

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In the years immediately following my succession, my life was richly chaotic, as I struggled to impose my will on this most unwieldy of empires. Eventually, the time came when my fulfillment was complete, when I and my world were in such accord that I was happy without being aware that I was so. With each passing hour, my vision of Rome became more fully realized; and, day and night, Antinous was at my side. – Little did I know, but I was blessed, as only one fortunate enough to be loved by one's own beloved can be. Only then can one fully enjoy the fruit of experience, only then can one truly taste the sensual and intellectual joys life has to offer. Only then is one's attention not diminished by desire for what one lacks. Yet, there are dangers, even in happiness – complacency, arrogance, a forgetting of what life had been before one's beloved. – Of impending loss, there were signs – signs I chose not to read as I busied myself hurrying to reap my harvest, to gather to myself all that life offers a popular and powerful emperor at the height of his reign.

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I have heard men argue that the institution of slavery is intrinsically evil. Perhaps. But it is not unnatural. There is, in fact, no clear line to be drawn between slavery and other forms of servitude. Slavery is but an emblem; and, many who do not wear the emblem bear the weight of subjugation. Indeed, all men are slaves to the needs of life. And yet, this much is true: As the State *must*, by its very nature, impose special burdens on its subjects, it *ought*, in return, to bestow benefits; and, any ruler who would forget this fact, needlessly divesting thereby any significant part of the populace of its natural interest in the State's continued existence, is a fool, for the State over which he rules is then vulnerable, to an extent precisely

calculable by combining the degree of the divestiture with the relative weighted proportion of the population so divested. – I have, therefore, made it my task to ensure that not even the lowest classes, whether slave or free, have reason to wish Rome to be less than eternal, insisting that the institution of slavery be regulated by laws and imperial edicts providing certain basic protections and guarantees.

* * *

Yet, nothing, not even Rome, *is*, in fact, eternal. My first visit to Athens overwhelmed me with melancholy. Its past glories cast the city in a golden light, granting an air of autumn to what is become, in actuality, an endless winter. I knew then, in a moment, that Rome must one day suffer the same fate. . . . Even now, our harvest is almost complete, what fruit remains already past its prime. Though not yet evident to the average citizen, Rome is slowly rotting from within.

Like a bird, making its nest in the upper branches of a great tree, I am, perhaps, uniquely positioned to sense the rigidity that is prelude to death. There may well be greater spectacles, greater conquests yet to come; but the *soul* of Rome is already less vital than it was. – Our creativity is already dead. Even at its best, Roman artistic inspiration amounted to little more than a synthesis, a well-organized application of Greek ideals. Yet, where once we might have been inspired to see the possibility of *new* works in the pieces of a glorious past, now we merely copy, too often badly, what has been done before.

Some say this is simply the inevitable consequence of our past successes, that we have exhausted the possibilities of form. But, I do not believe this to be so. The world of form, like the world of ideas, is inexhaustible. Somewhere, *between* the Roman insistence on a literal accuracy that renders invisible the god within and the Greek desire to represent *only* that which is of the god, is the still unrealized art of the *human*. There, existing as yet only in *potentia*, is the art of Man and his relationship to all that is *and*, of equal importance, all that is not.

The world does not weary of us; but, in a sense we cannot fully grasp in youth, or even middle age, we weary of the world. We are born containing within us the seeds of our own destruction; and, it is we who exhaust our *own* possibilities.

This is, perhaps, as it should be. My own exhaustion is evident; Rome's may be less so. Both, however, are genuine.

* * *

There are no words to convey the madness which came upon me at the death of Antinous. One day I was utterly fulfilled, a ruler wanting for nothing. The next, my beloved was gone – leaving only the empty vessels of body and name, his absence draining all else of its previous worth. – Some of our philosophers teach that death is simply life's reabsorption of its own latent possibilities – hence the greater pain caused by the death of one who dies young, leaving so many possibilities forever unrealized. It is said that such dead are

the beloved of the gods, particularly those who choose, as did Antinous, to make of themselves sacrifices to love of the living.

But what of those the dead leave behind? Nothing is said, and there is little to say. The world seen through the weave of a fine cloth appears softened, but still the world. Seen suddenly without the cloth, the world was, for a time, too much.

* * *

It is not an emperor's prerogative to withdraw from the active life as age advances, though such may be man's natural course. Nevertheless, I have in recent years secluded myself to a greater degree than before, indulging an ever greater part of myself in contemplation.

I have come to believe that *truth* is various, and that each instance of it must be understood to have arisen from one or another limited perspective. Where the philosophers, with their abstract arguments, claim to have discovered countless instances of *absolute* truth, I have found only infinite mystery, but mystery within which is hidden the essence of life: *My world is not the world*; and yet I feel within me the presence of that which is eternal – meeting and affecting, somehow, that which is in constant flux. Man partakes of *both* the eternal *and* this whirl of constant change; and, I believe, it is up to each man to find his *own* balance in between them.

* * *

I have also come to believe that all we claim to *know* is rooted in our desires. Such desires may take many forms. One man's desire may be the acquisition of mathematical skills; another's may be to assemble a complete collection of the works of a particular sculptor; and, for a third, the object of greatest desire may be a person, a beloved, without whom life's meaning is lost. . . . Without desire there can be neither knowledge nor action. Thus, even if there *were*, as some claim, a singular God, subject not at all to human desire, I do not believe he could be an active agent in the world. It is for this reason that, while accepting neither God nor gods, my sympathies have always fallen nearer those who place their hope in the latter, for the gods seem merely men and women of great appetite, and the possibility of their existence is, accordingly, less incomprehensible to me.

* * *

If all knowledge *is*, in fact, rooted in desire, then *no* man's view of the world can be fully understood unless one *first* understands his desires. – Of all human desire, eroticism is the most important, and the most mysterious. I do not, however, go so far as to assert *all* knowledge to be erotic in nature. The knowledge of the old man and that of the small child, for instance, are both largely free of eroticism, though the memory of a world passed on casts a shadow over the former different from that cast by premonition over the latter. Nevertheless, I cannot claim to have encountered a single instance of human opinion or knowledge not

seasoned, to at least some small degree, by eroticism. Throughout our lives, lessening only slightly after physical release, eroticism colors even the *least* sensual of our encounters. In some instances, even ignorance may be seen to be erotic in nature, a *failure* of the understanding that is the inverse of that insight oft times granted by passion.

* * *

My life, in this time of dying, has led me to believe that even the wisest must live out their lives in what is, at best, a dimly lit room, understanding far outweighed by ignorance. . . . Solitude and the dark of night make up much of what we are. And yet, it is the mystery inherent in the night that gives us cause to wonder, and it is solitude that grants us opportunity.

I have been many men over the decades and varying circumstances of my life, some of whom would be strangers to the man I am today, so much have I changed. Of late, these differences have led me to wonder whether *all* differences between one man and another do not, in the end, result *wholly* from mere differences in time and circumstance. – After all, were these not sufficient unto themselves to create the old man I am today out of the endless series of younger men I have been? – Yet, is it not also true, as the philosophers tell us, that the soul itself is eternal? If so, might it not be that we all partake of a *single* soul, unchanging in itself, its eternal singularity masked by those differences in time and circumstance that separate us - one from another, *and* from our own previous selves? – And, if this too were so, would I not, in *potentia* at least, be *both* an aging emperor, dying in his bed, *and* that small child who once ran through the woods of his native Spain? – And, might I then not *also* be Antinous, with the knife in his hand?

* * *

If love is to survive, it must change, like a river, slowing, but deepening in its course, as the ages pass and it becomes an intimate part, the defining characteristic perhaps, of the surrounding landscape. Such love requires a lifetime to grow, and lovers who are wise enough to surrender love's fire, without abandoning love itself.

What was it I did not see? Was I blinded by my love or by my failure to love enough? I have asked myself these questions time and again, in a thousand different ways, spent these last years of my life reliving *his* last moments, as if *I* were the boy alone on that Egyptian riverbank, with the first light of dawn about to break on eternity.

But to no avail, no answers are given.

* * *

Memory is an artist, juxtaposing events transpired months and years apart, one remembrance triggering another, and then another and another, the entire chain related not by reason but by a metaphor or a series of metaphors – the identity of which is only sometimes evident to the soul that is the medium of the artist's compositions. . . . In the end, I find myself oft returning to that time of childhood when the words to

articulate the world's great secrets seemed to circle just out of reach, soon to alight on the tip of my tongue
– “*There are no gods, and yet no God, to baffle or purify what lies within . . .*” – Yes, this, perhaps, or
something like it . . .

There are no gods, and yet no God, to baffle or purify what lies within. The round structure of the human skull, fit for neither hierarchy nor the singular truth of the Word, dooms the quest for meaning to ultimate failure, and prepares us for another quest, less well-defined, with outcome less certain.

- Comment attributed to the Roman emperor, Hadrian, on his deathbed.

***Rapid City, South Dakota
October 7, 2001 – October 30, 2003***

[4] Thoreauvian Economics: “The value of a basket of fruit”

“[T]hough private property appears to be the source, the cause of alienated labor, it is really its consequence, just as the gods in the beginning are not the cause but the effect of man’s confusion.” - Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844.

The value of a basket of fruit is,
if we are to be precise,
that very basket of fruit; and yet,
even though the most closely similar basket
is, thus, but an *approximation* of the first,
the very *concept* of value is rooted in
the original substitution, the *first*
such approximation.

*“It is not the orange of Cuba but rather the checkerberry of the neighboring pasture that most delights the eye and the palate of the New England child. For it is not the foreignness or size or nutritive qualities of a fruit that determine its absolute value. . . . The value of these wild fruits is not in the mere possession or eating of them, but in the sight and enjoyment of them.” – Henry David Thoreau, Wild Fruits (1859-1862).**

And will even *this* basket
be the *same* basket of fruit in a month?
No, most certainly not. Will it be so
tomorrow? Or even an hour from now? No,
though we may, of course,
determine to *speak*,
as if it were so . . .

“. . . Thoreau writes of this very thing in Walden, stating, ‘I respect not his labors, his farm where everything has its price, who would carry the landscape, who would carry his God to market, if he could get anything for him; who goes to market for his god as it is; on whose farm nothing grows free, whose fields bear no crops, whose meadows no flowers, whose trees no fruits, but dollars.’ The fact that Thoreau himself does not here go so far should not prevent us, his spiritual heirs, from giving to the set of all non-fungible values the name of the Sacred, and to the things which partake of those values, and to that very extent to which they partake of those values, the name of God.” – Monique-Mystälya Honeychurch, Thoreauvian Economics: Notes Toward a Sustainable Global Economy (1989).

**New York, New York
May 14-16, 1991**

[5] Dancing in Tongues

"There is nothing inorganic; this earth is not, then, a mere fragment of dead history . . . but living poetry like the leaves of a tree – not a fossil earth – but a living specimen." – Henry David Thoreau, *Journal*.



The lungfish still swims in the
saltwater pool
of our palms

Its chances still random
as rainfall

And a turtle's heart still beats
its reptilian logic

In the fossil bone cage
of our ribs

We are dancing in tongues!
Yes, dancing in tongues!
We have dined on the lark's song
And are dancing in tongues!



"We are rag dolls made out of many ages and skins, changelings who have slept in wood nests or hissed in the uncouth guise of waddling amphibians. We have played such roles for infinitely longer ages than we have been men. Our identity is a dream. We are process, not reality, for reality is an illusion of the daylight – the light of our particular day." – Loren Eisley, "The Star Thrower".

**New York, New York
March 19, 1991**

[6] Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus 5.64

"In my end is my beginning." - T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets.

Dawn,
her ottered o
yawns across
a young god
unable to bear
the expense
of skin

Turning,
 turning,
 turning,

Slowly turning,
 to tigress-petalled,
 evening's eye.

Shadows porpoise
her sunset lip,
her face
childbirth's
ecstatic sister

Vancouver, Washington
December 18-19, 1991

[7] This Saltwater Waltz (in ¾-time)

“Other dances, they say, are for people who are falling in love, but the tango is a dance for those who have been in love – and are still more than a little angry about it. It is a truism to say that life shapes art and, then, art turns around and influences our understanding of life. But it is true, at least of certain forms of art. The tango is just such a form. Thus, for example, I wonder whether our understanding, even our experience of a work such as Federico García Lorca’s “Little Viennese Waltz” would be the same if we lived in a world that had never known the tango. Because, as every tango aficionado who has ever read it knows, García Lorca’s poem, despite tempo and title, is at its center no waltz at all, but among the very rawest of tangos.” – Gustavo Jorge Merello, The History of the Tango, from Montevideo to the 21st Century (2003).

There’s a cry where the window of sunrise
Meets the tear in the sky’s tissue seam
A faint echo of still-born laughter
Eloped from some delicate dream

The pigeon soot hands of my evening
The yolkless white flesh of your eyes
A stone lizard which stood in the garden
And now gasps in the sweat of our thighs

The blue flute I kept buried in the closet
Of your fear of its forbidden tune
Your lost paintings of unfabled fountains
All swim in a heavy perfume

Distilled from the musk of some meeting
Of these sheets upon which we are bled
No sweet scent of a meadow’s encounter
Masks this odor which hangs from our bed

As I grasp the high waist of your pitiless vase
We have filled with a cognac of flowerless stems
And we drink the moon’s glance of its bittersweet dance
Beneath cobblestone shadows of rags dressed as men

And swallow the tongues of our fathers
With their cries of cathedralless love
Tasting each tear of our firefly years
We weave of them glistening gloves

And glide across marble floor memories
Before coming to rest hand in hand
There’s a face I will fasten for the lamplight
To your voice full of sadness and sand

*Palo Alto, California/Minneapolis, Minnesota
July 8-14, 1990/October 27, 2019*

[8] “Once I had a dream”

*A child is sleeping:
An old man gone.
O, father forsaken,
Forgive your son! **

Once I had a dream in which I created a world so real its existence precluded my own, a metaphysical instantiation whose reality, once created, would be inconsistent not only with my continued existence but with my having ever existed. Upon awakening, I determined, in my omniscience, omnipotence and love, to make this dream reality.

Now, in the deafening roar of my last waking moments, I hear the harsh voice of my newborn son taking its place in the infinite chorus: “I am the Lord, your God! You shall have no other gods before me!”

*“Do you hear the little bell tinkle? Kneel down. They are bringing the sacraments to a dying god.” ***

*Los Angeles, California
October 3, 1993*

* James Joyce, “Ecce Puer” (1932).

** Heinrich Heine, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* (1834).

[9] “Some cultures never invent the wheel”

Some cultures never invent the wheel.

The city in which I was born was completely innocent of maps. Each inhabitant found his way about by reference to his private, mental image of the city, an image developed by simple trial and error. When two people wished to meet, or when one gave directions to another, the parties would attempt to discover a common landmark, someplace known to both. Once discovered, this landmark - in fact, two or even three sites known to both parties were preferred - allowed speakers to translate information from the ‘language’ of one to that of the other. Thus, the absence of maps led to no great difficulties in the daily affairs of the people.

In spite (or, perhaps, because) of our lack of maps, the poetry of my city was geographic. By this, I mean simply that reading a poem involved going to specific places in the city (often, at specific times). For instance, a poem’s first line might read “The shadows moving across the churchyard in winter sunrise.” The second might state “The sounds of the fish market heard from the hills above the harbor.” Such lines would be considered directions to a poem. Although the poem was read by following such directions, only the set of experiences which ensued was considered to *be* the poem.

Of course, without maps a certain amount of ambiguity in our poetry was unavoidable. I remember that certain poets - those whose work was most dependent on subtle nuances of experience - refused to commit the directions to their poems to paper. Instead, they gave personally guided tours to their poetry, sometimes going so far as to grasp their readers by the shoulders or tilt each successive reader’s head to the proper angle in a (perhaps, futile) effort to ensure that the experience of the reader was, indeed, that intended by the poet.

I have not seen it, but I have been told that somewhere there is a city without even the concept of a dictionary. Of course, each inhabitant carries a private, linguistic roadmap, a *de facto* dictionary of sorts, in his mind. Since each such map is shaped by the individual’s trial and error utterances, no two maps are quite alike. * Nevertheless, for practical purposes, such differences cause the city’s inhabitants no great difficulties.

Like the people of my native city, these people, too, treat a poet’s written lines as mere directions to his work. However, the poetry of this city is not primarily a poetry of geographic or perceptual experience but, rather, one of linguistic experience. A poem includes not only the broad meaning of the poet’s words but

* The man who told me of this city told me also a story of two brothers who lived in it. For the elder, the distinction between the internal and external worlds was a central landmark of his cognitive map. For the younger it was not. Though both brothers were said to speak the same language, and to speak it fluently, the younger treated the words ‘ambiguous’ and ‘ambivalent’ as near synonyms. To the elder, however, these concepts were as far apart as the distance between the city’s eastern and western gates.

also all of the associations, all of the linguistic colors, shadings, and echoes experienced by the reader in connection with those words.

Of course, in a city without dictionaries, such experiences must vary widely from reader to reader. Those poets whose work is most dependent on subtle nuances of experience are said to have wrestled long and hard with the problem of how to grasp the reader by the shoulders, how to tilt his head to the proper angle.

Sacramento, California
March 8, 1992

[10] Triptych

“ . . . and we will go down to the water with the poor.”

I. Sign *

Sign becomes symbol and object myth when that which is signified remains too long beyond the linguistic community's grasp. At just this point must discourse lose its literal meaning, becoming permanently metaphorical. Notice that the *meaning* of a sign is never that which is signified but always (an)other sign(s). The object itself is without meaning. Nevertheless, it is that in which one must believe if signs are to have meanings.

The smile, the touch, the kiss - sometimes object, sometimes sign . . . sometimes merely symbol.

II. Michelangelo



*Twin orbs in pale orbits reign
O'er fluted lips unsplit by sun
In flawless face unworn by wind
Adorned by neither pain nor love*

*This, the sacred visage of
That utterly untouched by time*

. . .

No. These lines are false. Their David was broken within me long ago. These fragments I would have shored against my ruins are but empty shells, bits and pieces of an old man's memory, echoes of a lingering rhyme.

III. Soliloquies

1st

Do we wait then
Here, fearing even the *ghosts* of war,
In this, this most rotted of Gothic cathedrals? We
Who, though born in no church, have been fed a steady diet
Of its dark-spotted fruit, its disease and decay,

* The difference between signified and signifier belongs in a profound and implicit way to the totality of the great epoch covered by the history of metaphysics, and in a more explicit and more systematically articulated way to the narrower epoch of Christian creationism and infinitism when these appropriate the resources of Greek conceptuality. . . . The sign and divinity have the same place and time of birth. The age of the sign is essentially theological. Perhaps it will never end. Its historical closure is, however, outlined. – Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.

We wait.

*Like castled rooks
We watched as they waited*

If only
Mind and hand *did* go together!
You! Once as much like me as I to I
The two drawing ever closer:
In what hell have we not already coupled?
What crutch can now carry us through our days?

Time!
Its hours now more yours than mine,
Speaks now its effortless chimes!
Would you speak to it what you would not
Speak to me? Speak, then!
Complete your pregnant pause! Here!
In this state of undress,
Speak!

Has bile formed about your tongue?
Tell me, I ask you, what love has withstood
Those chimes, time's passage?
What human love could ever withstand
The orbits of its hands?
Speak! Or, would you now
Hold the gift of tongues to yourself?

Yes, triple speed, indeed
Will be the passing of my memory
Of your tears!

2nd

Have you found of late the hard fact of our father's funeral
To be too much in you? Too much *and* too little! Who knows,
But some would call it love. Love, but only human.

Would you that its mercies
Extended so far as to embrace your pain? Such tenderness
A saint's to bestow, and so only to be found in a higher circle,
Not here where the geometry of less celestial shapes rules,
Rules, and needs be, will rule for yet some time to come.

*Shapeliness unshaped by time
Its chimes sound, and will sound yet
Again and again, through this unending fog*

3rd

What emptiness awaits me now
Beneath this coming sea-cliff's high horizon?

How cold the bones of this bare coast!

What spell within us undoes,
Unpins, the cloak of even the closest desire
(Especially those closest!)
Removing even the possibility of union? Or,
Is our fate, perhaps, to guard these cliffs
Lest others plummet, like stones, like us
Into the sea?

4th

Yes, my father, I am flawed! Flawed, yes
And weak! But in these dead soliloquies,
(Although they are, indeed, thoughts of love!)
I will not, *cannot*, create my fate.

The splinters of your language are too easy, too easy
And too hard, the price of your words too high,
For they contain within them the blueprints
Of *your* church, the foundations
Of your dark and bloody altar.

Yours is not the only church, nor yours the only language.
I was not born in this cathedral.
I am not yours to hold.

***Santa Barbara, California
August 3, 1991***

[11] Möbius Strip

I.

Since
Experience unremembered is
nothing

And
Memory without experience is
illusion,

True memory is
all

There is,

And not a single sliver of the little I remember is remembered the same
by any other.

II.

She
Reaches out to touch, with God's fingertips, he who
Bends down to kiss her, this time with His lips,
And so is Creation re-enacted through an act, though wholly human,
Today so sacred, so pure, that we,
Who are but sense organs of God,
Are, in this moment, the envy of heaven.

*Redwood City, California
January 28, 1990*

Not only is the philosophical problem of the other unsolvable; it is necessarily so, because the problem is regressive. Were we not, as individuals, so isolated, the 'problem' would arise again, now in relation to the multi-organism's (the we's) perception of its isolation.

[12] Dramatis Personae: Fragmentum Dialogus *

*Standing on the threshold of daylight's imminent departure,
Alone but for the evening,
Lonely only in the sweetest sense,
I offer up my soul in the cupped palms of my hands.*

Son: Your blinded eyes stand wide tonight
As twice-full barren moons,
While the music from your daughter's wedding
Plays on without you in the inner rooms.
You die, dear Father, a pauper,
Rich in gold and jewels, perhaps,
But forgotten already by the living,
Graced only with death's peasant scraps.
Your tremulous voice, your trembling hands,
Cracked skin and broken teeth -
Are these the only crown death grant
A king to take his ease?

Father: *The wealth of my loins I have deeded my children,
And by that deed hath death denied,
Although, indeed, each world so deeded
Must itself soon wither and die -
Yet, in this, too, there lurks a pleasure,
A painful, bitter knowledge, without which life's measure
Could not have been so sweet.*

*This crown of thorns that age bestows
'Tis not death's, but life's greatest boon.
For when sweet simple pleasure of innocent youth
Doth yield to the far more difficult truth
That age be a treasure, earned with the years,
A pleasure whose essence the bittersweet tear,
When pain be learned not the price of our joys
But the salt in life's sweet recipe,
You will eagerly greet your next bittersweet tear,
'Tis this we are born to be!*

*For if life be naught but a prelude to parting
(And 'tis no more than this for all that we know!),
'Tis naught but life's thorns warn the journey is starting
And to savor each moment we share as we go.
(Extends hand to son, who takes it in his own. Father dies.)*

Son: This funeral of a friend too dear
To bear the muffled drums:

* “. . . what is happiness except the simple harmony between a man and the life he leads? And what more legitimate harmony can unite a man with life than the dual consciousness of his longing to endure and his awareness of death?” - Camus, Nuptials.

How can I find the words to say
That what will come is come?
Father, seek a dearer father in a further room,
For I must leave your hollow host
Here in the cold, dark tomb.

Rapid City, South Dakota
March 1997-October 1998

[13] I & I & I . . .

The man of yesterday has died in that of today, that of today dies in that of tomorrow. - Plutarch

He had dreamed his own death. Or, *had* it been a dream? He tried to move a shattered limb, and failed. *I remember a ditch, with people gathered round, staring and whispering among themselves.* The accident had been followed by a dark tunnel and, beyond, a light of indescribable perfection. After the light, there had been nothing.

Understanding came to him then, not in degrees, but clear and complete. *I am alive, but dressed in dead flesh. This body is a suit animated only by my presence. And among the many things that are mine but are not me are these memories: I am not the one who suffered the accident. I am not that which traveled through the tunnel, nor that which was encompassed by the light. I am that which is, but I am not that which was; nor will that which inhabits this flesh tomorrow be me.*

He died here in this ditch a few minutes ago. Later tonight, I will die in a hospital bed, leaving this, our corpse, to an unknown successor who, in his turn, will meet his fate tomorrow.

I exist in that measure in which Thou art with me, and, since Thy look is Thy being, I am because Thou dost look at me, and if Thou didst turn Thy glance from me I should cease to be. - Nicholas of Cusa

***Palo Alto, California/Rapid City, South Dakota
May 23, 1990/November 17, 1997***

[14] Letters: August-November 1987

*I listen to the voices in my head,
Care not for who they are but only what is said.
Through the day and in the night,
Secret source of all my sight,
Create a lifelike mask from what is dead,
Sifting . . . Sifting . . .
Who creates this lifelike face here in my stead?*

God came to visit, stayed here awhile, left in the morning, left us a child. . . . Turn your gaze from the sun while you still can. Truth is nothing more than an after-image seared onto the blind eyes of a madman. . . . Time in his pocket, hand up his sleeve, he delivered his warning, "I shall let the crime fit the punishment." . . . Who of us would recognize a god even as he walked among us on the street? . . . Finding no one home he turned and looked again. Finding no one home he turned and looked again. Finding no one home he turned and looked again. . . . Consider the Tractarian relationship between solipsism and realism. What does it teach you about egocentricity and selflessness? . . . Don't let the Clown out! . . . Opposing teams of sycophants agreeing to vociferously disagree. . . . He wanted to retell the sacred stories. He wanted you to repeat them as your prayers. . . . Only God lacks a soul. That is the price one pays to become God. . . . Pesticide for the bugs in my brain. Novacaine to numb the pain. . . . You thought I would take you by the hand and simply lead you through it all? Fuck you! Let it bleed, the next one can follow the trail. . . . The insane are the ones who most convincingly fake insanity. . . . What did you expect with your face buried firmly in the lap of luxury? Did you think she would respond in kind? . . . You can search for value, but where in this land of literate itinerants can you hope to find it? . . . Even as you look the other way the world continues to paint reflections on the mirror. And time will still tell if only someone will listen. . . . Time in my pocket, blood on my hands, I watched the trees grow, heard the stones crack, felt the earth shift; and, in that moment, madness took my hand. . . . When we were young the machine studied them - how they move, how they grow, the relationships among them. Since he has gone I only watch them. After all this time I'm finally alone again, stumbling through these fragmented memories left behind in the ruins of my mind. . . . His memories, my mind. . . . Was it like this before the machine came? How could I be lonely if I'd always been alone? No, it wasn't like this. . . . We danced a dance of chanceless circumstance, before owls dreamed and while gods gave answers to the night. But dances end, and gods must fall; chance today it rules us all. Alone we wander, eyes unseeing. . . . But times ago I saw the singer, heard her voice, had to linger; and dreams returned with sharpened vision. Now both voice and owner long since died away, only memory fragment echoes remain, long past hope that at death's door the dance regained. . . . Would I give it all gladly just to have it all back? I both love and hate him. Everything I have I owe to him, but---people call my name when it is him that they want, and it is him they want, they don't

know me. How could they? . . . Yet I pity him as well. On a morning long ago he had said, 'Let the Games begin', not knowing, not suspecting, finding only later that hell is not the burden that cannot be carried but the one that can, that just barely can. Then he screamed, with my voice, to let them end, to please let them end. . . . The machine is gone now; it had to end this way. He passed the sentence on himself, but what else could he do? He had to be unique, to go further than anyone else ever had. But with strength came isolation, and in the quiet of the solitude he had created for himself he began to hear voices whispering to him from the dark. . . . He was captured by a vision of the perfect language, the language of Rimbaud's dreamed of alchemy, the long-sought ideal language of the philosophers. Such a language as would be a magical instrument that, when played upon by one gifted with vision and skill, would reveal the world as it truly could be; and, in so revealing, create a reality. We both dreamed of this language of the gods, but while he remembered I have only the mirror splinters of *his* memory and my own scattered memories of things he told me. . . . He said that incomprehension was the lot of the Babelites well before their fall into private languages. Why build a tower to ascend to heaven when you can build a god and let heaven come to you? God is in his heaven, waiting still for a worthy opponent, a momentary companion; he waits, a hollow idol praying to the void for a single instant of value. Where does this God live? Ask those of your artists who caught but a glimpse of that homeland and came running back. Ask Nietzsche, if you dare, he lives there even now. God lives but a single step beyond genius. And there he stays, awaiting redemption, awaiting a worthy successor, a worthy son, the true Christ. . . . Another time he told me that they walk among you having nothing in common save each's isolation from all else he meets. There is no difference between an unworshiped and unrecognized god and the lowest beggar on the street. And while there might be a difference between the beggar and a god who is worshiped but unloved it is not apparent to the god. Yet, who could love a god? Gods may be worshiped or cursed but they cannot be loved. Now do you see how Christ suffered for your sins? . . . Some of the memories are almost whole. His or mine? I cannot tell, can no longer remember. . . . Only, with this axe, I, he, we . . . When he was finished I bathed in her blood. After I had washed I saw that she was still alive so I gave her some of the blood to drink. I thus absolved myself of her sins. . . . She, of all of them, knew what I was, but she wouldn't tell me. She said only that I could tell the one by the sign of the cross and the other by the mark of the beast. But when I asked her how to distinguish the two symbols she laughed at me and said there could be only a single symbol. . . . Sometime later he offered me this: Do not begrudge the god his position. Love is only possible between equals, and there can be no equality where there can be nothing shared. Whether his uniqueness appears to you as the sign of the cross or the mark of the beast it is the sole visible indication of his solitary personal hell. God gives to the worthy, to each, a hell of his own, for we are made in his image. . . . I remember him as an androgynous Methuselah who wore, in youth, any face he chose. His days were spent anesthetizing butterflies and placing them in piles. Yet nights when he was able to sleep he slipped into visions. Visions

of you/me/her/him, of now/what will be/then. But mostly visions of what can't be or what won't be again. I heard him cry, Where is she? . . . Where is she? . . . Now that he is gone the visions come to me, but they must be meant for him, I don't understand them. In one I see a trio of couples. She, red-haired and slight, runs ahead across the commons; they follow. He, dreadlocked and dark, points among the scattered trees; they look. He, blonde and unwashed, seats himself near the fountain in the light of the setting sun, where they join him. But he isn't among them and she is not the one he remembered. . . . In the other dream I see him. Watching a flight of passenger pigeons fly into a huge red sun, he patiently waits for the Lord's last priest to be flung down from the tower, dismembered by the old gods. Earlier, beneath an orange moon, he saw a tall black wolf standing in the shadows near the edge of the forest. The wolf waits only for the fall of the priest to walk through the streets of the city in the light of the noon-time sun. . . . When he left he told me that if I ever chose to seek for the finest to go to Earth's final evening. There I would find all the best and worst the world had to offer. And would I find him there? And which would he be? He laughed at me then.

While I will never forget, it is already hard to remember just how it was. The only memory which remains clear is a fragment of his, one single mirror splinter has remained bright as the others have clouded, one thing he said: *A new day is coming and these the words left, the words I leave behind. See the sights, the play of light, the light of day under a new sun.*

*Palo Alto/Santa Barbara, California
August 28-November 10, 1987*

[15] The Delany-Yourcenar Intersection

"I have sometimes thought of constructing a system of human knowledge which would be based on eroticism, a theory of contact wherein the mysterious value of each being is to offer to us just that point of perspective which another world affords."

– Marguerite Yourcenar, *Memoirs of Hadrian* (1951).

*Alone,
I loosen the drawstring
of a scrotal sack
filled with stones of pitted glass
to feel my fingers examine its memories of youthful glories.*

Behind the solipsistic veil of ignorance, mask across the new moon's face,
My heart beats hard against my ribs, saying something I want to say . . . and can't.
Tonight . . . the wind awaits resolution as well.

*Barefoot, well-cobbled boots in hand
Loneliness lingering my groin*

Night—barbed wire dressed in white, its desert sands surround pools of vegetation.
A thin feeling, premature, this understanding of the myriad pains which define self.
Yet, in her harmonica's phrasing

*I am Judas, Peter, Christ himself
Gandhi and Charles Manson
Moses at the threshold*

Sound gives form to shadows behind my eyelids,
As laughter, tasting of an infant reality, peels back darkness's edge.
Light explodes my eyes

*Everyman's daughter and every daughter's son
I am the window
Through which you see the world*

Colors her flowering hips, flooding her deep-sculpted body in braille.
Her breasts come bleeding into my hands,
In creation,
In evening's ruins,
Behind the solipsistic veil of ignorance.

*Inside the tattooed city
I waited,
loved,
and waited again.*

Vancouver, Washington
September 9, 1991 – November 6, 1991

[16] Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Ontologies of Absence

**Minneapolis, Minnesota/Rapid City, South Dakota
October 3, 2019 – January 1, 2020**