Suspending Meaninglessness

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LYCEUM

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LYCEUM

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Steven Baldner

Some philosophers think that the universe could not possibly have existed eternally in the past. For the universe to have existed eternally in the past, they argue, would mean that there has been an actually infinite number of past events, but since an actual infinity is an impossibility (in natural or physical things), it follows that the universe could not have been eternal in the past. Fr. Ronald Tacelli has provided an argument for part of this position, namely, an argument to show that an eternal past implies an actual infinity.[1] Prof. Staley[2] has set out to argue against the position of Fr. Tacelli, but he has done so in a curious way. He concedes to Fr. Tacelli that the past events are actual, and he also concedes that an eternal past implies an infinite number of events. Now it would seem to me that if past events are actual, and if they are infinite in number, then we must draw the conclusion that Fr. Tacelli has drawn: that an eternal past implies an actual infinity. Prof. Staley, however, does not draw such a conclusion.

The reason he does not draw the otherwise obvious conclusion is that he is using a peculiar definition of actuality, which he has taken from Fr. Tacelli. To be actual, according to Tacelli and Staley, is to be a completed set or "some sort of totality which is all together, whole or complete." (Staley, 18-19) Past events, therefore, so long as they are completed sets, are actual. All finite events in an infinite past would be actual, and the sum of all such events would be infinite, but yet this infinity of actual events would not itself be actual. It would not be an actual infinity, because of the definition of actuality that has been presupposed.

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[1] Ronald Keith Tacelli, S.J., "Does the Eternity of the World Entail an Actual Infinite? Yes!" ***Lyceum*** 3 (Spring, 1991) , pp.15-22.

[2] Kevin M. Staley, "Infinity and Proofs for the Existence of God," ***Lyceum*** 3 (Fall, 1991), pp.15-26.

The Riddle of Self-Sufficiency

> A whole or totality is that which is complete in the sense of having a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginningless universe does not, by definition, have a beginning. Therefore, it cannot constitute a totality. I do not dispute the fact that the past events of a beginningless universe are complete in the sense that they have actually occurred, each and every one of them. But I do deny that taken, together, they can in any meaningful sense be considered to be a kind of whole or totality, which is what the term 'actual' in the phrase 'actual infinity' means.(Staley, 22)

But this is not a very satisfactory way of arguing. For one thing, it commits one to the position that, although all of the past events of an eternal past are actual, the past as a whole is not actual. Surely, however, if "each and every one" of the events is actual, the sum of them (even if we cannot call it a whole or a totality) must be actual, and since infinite, and actual infinity. For another thing, this sort of argument requires a rather forced use of the words 'actual' and 'potential'. Actuality normally means, as Prof. Staley notes, that which **is**, in other words, that which presently exists. It seems gratuitous to define the actual as a closed set, a whole, or a totality. If the actual must be a whole, can my hand, which is only a part, be said to be actual? Can God be said to be actual, since He is not made up of parts or units and could not therefore be a set, whole, or totality? And it violates usage to say, as Prof. Staley does, that the past is a **potential** infinite. Potentiality, as we normally use the term, refers only to the future: potency is for that which is not but could be. A potential infinite is "always in the process of being completed" (Staley, 19), and therefore not something that could be meaningfully said of the past, for the past is certainly not in the process of being completed but simply is completed. There is, however, a sense in which an eternal past might be said to be potentially infinite: if the past were eternal, we could always count more and more past days. We could never count an actually infinite number of them, but we could always

(potentially) count more. In this sense only I would agree that the past would be, if eternal, a potential infinity

Prof. Staley has himself suggested the correct way of responding to Fr. Tacelli: "some have argued that it is wrongheaded to consider the past actual, since it no longer exists. They would rule out the past's being an actual infinity on this basis alone; for how can there be an actual infinity of non-existing past events?" (Staley, 18) I count myself among the "some who have argued" and think that this sort of argument is the only way to respond to the position which Fr. Tacelli presents so forcefully. The past of this universe is, if eternal, neither a potential nor an actual infinite; because it has no actuality at all it is wrong to characterize it as any sort of infinite. Both Tacelli and Staley regard the past as something actual because it is something that has occurred, but I would say, precisely because it is something that has occurred and no longer is occurring, that it is not actual.

The only way in which one might consider the past to be actual is in the fact that past events leave traces, so to speak, in the present. The results of my diligence in the third grade are in my present memory of the multiplication table, and the results of nourishment taken by me at that time are, in part, my present growth to an adult, but the actuality of my being in the third grade is absolutely gone. What is actual, what presently exists, is nothing more than my memories of that time, and the memories that other people have of that time, and my current health and adult growth.

Fr. Tacelli has raised problems about counting successions of Popes in an eternal Church. Of course, as he points out, if there had been an infinite number of Popes, it would be impossible to assign a number to the currently elected Pope. He uses this as an example to show that an eternal past would necessarily entail the existence of an actual infinity. Now I might concede to him that the Church could not have existed eternally in the past, and even that human history could not have an eternal past, but such considerations are only accidental to the question. He might just as well have pointed out that no one material substance could be eternal, that no artifact could be eternal, that no human institution could be eternal, and perhaps even that the species man could

not be eternal. All of these assertions are very likely true, but none of them are relevant to the question at issue. The relevant question is the general one of whether the eternal past duration of material things implies an actual infinity. Whether the eternal past of **this** universe, if it existed eternally in the past with all of its currently existing species (including man), would imply an actual infinity, is a secondary question. The prior question, the question for the debate between Fr. Tacelli and Prof. Staley, is whether the material universe in **some** form could have existed eternally in the past without resulting in an actual infinity.

Fr. Tacelli has argued that an eternal past would entail an actual infinity, because he argues that some accidental parts of the universe, if eternal, would entail an actual infinity. Prof. Staley has argued that an eternal past would entail a potential infinity and not an actual infinity, because he works with a notion of actuality that precludes an infinite set of actual events from being an actually infinite set. I argue that an eternal past would entail no infinity at all, because, unlike both Fr. Tacelli and Prof. Staley, I do not regard the past as actual.

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Suspending Meaninglessness
Style, Philosophy, and the Recent Writings of Erazim Kohák

Michael Donovan

I
(Re)Reading Kohák

Though Erazim Kohák's ***The Embers and The Stars***[3] offers meaningful possibilities for philosophy, its reception has yet to recognize those possibilities. Part theory and part poetic vision, the book's style is difficult to situate within contemporary philosophical traditions. Of course ***Embers'*** theoretical background, by itself, may also be too unfamiliar, for Kohák's vital references to Edmund Husserl's proposed "bracketing of the Natural Attitude" is recognizable only by specialized audiences[4], and Kohák's religious vision, so crucial to some of ***Embers***' conclusions, is a vision that, today, will seem extremely foreign to many readers. Coupled with its apparent stylistic aberrations, this may explain why ***Embers***' reception by technical philosophers has, so far, like that of David Hume's wonderful **A *Treatise of Human Nature***, which nearly "fell dead-born from the press." Of course, the recent publication of ***Jan Patocka: Philosophy and Selected Writings***[5] provides an occasion to return to ***Embers***' possibilities; for, with Kohák claiming that Patocka may have articulated "the deepest philosophical question of our time,"[6] understanding Kohák's relation to this question can help evoke the meaningfulness of both ***Embers***' theory and style.

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[3] Erazim Kohák, ***The Embers and The Stars (Chicago*** IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1984). Throughout the rest of this paper the book will be referred to as ***Embers.***

[4] In fact, references to Husserl's ***epoche***, or the "project of bracketing," remain in specialized articles despite Kohák's wonderfully assessable ***Ideas & Experience*** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

[5] Erazim Kohák, ***Jan Patocka*** (Chicago IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1989). Throughout the rest of this paper the book will be referred to as ***Patocka.***

[6] ***Patocka,*** p. 132.

II
(Re)Describing Philosophy

Like the sun at high noon, philosophical writings are expected to **shed light** for its reader. The metaphor is very meaningful; for, light allows one to see subtle distinctions, distinctions that help one learn how things work. For the philosophical writer, this task is performed through the use of technical terms; for, like that sun at high noon, technical terms provide the clear distinctions that help one learn how things work. Unfortunately, despite the fact that Plato's dialogues announced philosophy's technical task with the help of metaphor, philosophers have, more often than not, used Plato's image to deny non-technical, metaphorical, poetic language. Assuming that the choice between being metaphoric and being technical is mutually exclusive, philosophers have repeatedly chosen to be technical.

From its opening sentence, ***The Embers and The Stars*** evokes remembrance of the night and its midnight moon.[7] Through this image it reminds the reader that if a writer evokes a poetic image, (s)he is, like the night and its midnight moon, not simply giving a technical account of how things work, but asking the reader to stop . . . . . in wonder. ***Embers***' poetic language beautifully evokes this sense of wonder. However, though one may be tempted to classify this book part philosophy (that is, technical) and part poetry (non-technical), there is another alternative; for, rather than facing a choice between technical distinctions and poetic wonder, the task of philosophy may

[7] I am referring to, "There still is night, down where the long-abandoned wagon road disappears amid the new growth beneath the tumbled dam, deep, virgin darkness as humans had known it through the millennia, between the glowing embers and the stars." (***Embers,*** p. ix) It is one of the most beautiful opening sentences of any book that I have read; and it definitely is the most beautiful opening of any philosophy book that I have read. As to the metaphors' philosophical relevance, as Kohák suggests, the choice between the fundamental symmetry or asymmetry of Being and nothing "cannot be made simply on conceptual grounds. It is a gift of the full moon, and must be so, since it is an experiential difference, not between the ways Being and nothing are thought but between the ways they present themselves." (p. 59.)

include both. Like the passing of a day, that which reminds us of the intimate, subtle relationship between the light and the dark, technical distinctions and poetic vision may not deny, but complement, each other.

In reply to Galen Johnson's review of ***Embers,*** Kohák addresses this issue of style:

> I have been criticized by some readers for introducing poetry into a book of philosophy, much as Plato was criticized by Aristotle for telling myths, and by others for burdening a poetic book with speculation. Yet theoretically, both critics would accept the claim . . . that philosophy is the tension between poetic nearness and the critical distance of speculation. Again, on a purely theoretic level, that is something of a philosophical commonplace. I have only chosen to put it into practice, doing philosophy rather than metaphilosophic speculation—though, note, in conformity with those speculation![8]

As Kohák suggests, no matter how commonplace the description may be, philosophers have been slow to pursue the **task** of a philosophy that does not deny the tension between poetic nearness and speculative distance. In turning to the relationship between ***Patocka*** and ***Embers***, this task can arise. It can arise as the task of a people who dwell in a world of day **and** night, of light **and** dark, evoking understanding **and** wonder.

III
The Metaphor of Light and Meaning

[8] See ***Man and World*** 19: 103-117 (1986) for Johnson's review. See ***Man and World*** 19 ***:*** 119-121 (1986) for Kohák's reply. Though a very rewarding review, it is, I believe, misleading when Johnson claims that the book "is located at the intersection of Husserl, Ricoeur and Frost, and as that trio suggests, at the **intersection of philosophy and poetry**." This very comment suggests, that Johnson did not, as was so important to Kohák's work, turn away from the book, and see philosophy "as if for the first time." As the book repeatedly emphasizes, to read ***Embers*** is to re-think, and re-attempt, philosophy.

The Riddle of Self-Sufficiency

Imagine if the passing of a day were reduced to 1,440 reoccurring sunny noontime minutes. It is never night, never dusk, never dawn. Imagine if the passing of a year were reduced to 365 reoccurring sunny days. Though it is not hot, but warm, there is never snow; and it never rains. There is only sunlight. How does this world differ from ours?

In a world of which time is but the repeated passing of sunlight minutes, a person's life **can** be reduced to the busy-ness of work; for, in a world of constant light, its gift is its emphasis on distinctions; and, whether one is working with a computer or on a farm, distinctions allow one to continue working. The more distinctions one can see, the more one can do. As ***Embers*** suggests, this is "a matter-of-fact world whose multiplicity calls for the ***techne*** of doing and theorizing . . ."[9] In this world, this night-less world, it is possible for one to see no meaning in that which is not useful. My wording is quite deliberate; for, in this world, it is possible for **usefulness** to become synonymous with meaningfulness. Thus the night becomes meaningless!

IV
The Metaphor of Light and The Rise of Science

Of course the "matter of fact world" Kohák is describing is not simply an imaginary world, but very much a part of the world in which we live; for, with the rise of science, and the technological culture it has established, the earth is actually transformed into a world of constant light. As ***Embers*** reminds:

> In the global city of our civilization, girded by the high tension of our powerlines, we have abolished the night. There the glare of electric lights extends the unforgiving day far into a night restless with the eerie glow of neon.[10]

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[9] ***Embers,*** p. 32.

[10] ***The Embers and the Stars,*** p. x.

Ironically, science, that which commonly has understood itself as antithetical to metaphysics, can be understood as the product of a specific metaphysic. And, though it may be easy to point to the Enlightenment, the truth may be that its roots are much deeper. One need only return to Plato's images of the cave and sun to acknowledge this. Of course, the irony is that there is no longer the need to emphasize a metaphor of light; for, now, our very world emphasizes and perpetuates the task of denying darkness. With this, our very world emphasizes and perpetuates continued technology, continued work, continued production.

The rise of science has lead to devastating consequences. A person whose task is always to produce something new, whether automobiles or technical distinctions, is, in a sense, muted; for, as Kohák writes, such a person

> will not know what to do with his knowledge: he might build nuclear bombs with no ideas of whether or on whom to drop them.[11]

The point is not that science should be rejected. The point is that our obsession, our worship, of scientific knowledge has crippled our ability to philosophize. Is it surprising that the most common student theme in introductory philosophy classes is the constant appeal to values as merely subjective belief/opinion? Our technological age reinforces that appeal. And though many philosophers agree that moral subjectivity is one of the most crucial issues facing contemporary society, philosophers still tragically fail to express that it **matters** what one does. Ethical choices, while, ultimately being chosen by individuals, need not be **arbitrarily** chosen by individuals.

V
Husserl's Gift

The themes upon which I have so far focused will be somewhat familiar to those who have read Edmund Husserl's ***Crisis of the European Sciences***.[12] Though it differs from Husserl's earlier writings in that it adopted a historical analysis,

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11 ***Patocka***, p. 74.

The Riddle of Self-Sufficiency

Crisis maintained Husserl's life-long attempt to describe human understanding more richly than the Enlightenment tradition that had been influenced by Galileo and Descartes, suggesting that western society's maintenance of this perspective has lead to our age's tragic obsession with meaninglessness. In what might be his clearest description of this tragedy, Husserl's introduction to ***Crisis*** offers the following:

> The exclusiveness with which the total world-view of modern man, in the second half of the nineteenth century, let itself be determined by the positive sciences and be blinded by the "prosperity" they produced, meant an indifferent turning-away from the questions which are decisive for a genuine humanity. Merely fact-minded sciences make merely fact-minded people . . . . In our vital need—so we are told—this science has nothing to say to us. It excludes in principle precisely the questions which man, given over in our unhappy times to the portentous upheavals, finds the most burning: questions of the meaning or meaninglessness of the whole of existence.[13]

With this quote, and his repeated attempts to address this crisis, Husserl challenged Enlightenment thought, a challenge that, though continued in the writings of Heidegger, was, in a different way, also continued in the writings of Patocka and Kohák. Thus, though he did not acknowledge either the meaningfulness of metaphor or the limits of the metaphor of light, Husserl's writings can be a rewarding reference for any philosophical task that does.

It might help one understand this tradition by contrasting it with an aphorism in Nietzsche's ***Daybreak.*** Though one aphorism does not provide an ample understanding of Nietzsche, it can help us better understand Husserl's gift.

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12 Edmund Husserl, ***The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*** (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970). Throughout the rest of this paper the book will occasionally be referred to as ***Crisis***.

13 ***Crisis***, p. 6.

Nietzsche, whose insightful writings are enjoying popular contemporary revival in America, writes the following in aphorism 454 of ***Daybreak:***

> A book such as this is not for reading straight through or reading aloud but for dipping into, especially when out walking or on a journey; you must be able to stick your head into it again and again and discover nothing familiar around you [14]

Those who have read ***Embers*** will know that this passage is remarkably similar to passages in Kohák's book. Like Nietzsche's ***Daybreak,*** the writings of Husserl, Patocka, and Kohák all attempt to suspend assumed biases.[15] Though Nietzsche does attempt to suspend the Enlightenment perspective, he, like the Romantic and Existential movements from which he arose and to which he contributed, differs from the tradition of ***Embers:*** for, this tradition clearly emphasizes that, as the reader sticks her head from out of the book, there remains a sense that everything around her is not unfamiliar, but familiar. Nietzsche's aphorism can become too restrictive. Nietzsche restricts meaningfulness to the distinctly human act of will. But this only reinforces the belief that all else is meaningless. In contrast, Husserl, Patocka, and Kohák can be read as attempting to overcome, or suspend, the belief that all else is meaningless.

VI
Husserl's Suspension of Facts

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[14] Friederich Nietzsche, ***Daybreak*** (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), see aphorism 454.

[15] To find a clue that, like Nietzsche, Kohák acknowledges the newness of, the unfamiliarity of, this process, one need only reread Kohák's reply to Galen Johnson's review: "Galen Johnson pays my book the highest possible compliment when he writes that, after reading it, he looked up at the night sky and watched the day turn to dusk 'as if for the first time.' More than ought else, that is what I hoped to give my readers, the wonder of seeing 'as if for the first time.' "

The Riddle of Self-Sufficiency

> Merely fact-minded sciences make merely fact-minded people . . . . In our vital need—so we are told—this science has nothing to say to us. It excludes in principle precisely the questions which man, given over in our unhappy times to the portentous upheavals, finds the most burning: questions of the meaning or meaninglessness of the whole of existence.[16]

Interestingly, if the above quote refers to a life-long concern of his, Husserl's "bracketing of the Natural Attitude" might be understood as a **suspension of facts**[17]. Though Husserl's writings repeatedly reflect a strong faith in science, his writings can be understood as a suspension of scientific facts. Again, the point is not that either science or facts should be rejected; the point is that our obsession with, our worship of, science and facts has crippled our ability to philosophize.

Husserl's writings can be read as attempting, to suspend this obsession. Thus, Husserl's writings can be read as attempting to allow science and philosophy to coexist. Interestingly, though, again, he does not refer to the image of the sun, Husserl's task returns him both to a very Platonic question and to a very Platonic answer.

In the scientific/technological age in which we live, we have begun to reduce the world to particulars. In claiming that we can understand, for example, the paper on which this essay is printed, we have come to believe that we understand it as "this particular piece of paper." However, as everyday

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16 ***Crisis,*** p. 6. As readers who are familiar with Husserl will know, this language is rather different than most of Husserl's writings. However, though ***Crisis'*** proposal**,** its transcendental phenomenology, is different from the descriptive phenomenology of earlier writings, ***Crisis'*** general concerns, that against which it is reacting, were also the concerns of his earlier period.

17 See ***Idea & Experience*** (New York: University of Chicago Press, 1978) for Kohák's support of this wording. Thus, Husserl's philosophical ***epoche***, or "bracketing of the Natural Attitude," can also be understood as a suspension of meaninglessness; for, though these phrases may seem obscure, they are only very general indicators of Husserl's project. While ***epoche*** means **suspending belief,** Husserl's reference to "the Natural Attitude" can be read as a rhetorical device emphasizing the fact that the belief being bracketed, or examined, is assumed to be "natural," or common sense.

speech suggests, when, for example, referring to the paper on which this essay is printed, we refer to it as "a" paper or "the" paper. That is, though we may have forgotten how to talk about it, our speech does acknowledge that this particular paper is an instance of, (for example) seeing, reading about, thinking about, and, also possibly, touching paper. Husserl's writings repeatedly suggest that, for example, this particular piece of paper is understandable only if it is not understandable simply as "this **particular** piece of paper," but also that of which this particular piece of paper is an instance.

Though science, too, claims that the world is understandable, Husserl can be read as suspending science's denial that a metaphysics is presupposed by our understanding. Whether it is his writings on intentionality, the Transcendental "I," the "Life-World," or "the bracketing of the Natural Attitude," Husserl's writings can be read as the continued attempt to evoke the subtle relationship between metaphysics and the possibility of understanding. This evocation is Husserl's attempt to suspend the meaninglessness of our scientific/technological age. And it is this task that, though, again, continued by the writings of Heidegger, is in a different way continued in the writings of both Patocka and Kohák.

VII
Patocka: Continuing and Reacting Against Husserl

Kohák's introduction to ***Patocka*** focuses on the Czech thinker's dramatic attempt, while living, in communist Czechoslovakia, to articulate "the deepest philosophical question of our time." It is, first, a question that, as Husserl's student, Patocka asked as part of his response to Husserl. However, it is also the question that opens ***Embers*** toward its stylistic task. Thus, though he, too, did not acknowledge either the meaningfulness of metaphor or the limits of the metaphor of light, Jan Patocka's writings can also be a meaningful reference for any philosophical task that does.

The Riddle of Self-Sufficiency

Beginning, in the 1930's, Patocka's earliest writings find a rewarding focus in the writings of Husserl and T.G. Masaryk[18]. His focuses include the typical Husserlian themes of understanding humankind's place within the cosmos as meaningful. However, with Masaryk, Patocka not only studies one of Husserl's teachers, but a man who applied these themes to his life as the first president of, the father of, Czechoslovakia's post-WWI democracy[19]. Kohák's introduction, a dramatic mixture of biography and analysis, wonderfully shows how, though his writings were restricted by Communist Czechoslovakia's government, Patocka maintains this interest throughout his life. Heroically, yet tragically, with the signing of Charta 77, Patocka even sacrifices his life[20].

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[18] See pp. 8-45 of ***Patocka*** for Kohák's introduction to this period. See pp. 139-156 of ***Palocka*** for Patocka's essays "Titanism" and "Masaryk's and Husserl's Conception of the Spiritual Crisis of European Humanity."

[19] Today, with revived interest in the relationship between Heidegger's writings and his participation in the Nazi movement, it might be meaningful to compare Heidegger and Masaryk. The difference between their theoretical locuses may be related to their political differences. Furthermore, in understanding Masaryk's relationship to Husserl, and Husserl's politics, such a study might help one better understand the choice between Husserl and Heidegger.

[20] Kohák's introduction dramatically interweaves Patocka's theoretical themes within an account of his life. The result is an amazing account of a man who, though, himself, unable to address the relationship between the ambiguousness of reality and our crisis of meaning, continued to, while living under one of the oppressive Stalinist governments that plagued Europe for roughly forty-five years, pursued a meaningful life. Given that his very writing meant that Patocka constantly risked arrest, the fact that he was able to write as much as he did is heroic. However, more than this, his signing of Charta 77 helped remind the Czech government that, in Kohák's words, "the ideals of human dignity and civic freedom which it had itself promulgated in its laws and in the international agreements it signed were being routinely violated in practice." (See p. 3 of ***Patocka*** .) Charta 77 reminded all who read it that Czechs still knew that, quite separate from the authority of the government, the authority of the law, it still **mattered** what choices everyone, including the government, made. Charta 77 reminded all who read it that, though living under a government that, after 1968, returned to its previous repressive ways, Czechs had not given up all hope.

On March 13, 1977, Patocka died of a massive brain hemorrhage acquired during police interrogation. Like Socrates over 2000 years earlier, Jan Patocka was killed for reminding his fellow citizens that it still mattered what choices they made.

In the 1940's, 50's, and early 60's, Patocka's historical studies of the Greeks and Enlightenment[21] not only continue, but enrich, his previous themes. His Greek studies, recognizing that metaphysics has, with the rise of science, died, emphasizes the relationship between the Socratic question and Husserl's ***Crisis*** concerns. His Enlightenment studies, recognizing the period as having lead to the death of metaphysics, continues ***Crisis***' attempt to enrich our understanding of both the rise of science and the demise of metaphysics.

While, along with Galileo, Descartes' writings are central to ***Crisis***' historical analysis, Patocka's writings on the Enlightenment focus on Jan Komensky, or Comenius. By returning to the writings of this 17th century Czech philosopher and educator, Patocka juxtaposes Comenius and Descartes; for Comenius' alternative to Descartes' mathematical portrayal of the cosmos is evidence of a philosophical fork, a choice that European thinkers faced. One path, as chosen by Descartes, has lead western society to a crisis in meaning. The other path, as chosen by Comenius, does not equate non-mathematical concerns with the **merely subjective belief/opinion** to which our technological age reduces them. It **matters**, for example, if and how George Bush uses the USA's nuclear arsenal; it **matters** whether or not abortion should be allowed; it **matters** whether or not we have created, and will further, a Greenhouse Effect. Put simply, it **matters** what one does; and such choices, while, ultimately, being chosen by individuals, need not be arbitrarily chosen by individuals. Cleverly, Patocka's historical writings are more than the mere record of our history. By reminding his readers of our history, these historical writings also attempt to suspend meaninglessness in that they remind us of the historical choices that lead to our crisis in meaning.

But Patocka's late 60's works on Husserl may provide his richest contribution[22]. Husserl's writings repeatedly attempt to show that, though, for

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[21] See pp. 46-75 of ***Patocka*** for Kohák's introduction to this period. See pp. 157-206 of ***Patocka*** for Patocka's essays "Two Senses of Reason and Nature in the German Enlightenment: A Herdian Study" and "Negative Platonism: Reflections concerning the Rise, the Scope, and the Demise of Metaphysics. and Whether Philosophy can survive It."

[22] See pp.76-136 of ***Patocka*** for Kohák's introduction to this period. See pp. 207-339 for the Patocka's essays: "Husserl's Transcendental Turn: The Phenomenological Reduction in The Idea of Phenomenology and in Ideas I," "Edmund Husserl's Philosophy of the Crisis of the Sciences

example, my understanding of the piece of paper on which this page is printed is also understandable by other people, the relationship between an object and the knowing subject is the basic structure for the possibility of understanding. Unfortunately, in accepting the relationship between an object and the knowing subject as the basic structure for the possibility of human understanding, Husserl has difficulty accounting for an object as anything other than that which humans describe it as. Though when I describe the particular piece of paper on which this essay is printed as the particular piece on which this essay is printed you, too, can understand this particular piece of paper as such, Husserl reduces it to the humanly describable.

This point is crucial; for, it suggests that, though Husserl attempted to avoid the Enlightenment's crisis of meaninglessness, he continued to reduce the meaningful relationship between humans and the world to that which is describable. As such, Husserl perpetuates the Enlightenment task of emphasizing, technical distinctions. These themes lead him to ***Crisis'*** conclusion that only the task of **continuously** producing technical distinctions can maintain meaning. Ironically, it may be this very task that perpetuates the **need** to maintain meaning.

Patocka's later writings suggest that, though humans can understand the world, it remains **autonomous** of human understanding. That is, though being human includes understanding, for example, the piece of paper on which this essay is printed as a piece of paper, that piece of paper remains part of a world that is not reducible to human understanding. We can know that this is paper and not, for example, a rock, and that as paper we can, among other things, write on it. However, no matter what descriptions we may develop, no matter what **use** we may develop, that is not **all** that this particular piece of paper is. As a part of the world, it transcends or overflows the uses and descriptions that only partially constitutes its meaning. What escapes such descriptions is the

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and His Conception of a Phenomenology of the **Life-World**," "The **Natural** World and Phenomenology," "The Movement of Human Existence: A Selection from ***Body, Community. Language, World*** ," "Cartesianism and Phenomenology," and "The Dangers of Technicization in Science according to E. Husserl and The Essence of Technology as Danger according to M. Heidegger."

autonomy of the world of which it is a part. One of philosophy's most difficult tasks is, and has been, the attempt to articulate this autonomy. It is, I believe, an attempt to account for wonder. Wonder is evoked because our relationship with world entails the crucial detail that the world is not reducible to its relationship to humans. Our relationship with the world entails the crucial detail that the world is not reducible to even the relation to which I am now referring. Patocka's gift can be understood as an attempt to ask if wonder denies the human capacity for understanding.

Kohák suggests that Patocka's insight can be read as an attempt to articulate both Husserl (the belief that the world is understandable) and Heidegger (the belief that the world is autonomous) simultaneously. Whether or not this is true, I agree with Kohák that Patocka's insight may have articulated "the deepest philosophical question of our time."[23] Patocka has **furthered** Husserl's project by reminding the 20th century that being human does not simply involve human understanding. However, though the world is not reducible to what is humanly known, Patocka has reminded his readers that one need not deny human understanding. In fact, it may not be possible to appreciate human knowledge fully without appreciating that, by itself, knowledge is incomplete; for, again, one who has simply human knowledge may

> not know what to do with his knowledge: he might build nuclear bombs with no ideas of whether or on whom to drop them.[24]

This very concrete image can help evoke the urgency of Patocka's question; for it may not be until we can face the relationship between human understanding and human wonder that we can nurture ideas about how to use our knowledge.

VIII
(Re)Reading Kohák's Style As The Compliment To Patocka

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[23] ***Patocka,*** p. 132.

[24] ***Patocka,*** p. 74.

The Riddle of Self-Sufficiency

It is important to acknowledge how ***Embers*** can be the attempt to answer Patocka's question; for, though Patocka's insight may appear to be the theoretical license to describe philosophy as torn between the two distinct tasks of being technical and being poetic, ***Embers*** is the attempt to re-understand the relationship between being technical and being poetic, an attempt to re-understand the relationship between human understanding and human wonder. Of course, to fully appreciate that Kohák's stylistic turn in ***Embers*** is not an alternative to Patocka, one must introduce Kohák's theological vision; for, as his essay in ***Patocka*** concludes, Kohák believes that Patocka's insight is anticipating a return to understanding the earth as a gift of God. It is only as such that Kohák believes the wonder of poetic language is meaningful.

Having grown weary of an assumption that Husserl left largely unexamined—that "language is a wholly transparent, non-distorting medium."[25] —Kohák does not simply juxtapose literal language and metaphor, but proclaims that all language, including technical language, is metaphor. But metaphor is no longer the aberration of literal language. Rather, after, for example, reading any particular description of the piece of paper on which this essay is printed, no matter how technical, the reader can understand that this description is of that which (s)he is seeing, reading, and, possibly, touching. That is, language does not deny that that which you are seeing, reading, and, possibly, touching is autonomous of any particular description of it.

In a world of constant light metaphor can only be the non-literal aberration of literal meaning; for, in such a world, meaningfulness is reduced to a single omniscient view of the plethora of possible distinctions. Ironic consequences aside, metaphor is not an aberration because our earth is not this world of absolute light, but the world of a changing relationship between light and dark. It is not any single particular moment, but the **process** of which any particular moment on earth is a part that is meaningful. Though useful, the particular distinctions that are our knowledge are always partial. Further they are meaningful only as a part of that entire process which is never reducible to our particular distinctions. They are meaningful if they are not literal.

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25 **Embers**, p. 48.

Importantly, the world is not reducible to the particular relationships of our particular distinction; for this reduction divides the world into artifacts. A world made simply of artifacts like the piece of paper on which this essay is printed is not a world of metaphor, but a world made of useful artifacts with single non-changing purposes. ***Embers*** reminds its readers that the earth is not simply a world of artifacts.[26] Of course, with the rise of science, and the technological culture it has established, we have forgotten this; for, with the rise of its cities, our world can appear to be one of artifacts. It is no coincidence that we need to establish national parks in order to preserve forests. It is no coincidence that we are threatening different animals with extinction. One needs only to be reminded of the everyday claim that the killing of animals for fur is a human **right** to be reminded that we have forgotten that our world is not simply a world of artifacts for our use. Reminiscent of Thoreau, ***Embers***' beautifully evokes images of nature that turn its readers away from the city and its abundance of artifacts. However, unlike Thoreau's ***Walden,*** both Kohák's images and the actual journey away from the city are attempting simply to **remind** its readers that our world is not merely a world of artifacts. The point is not to abandon technology, but to end our obsessive worship of technology. ***Embers'*** ability to evoke this remembrance is a tribute to Kohák's style, for he does not simply argue for the use of metaphor, he wonderfully pursues the task of evoking this possibility through the use of metaphor. In the end, we are not given an argument why we should not continue as we do. Rather, reminding us that we need not continue as we do, ***Embers*** wonderfully evokes a meaningful alternative.

IX
(Re)Kohák's Theology

[26] Note that I write "is not simply a world of artifacts" rather than "simply is not a world of artifacts." I think this distinguishes Kohák from Heidegger. By emphasizing simply that the world is not reducible to our artifacts, rather than, as I believe Heidegger does, accepting that the world is simply not a world of artifacts, Kohák is emphasizing that, though autonomous, the world remains knowable (which was Patocka's insight).

The Riddle of Self-Sufficiency

Rather than **explaining away** the ambiguity that Patocka's question presupposes, Kohák believes that a theological vision can account for it. In fact, Kohák believes that it is this ambiguity, itself, that points to a theological vision; for, with it, we face a choice: in being autonomous of humans, the earth can either be the **creation of**, the gift of, God, or the earth can simply remain an alienated Other. Quoting ***Embers***,

> . . . alienation sets in when humans lose their awareness of the presence of God and persuade themselves to view the cosmos no longer as a **creation**, endowed with value in the order of being, a purpose in the order of time and a moral sense in the order of being, but as a cosmic accident, meaningless and mechanical.[27]

Interestingly, Kohák's theological vision can be understood by contrasting it with Plato's ***Republic.*** In Book X the character Socrates says that he takes God, "to be the real author of the couch that has real being and not of some **particular** couch . . . . "[28] Two sentences later, the dialogue continues with Socrates saying,

> Shall we, then, call him its true and natural begetter, or something of the kind?
> That would certainly be right, he said, since it is by and in nature that he has made this and all other things.
> And what of the carpenter? Shall we not call him the creator of **a** couch?
> Yes.[29]

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[27] ***Embers***, p. 183.

[28] ***Republic***, 597d; bold is mine.

[29] ***Republic***, 597d.

This quote is an example of that against which Kohák is reacting. Having referred to an artifact as an example, the character Socrates suggests that, while humans create particulars, God creates that of which the particular is an instance. If, as Socrates' example can misleadingly suggest, the world can be reduced to an analogy with **human**-made objects, then this might be a helpful distinction. However, the world can not be reduced to an analogy with human-made artifacts. As Patocka suggested, the world remains autonomous of humans. Rather than accepting the character Socrates' dependence upon an analogy with human artifacts, Kohák's theology hinges on the breakdown of this analogy. God's presence in the world is the world's autonomy from human artifacts:

> The basic trait of the world that confronts a dweller . . . is that it is God's world, not "man's," and that . . . God is never far. The heavens declare His glory, the creatures of the forest obey His law, the humans give thanks for His grace . . . .[30]

X
Suspending Kohák's Theology

With Kohák, I, too, believe that Patocka poses a "challenge to philosophy." As Kant arguably did in the ***Critique of Pure Reason***, Patocka's writings emphasize that the cosmos is both knowable and not reduced to that which is knowable. However, Kohák's theology does not appear to meet the challenge of this insight. By calling the cosmos a divine "creation," ***Embers*** does not satisfactorily avoid the character Socrates' problematic analogy. Repeating a previously quoted passage,

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[30] ***Embers***, p 182. The entire quote is: "The most basic trait of the world that confronts a dweller in the radical brackets of the forest clearing is that it is God's world, not 'man's,' and that here God is never far. The heavens declare His glory, the creatures of the forest obey His law, the humans give thanks for His grace."

The Riddle of Self-Sufficiency

> ...alienation sets in when humans lose their awareness of the presence of God and persuade themselves to view the cosmos no longer as a **creation**....[31]

While Kohák does react against modem society's attempt to reduce the earth to human artifacts, to human creations, his reference to the cosmos as a creation can be accused of maintaining the very analogy with human artifacts that denies the cosmos' autonomy. Like the character Socrates' account of God, ***Embers***' God remains a type of artisan, and the cosmos remains an artifact. Rather than acknowledging Patocka's insight that the cosmos is both humanly understandable and autonomous of human understanding, ***Embers***, or at least the analogy which ***Embers***' theology implies, denies this autonomy.

In so doing, in describing the cosmos as a type of artifact—though divine artifact—not only does ***Embers***' theology deny Patocka's insight, but ***Embers*** perpetuates the very metaphysical metaphor that has lead to our crisis in meaning; it implies that light, with its ability to evoke the distinctions that produce artifacts, evokes meaning. This light need not be the light of our human world, the pagan light of our and Plato's sun. No, this light does not evoke the cosmos' meaning. Rather it can be the light of God. But it remains light! And the world remains an artifact! Though this temporally halts our tragic reducing of the world to mere human artifact, portraying the world as an artifact can lead to tragic consequences; for ***Embers***' problematic acceptance and denial of the word's autonomy might not only lead to the suspension of any reference to a ***theos***, but Kohák's claim that only as a creation—as an artifact—is the world meaningful can imply that in a Godless world the creator must be humans. All else remains meaningless!

One might resolve these difficulties and maintain a type of theology by dropping all references to creation and simply equating the cosmos' autonomy with God's presence. This is an interesting alternative because it is suggestive both of God's transcendence—God's transcending human understanding—and

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[31] ***Embers***, p. l83.

God's immanence—God being this cosmos' autonomy from human understanding. Yet, if the word 'God' is to have an epistemological referent I find this problematic as well. In its autonomy, the cosmos is always beyond—it always overflows—human understanding. It has no epistemological referent. Autonomy simply evokes wonder! . . . Awe! If we choose to use the word 'God' to refer to the ongoing presence of the cosmos' autonomy and write of "faith" as our response of wonder and awe rather than a type of epistemological claim, a move strikingly similar to, though not identical with, John Dewey's use in A ***Common Faith***[32]—the problem may disappear. But this usage is neither necessary nor sufficient! While it might help us understand western religions, such usage is not an attempt to understand the world's autonomy; for the world's autonomy is not understandable.

XI
Evoking Meaning

Unlike Kohák, I do not believe that the wonder of metaphor is meaningful only as part of a theological vision.

During a recent visit to Colorado's Rocky Mountain National Park, I had an interesting conversation with a college student. After exchanging a few predictable comments about the beautiful scenery, I suggested that, as national parks, forests remind me of amusement parks. I shared my concern for the fact that, rather than being "the given," the earth on which I live, nature and nature's forests have become something to go to, a place to vacation. Cities are "the given." After he reminded me that not all forests are parks, I reminded him that, today, non-park forests are generally considered timber supply . . . merely a resource. I reminded him that this was the reason national parks were formed in the first place.

Noticing the puzzled look on his face, I asked him what he thought a forest was. "A collection of trees," he replied. Noticing my puzzled look, he said, "and a tree is a type of plant." He then preceded to give me an elaborately

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32 John Dewey, ***The Later Works***, Volume 9: 1933-1934 (Carbondale IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989).

detailed description of the tree in front of us. After hearing some biological categories, I asked, "is that all it is?" "Well, **ultimately**," he said, and began to describe the tree as the product of a chemical make-up and process. Seeing my puzzled look remain, he asked, "what do you think it is?" Rather than answer him, I suggested we walk. In choosing to walk I was hoping to avoid turning our conversation into the ongoing confrontations that follow from the perpetual "hair-splitting" of technical distinctions. I was hoping that our walk might contribute to his eventually experiencing a sense of wonder.

Like a story, philosophy can remind us of the limitations of technical distinctions. However, unlike a story, the meaningfulness of technical distinctions is also essential to philosophy. Rather than choosing one task over another, philosophy pursues the delicate intersection of the two. By not reducing meaningfulness either to that which is humanly understandable or to that which is autonomous of human understanding, philosophy can evoke the meaningful intersection of understanding and wonder—an intersection Kohák attempts to evoke in his account of metaphor. Like that walk I took through the Rockies, a philosopher can account for meaningfulness only if she does not deny this delicate intersection.

A short time ago, I walked along another path. Having spent 15 minutes wondering at the night sky, I began to walk through a peculiar path along Pennsylvania's Allegheny mountains. Being completely covered by trees, this path reminded me of Plato's cave. Looking ahead, and seeing this cave open toward the city lights ahead, I thought how, after having read ***Embers*** and after having returned to a night without light, I knew that there was a place for light and a place for the night. I thought how, at that instant, I was not ascending, as Plato might have hoped; but, there, then, I was, unfortunately, descending. I was descending into the light of the city; and, with this descent, I was losing the meaningfulness of the night. I thought how such an insight is an important contribution to the task of philosophy. I thought how, no matter what its possible shortcomings, Erazim Kohák's ***The Embers and the Stars*** remains a wonderfully meaningful book.

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The Riddle of Self-Sufficiency

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Within the works of Aristotle, self-sufficiency is given as a criterion of substantial character. That is, if a thing truly is a substance then we can know this through observing its self-sufficiency. But in terms of the human being ***qua*** substance this criterion becomes a bit of a riddle. This riddle unfolds when we examine the relationship between the ***polis*** and the citizen. Aristotle wants to claim that the human substance is self-sufficient and yet needs the ***polis*** in order to be fully human. He also wants to claim that the ***polis*** exists by nature, is prior to the human being, and yet is not truly a substance. It seems that in order for Aristotle to hold both claims he must either have an inconsistent meaning for self-sufficiency or he must embrace a rather recondite meaning. It is the purpose of this essay to show that the latter is the case, and, to make the Aristotelian meaning of self-sufficiency more explicit

To begin the unpacking of this term and the riddle it gives rise to, I shall first examine the elements of the central substance involved, i.e., human being. In the ***Poetics***, a very useful argument is given concerning the formal and material elements of the human being. This may seem a strange source to consult in dealing with a metaphysical query but there is, within this work, an argument identifying the formal and material elements of a quasi-substance, i.e., the tragedy. It is here that a parallel explication of the human substance is given. This should not seem all that strange, after all, the ***Poetics*** is an attempt to define how the formal informs the material to bring about the ***telos*** (final cause) of the tragedy, namely, catharsis. It would seem necessary, then, to discuss, at least briefly, another instance of the formal informing the material in order to bring about an end. Also, the discussion of human substance seems particularly relevant as it is the human substance which produces tragedies (due to a natural inclination to represent). Note that the tragedy is not assigned full or genuine substantial status as it does not possess an internal principle of motion. Another way of stating this in terms of the fore-mentioned riddle is to say that it (the tragedy) is not self-sufficient and is therefore not a true substance. Yet, the

human substance, not capable of complete actualization outside the ***polis***, is assigned complete self-sufficiency. To solve the riddle is to illustrate how Aristotle does not contradict himself regarding self-sufficiency and to render the meaning of at least one of the criteria of substantial character clear.

In order to assess whether Aristotle is contradicting himself I shall now examine what the ***Poetics*** offers as to the nature of human substance. Aristotle writes:

> Happiness and unhappiness lie in action, and the end [of life] is a sort of action, not a quality; people are of a certain sort according to their characters, but happy or the opposite according to their actions. So the actors do not act in order to represent the characters, but include the characters for the sake of their actions. Consequently the incidents, i.e., the plot, are the end of tragedy, and the end is most important of all.[33]

This passage is instructive in the following ways (1) it informs us that the final cause or the end to which a thing is driven is the most important cause concerning a thing; (2) it informs us that happiness is the end of human substance; (3) this end is a sort of action; (4) that peoples characters are the material of their substance; (5) and, finally, that the ***psyche*** (the soul, or that which is the "internal principle of motion" within us) is the form of the human substance. To clear up any remaining ambiguity, I have formulated this argument in "premise/conclusion" form:

i. The sort of thing a being is is determined by its matter.
ii. The function and end of a thing are determined by its form.
iii. Happiness is the end of human being.
iv. Happiness is an activity.
v. Since people are of a certain sort due to their character, character is the material element of the human substance.

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[33] Aristotle, ***The Poetics***, ed. Richard Janko. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1907),1450al7ff.

vi. 9 Since happiness is an activity (a function) and the end of human being those actions which bring about happiness must be the form of the human substance.

Thus far I have addressed the material and formal components of the human substance. At this point I judge it necessary to progress to an identification of the components of the other half of the riddle, i.e., the ***polis***. In order to identify the material and formal elements of the ***polis***, I must employ the thought of the ***Politics***. Here Aristotle identifies the ***polis*** as "a sort of political partnership that is superior to all those capable of living as far as possible in the manner one would pray for . . . ."[34] I believe the first question that must be answered here is why Aristotle construes the ***polis*** as a partnership? The answer lies in Book I, for it is there that Aristotle argues in the following manner:

i. The male part of the human substance enters into a partnership with the female counterpart of the human substance due to a natural striving to procure the good of reproduction, i.e., the end of being.
ii. The partnership of male and female, namely, the family, enters into a partnership with other families due to a natural striving to procure the good of non-daily needs, i.e., the end of continued being.
iii. The partnership of families, namely, the village, enters into a partnership with other villages due to a natural striving to procure the good of self sufficiency, i.e., the end of not only continued being but of living well.
iv. 9 In order for the human substance to reach self sufficiency it must enter into the partnership of villages, namely, the ***polis***.[35]

This seems straight forward enough—a city is that set of actions made by its citizens, not only to meet economic preconditions, but, ultimately, in order to live well. Aristotle writes, "The political partnership must be regarded,

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[34] Aristotle, ***Politics***, ed. Carnes Lord. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1904), 1260b25ff.

[35] Ibid., 1252a25ff: "First, then, there must of necessity be a conjunction of persons who cannot exist without one another . . . male and female, for the sake of reproduction . . . from a natural striving . . . from these . . . partnerships, then, the household first arose . . . . The first partnership arising from the union of several households and for the sake of nondaily needs is the village . . . . The partnership arising from the union of several villages that is complete is the city."

therefore, as being for the sake of noble actions, not for the sake of living together."[36] Thus, it seems rational to conclude that the actions of this partnership will somehow be the form of the ***polis***. After all, was it not the actions of the human substance that realized the "end" of human substance that were the form of that substance? With this is mind I believe the identification of what Aristotle believes to be the form of the state is fairly obvious; it is the regime, the source of direction and delegation of the entirety of authority of all partnerships and activities within the ***polis***, that is to be the form of the ***polis***:

> For a regime is an arrangement in cities connected with the offices, [establishing] the manner in which they have been distributed, what the authoritative element of the regime is, and what the end of the partnership is in each case; and there are distinct laws among the things that are indicative of the regime . . . .[37]

Notice that Aristotle indicates that there is more than just a singular form in regards to the state. I will now furnish a quotation so that, when it comes time to explicate the importance of this distinction, the reader will have some knowledge of the diversity of this form:

> . . . we distinguished three correct regimes—kingship, aristocracy, and polity—and three deviations from these—tyranny from kingship, oligarchy from aristocracy, and democracy from polity; and since aristocracy and kingship have been spoken of—for to study the best regime is the same as to speak about [the regimes designated by] these terms as well, as each of them wishes to be established on the basis of virtue . . . .[38]

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36 Ibid., 128la2ff.
37 Ibid., 1289a12ff.
38 Ibid., l289a25ff.

Thus far we have established the regime as being the form of the second half of the riddle that this paper is attempting to solve. The above quotation also illustrates that in the case of the ***polis***, unlike the human substance, there exists several types of the form. But what is the material element of the ***polis*** ?

In order to answer the above question I shall now explicate Aristotle's famous "political animal" argument. In Book I of the ***Politics*** Aristotle alludes to what the material element of the ***polis*** is when he writes:

> The partnership arising from [the union of] several villages that is complete is the city. It reaches a level of full self-sufficiency . . . it exists for the sake of living well . . . . From these things it is evident, then, that the city belongs among the things that exist by nature, and that man is by nature a political animal.[39]

This passage is instructive in the following ways: (1) the ***polis*** is the aggregatum of actions resulting from the partnerships upon which the city is built; (2) self-sufficiency, or not being in want of anything (being complete), is a criterion of substantial character; (3) the ***polis*** meets the criterion of self-sufficiency and is for a substance (it has a nature); (4) man, in order to fulfill its nature (it has a nature as it is a substance) must live within the ***polis*** ; (5) and, most importantly, humans, because of their actions and their partnerships, are the material element of the ***polis***. To clear up any ambiguity I now state the above passage in "premise/conclusion" form:

i. A ***polis*** exists by nature.

   a. That for the sake of which a thing exists, or the end, is what is best.

   b. Self-sufficiency is an end and is what is best.

   c. If a thing has self-sufficiency, then it is a substance.

ii. The ***polis***, since it is a sort of substance, exists for its end, namely, self-sufficiency.

iii. In order for the ***polis*** to be self-sufficient the partnerships upon which it

[39] Ibid., 1252b27ff.

is founded must reach their end.

iv. In order for the human substance to be self-sufficient it must reach its end.

v. In order for the human substance to reach its end, i.e., happiness, it must be engaged in the partnerships upon which the ***polis*** is built.

vi. Man is, by nature, a political animal.

vii. Man, i.e., his strivings and actions towards the reaching of his end, is the matter (or material element) of the ***polis***.

I believe the true tension of the riddle now lies exposed in the juxtaposition of premises iii and v. In what sense does the human substance need the ***polis*** ? Remember that the riddle was founded upon the ostensible inconsistency of saying both the ***polis*** and the human substance were self-sufficient while also claiming that man is a political animal (that man, in some sense, is really not self-sufficient). According to premise iii the ***polis*** must be seen as a sort of necessary cause for the human substance's attaining of its end. By necessary I mean a condition that must be present in order for a thing to happen, e.g., oxygen is a necessary cause for combustion but not a sufficient cause; if it were sufficient then in every instance in which oxygen was present there would be combustion. Since the ***polis*** is only a necessary cause (and not a sufficient cause) for the human substance's quest for fulfillment, i.e., self-sufficiency, it seems plausible to defend the full substantial quality of the human substance.

But I have not yet solved the riddle fully. In order to untie this knot fully I must now address the "of what" the ***polis*** is a necessary precondition. The above quotation indicates that it is the ***polis*** which enables man to not only meet his economic preconditions but also to "live well". Thus, the ***polis*** is a—necessary cause in man's living to the utmost of his faculties and capabilities, i.e., happiness. It is also clear, that for Aristotle, to actualize all of the human substance's potentials, it is necessary to employ reason. For it is reason that is unique to man; it is reason that sets man above the "brutes." The development of reason seems to have two aspects for Aristotle, political and philosophical. He writes:

> Now what the best regime must necessarily be that arrangement under which anyone might act in the best manner and live blessedly is evident. Yet there is a dispute among those who agree that the most choice worthy way of life is that accompanied by virtue as to whether the political and active way of life is choice worthy, or rather that which is divorced from all external things . . . .[40]

Aristotle solves this disjunction (the dispute between which is the better way of life, either the philosophical or the political) by claiming each can be the best way as long as the moral agent acts in such a way "with a view to the better aim both in the case of human beings individually and for the regime in common."[41] That is, as long as the moral agent places as much emphasis upon the matters of the public sphere (all those things which concern all the citizens of the ***polis***) as he does upon the matters of the private sphere (all those things which concern only that particular individual) then the moral agent can take either the political route or the philosophical route. Since both spheres are assumed to be equally as important to him he can not help being a good citizen. Note that by being a good citizen he is also a substance which is attaining its fulfillment or its proper pleasure.

At this point it seems the solution to the riddle is claiming that there is one fixed happiness for the entirety of human substance, despite the fore-mentioned variety of forms (regimes) of cities. But it is this variety on the part of the formal aspect of the ***polis*** which leads to get another riddle of self-sufficiency. In Book 3 of the ***Politics***, Aristotle claims:

> . . . although citizens are dissimilar, preservation of the partnership is their task, and the regime is [this] partnership; hence the virtue of the citizen must necessarily be with a view to the regime.[42]

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40 Ibid., 1324a24ff.
41 Ibid., 1324a33ff.
42 Ibid., 1276b27ff.

I was able to solve the first riddle of self-sufficiency by claiming that the substantial character of the human substance was indeed fully self-sufficient due to the quasi-substance of the ***polis*** being, in one sense, instrumental in the fulfillment of the human substance. Yet now it seems that there is still another level on which the human substance is dependent upon the ***polis***, namely, that level which determines the excellence or fulfillment of the moral agent. This follows if the virtue (excellence) of the citizen can only be judged in relation to the ***polis*** in which that citizen lives. Perhaps a more cogent way of putting this is to say that since man is by nature a "political animal" he can not expect to find fulfillment outside the partnerships of the city. Since there are three different forms for the ***polis***, then isn't it the case that the excellence a man will seek is determined by the ***polis*** in which he lives? Accordingly, a substance which can not determine its end should not be seen as a genuine substance. Therefore, man, in his dependence upon the ***polis*** to determine his end, should not be seen as a genuine substance. In other words, man is not truly self-sufficient as he cannot determine his own end.

Aristotle does not address this formulation of the riddle directly, but I believe he would begin answering it by explicating the meaning of the central term involved, i.e., citizen. Aristotle defines citizen as follows:

> The citizen in an unqualified sense is defined by no other thing so much as by sharing in decision and office [43]

and again:

> Whoever is entitled to participate in an office involving deliberation or decision is, we can now say, a citizen in this city; and the city is the multitude of such persons that is adequate with a view to a self-sufficient life . . . . [44]

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[43] Ibid., 1275a22-25.

[44] Ibid., 1275bl9-21.

Thus it seems we have a ready solution to the new formulation of the riddle: despite the form of the ***polis***, i.e., the regime, determining the end of the moral agent, the moral agent retains his self-sufficiency as he, by definition, participates in the ***polis*** attaining its end, namely, self-sufficiency. And as I have stated earlier, it is the ***polis***' self-sufficiency which allows for philosophical and political activity.

But, examining further what Aristotle has claimed, it seems that this solution must fail. Consider this:

> If, then, there are indeed several forms of regime, it is clear that it is not possible for the virtue of the excellent citizen to be single, or complete virtue. That it is possible for a citizen to be excellent yet not possess the virtue in accordance with which he is an excellent man, therefore, is evident.[45]

In this quotation Aristotle seems to be drawing a qualitative distinction between the excellent citizen and the excellent man. The excellent citizen, even at his best, is in some way, inferior to the excellent man. Since the citizen is not complete he cannot be seen as possessing genuine substantial status (completeness, after all, is merely another way of designating self-sufficiency). Because of this, no matter how much the citizen participates in the attaining of self-sufficiency for the ***polis*** he will never be fully self-sufficient (attain genuine substantial status). And what is the difference between the excellent citizen and the excellent man?

The excellent man is excellent because he acts in accordance with the four virtues; the excellent citizen, in his acquiescing to the prudence as granted authoritatively by the regime, never develops this specific virtue. Due to this lacking he can never be as complete as the excellent man. I quote:

> But will there be some case, then, in which the virtue of the excellent citizen and the excellent man is the same? We assert

45 Ibid., 1276b30ff.

> that the excellent ruler is good and prudent, while the [excellent] citizen is not necessarily prudent. [46]

So how does Aristotle resolve this formulation of the riddle given the dichotomy between the excellent citizen and the excellent man? I judge his first attempt to have addressed the first half of the dichotomy, i.e., the excellent citizen. I also judge this attempt to have failed. What is left but to attempt to solve this riddle by addressing the latter half of the dichotomy, i.e., the excellent man.

I believe Aristotle would begin by addressing the type of substance a man is. Here he would claim that man is a natural substance; but what does this mean? As opposed, say, to a tragedy, a natural substance has an internal principle of motion which is self perpetuating. A tragedy, on the other hand, requires the playwright to bring it into existence. I believe the most relevant and the most important attribute of the natural substance is that its parts cannot exist apart from the whole. Perhaps a comparison will make this criterion explicitly clear. If we examine the material elements of, say, a tragedy, it is clear that these elements can exist outside of the tragedy. Take, for instance, diction. It is that material element of the tragedy that studies "the art of delivery . . . what is a command, what is a wish, a statement, a threat, a question, an answer, etc."[47] But note that in order for diction "to be" a tragedy "needn't be." Diction is a material element in many other quasi-substances. In fact, even the composite parts of diction, a non-natural substance can be found as material components in other quasi-substances. Aristotle lists the parts of diction as: (i) the element, (ii) the syllable, (iii) the particle, (iv) the conjunction, (v) the name, (vi) the verb, (vii) the inflection, and (viii) the utterance.[48] Clearly all these parts are utilized materially in other quasi-substances.

In the case of the natural substance the parts can not exist without the whole. This is clearly illustrated in the following quotes:

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46 Ibid., 1277alff.

47 ***Poetics***,1456b11ff.

48 Ibid.

> For the whole must of necessity be prior to the part; for if the whole [body] is destroyed there will not be a foot or a hand, unless in the sense that the term is similar (as when one speaks of a hand made of stone), but the thing itself will be defective.[49]

and again:

> And moreover the factor of Necessity is not present in all the works of Nature in a similar sense . . . .There is an "absolute" Necessity, which belongs to the eternal things; and there is "conditional" Necessity, which has to do with every thing that is formed the processes of Nature.[50]

And how does the "absolute" necessity of the material elements of natural substances offer Aristotle yet another solution to the second formulation of the riddle of self-sufficiency? As to the question of how can the human substance need the ***polis*** in order to achieve self-sufficiency (and still remain self-sufficient), it seems that due to the type of substance "human being" is, it "absolutely" requires a whole in which to subsist. This is not a mark of substantial or ontological inferiority, rather it is a mark of ontological superiority as it is indicative of the natural substance—the highest of all substances. Since it is one of the natural substances then, of course, it is a genuine substance. And to be a genuine substance is to have self-sufficiency. As to the question of how can the human substance rely on the end as determined by the regime (form) of the ***polis*** and still be legitimately considered a substance it seems that, by nature, the natural substance "absolutely" requires a whole in which to subsist. It is substantial only through the whole; its end is therefore identical with the whole. This is problematic since as Aristotle himself stated that the excellent citizen is not identical with the excellent man. (Shouldn't he have if the end of the natural

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49 ***Politics***, 1253a20ff.

50 Aristotle, ***Aristotle's Works***, eds. A. L. Peck and E.S. Forester, from the Loeb Classical Library, vol. xii: ***Parts of Animals*** (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), 539b20ff.

substance is identical with the whole). However, I believe that Aristotle can adequately handle this objection. According to Aristotle "the virtue of man and citizen is necessarily the same in the best city,"[51] but, in order to have the best city you must have the appropriate material to inform. Yet, experience instructs us that this is not the sort of material we find in nature. In fact, if we find material with just one noble and excellent man that ***polis*** may be considered fortunate indeed. Unfortunately, the sort of material most often encountered lacks entirely the presence of the excellent man. And the only form (regime) appropriate to inform such lowly matter is the most inferior of all the forms of the ***polis***, namely, democracy. So why isn't the end of the excellent citizen identical with the excellent man? If we had the ideal state, the true state, indeed both ends would be identical. But since the forms (regimes) we are normally forced to employ and endure are indicative of a less than perfect state, they are, in a sense less than real, and by extension, not as substantial as the ideal. Thus we should not expect the end of the excellent citizen to be identical with the excellent man. But, more importantly, the riddle of self-sufficiency, in both its formulations, appears to have been solved.

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[51] ***Politics***, 1288a33ff.

The Locked Door
An Analysis of the Problem of the Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine's Thought

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"***nec tunc sciebam, nec adhuc scio***."
St. Augustine, ***Retractiones***

In ***De Libero Arbitrio***, Augustine wrestles with the problem of evil: how is the existence of evil compatible with the notion that God is omnipotent and all-good? In order to defend divine omnipotence and goodness, he argues that free human will must be the cause of evil. In book III, though, Augustine notes that "some things are done in ignorance which are held to be wrong and worthy of correction, as we read in the divinely authoritative books."[52] If the ignorance which leads men to sin were a part of human nature, it would hardly be just for God to punish actions flowing from this natural state. But since scripture affirms that wrong actions committed in ignorance are nonetheless wrong, Augustine deduces, "Who can doubt that this [ignorance] is a penal state?"[53] In fact, Augustine concludes, "there are for every sinful soul these two penal conditions, ignorance and difficulty."[54] These conditions, it seems, result not only from personal sin, but exist in each person as punishment for original sin. Now, Augustine notes, some will seek to be excused from personal failings because of original sin, for

> If Adam and Eve sinned, what have we miserable creatures done to deserve to be born in the darkness of ignorance and in the toils of difficulty, that, in the first place, we should err not

52 Augustine, ***De Libero Arbitrio***, ***Augustine: Earlier Writings***, ed. Burleigh (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 3.18.51.

53 ***Lib. Arb.,*** 3.18.51.

54 ***Lib. Arb.,*** 3.18.52.

> knowing what we ought to do, and, in the second place, that when the precepts of justice begin to be opened out to us, we should wish to obey them but by some necessity of carnal lust should not have the power?[55]

In his attempt to locate the cause of evil in the human will, Augustine raises the problem: how can one justly be punished for the sins of one's ancestors? For this state of affairs to be just, according to Robert O'Connell,

> . . . we must once have lived a "common" life, not only "in" Adam, but a life which made us identical with Adam. We sinned in his sinning; his sin was truly ours; and so, the punishment that "this" human life represents is just, and only Christ's redemptive grace can wipe it away.[56]

Augustine's task, thus, becomes to show that each individual is related to Adam and Eve in such a way that we sinned in their sinning and, therefore, justly share in their punishment. But how can it be that we lived a life identical with Adam? To understand this, and defend his doctrine of free will, Augustine sets out to discover the origin of the human soul and thereby determine its relationship to Adam and Eve's souls. In the third book of ***De Libero Arbitrio***, Augustine's first concern is refuting the Manichean position, and thus his exposition on theories of the soul's origin is primarily intended to show that, no matter what the origin of the soul is, evil is a product of creaturely free will. But, seeking a theory of the origin of the soul which is consistent with his doctrine of original sin is a recurring pursuit in the corpus of Augustine's works. And Augustine's desire to resolve this issue is justified. If revelation demands faith in God's complete justice as well as in the proposition that we share in the guilt of Adam and Eve's sin, then reason seems compelled to see a contradiction. If, however, Augustine

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55 ***Lib. Arb.,*** 3.18.53.

56 Robert O'Connell, ***The Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine's Later Works*** (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987), 16.

can determine the relationship among human souls to be such that one participates in the sin of its predecessors and therefore justly shares in its punishment, then the apparent contradiction is resolved and faith and reason each maintain their integrity.

St. Augustine begins his exposition on the origin of the soul by referring to the traducianist[57] theory that only one human soul was created and that all men's souls are derived from it. If one accepts the traducianist theory, Augustine writes, "who can say that he did not sin when the first man sinned?"[58] Since all souls are one with Adam's (and thus active in Adam's soul), all souls share in the guilt of original sin, and each one's moral ignorance and impotence are justly deserved penal states.

The second theory that Augustine advances in ***De Libero Arbitrio*** is the creationist[59] theory, wherein each individual soul is created by God as each person is born. Attempting to resolve this theory with his belief that all men are subject to moral ignorance and impotence because of Adam's sin, Augustine argues,

> If however souls are created separately in individual men as they are born, it appears not to be unreasonable but rather most appropriate and in accordance with right order that the ill desert of an earlier soul should determine the nature of those which are created afterwards. . . .[60]

The argument underlying this statement seems to have two parts. Proceeding on the principle that a thing can only be made by a maker which is greater than that

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57 Augustine does not use the term 'traducianist' but this is clearly the theory he has in mind. For the sake of clarity and brevity I use the accepted names of Augustine's theories whenever possible. O'Connell attributes this particular theory to Tertullian and Apollinarus. See O'Connell, 151.

58 ***Lib. Arb.,*** 3.20.56.

59 Again, Augustine does not use the term 'creationist'. We must be careful, thus, not to associate this second theory with later "creationist" ideas, even though scholars frequently use the same name.

60 ***Lib. Arb.,*** 3.20.56.

which is made,[61] the first step in the argument is that only a maker which is greater than a human is capable of creating a human. God, of course, is this Maker. Second, human parents share in the making of a human child. Now, Adam and Eve (who subjected themselves to sin and therefore death) could not beget a child who is not subject to these evils (even though God actually creates the child's soul), for such a child would be greater than Adam and Eve themselves, and this begetting would then be contrary to the natural order: thus, "as man the parent is, such is man the offspring."[62] Under the creationist theory, however, Augustine is forced to admit that, "ignorance and toil are not punishment for sin but a warning to improve themselves, and the beginning of their perfection."[63] And, as Robert O'Connell observes,

> . . . the term ***poena*** (punishment) cannot rightly be applied, in its proper sense, to the situation of later souls, which never enjoyed the superior condition their sinful progenitor experienced . . . If their condition is to be regarded as "penal," therefore, it is so only in some looser and derived sense of the term.[64]

Augustine's text confirms this analysis; for, Augustine writes,

> If ignorance and moral difficulty are natural to man, it is from that condition that the soul begins to progress and to advance towards knowledge and tranquillity until it reaches the

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61In ***De Immortalitate Animae*** 8.14 Augustine argues for the creation of the body by some superior maker from the same principle, providing evidence that he was at least familiar with this notion. That he is employing it in this argument is, of course, my interpretation. Augustine ***De Immortalitate Animae (Concerning the Teacher and On the Immortality of the Soul),*** Ed. George Leckie (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1938), 59-84.

62 Augustine, ***De Civitate Dei,*** in ***The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers***, vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), 13.3.

63 ***Lib. Arb.***, 3.20.56.

64 O'Connell, 34-35.

> perfection of the happy life. If by its own will it neglects to advance by means of good studies and piety—for the capacity to do so is not denied to it—it justly falls into a still graver state of ignorance and struggle, which is now penal, and is ranked among the inferior creatures according to the appropriate and fitting government of the universe. Natural ignorance and natural impotence are not reckoned to the soul as guilt. The guilt arises because it does not eagerly pursue knowledge, and does not give adequate attention to acquiring facility in doing right.[65]

Under the creationist theory, then, the state of ignorance and impotence into which Adam and Eve's progeny are born is not penal, but rather a natural condition. A soul would be judged only for its personal sins, that is, only those sins which it commits after birth. In addition, the soul would be given "the power with the aid of its Creator to cultivate itself, and with pious care to acquire the virtues by which it may be liberated both from tormenting toil and blinding ignorance."[66] Thus, according to the creationist theory, the soul has reason to praise its Creator even though it is not so perfect as Adam's soul was originally: the soul possesses a noble existence and the means by which it can ascend even higher.[67]

The third theory of the soul's origin which Augustine cites is something of a Platonic[68] notion:

> . . . souls pre-exist in some secret place and are sent out to quicken and rule the bodies of individuals when they are born, their mission is to govern well the body which is born under

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65 ***Lib. Arb.***, 3.22.64.

66 ***Lib. Arb.***, 3.20.56.

67 See also Origen, ***De Principiis***, trans. G.W. Butterworth (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 1.5.3, 1.8.1. Origen develops his theory of the fallen soul in order to explain why different beings have different kinds of existence.

68 See Plato, ***Timaeus,*** in ***The Dialogues of Plato***, vol. 3, trans. B. Jowett (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 30a-b, 41b-d, 42d.

> the penalty of the sin of the first man, that is mortality. They are to discipline it with virtues, and subject it to an orderly and legitimate servitude, so that in due order and in the due time men may attain the place of heavenly perfection.[69]

In this theory, as in the creationist theory, the ignorance and impotence into which men are born are natural rather than penal conditions, "and the blame for them is to be ascribed neither to the souls nor to their Creator."[70] This third theory is also similar to the creationist account in that the soul is upwardly mobile:

> [God] has given them the insight which every soul possesses; that it must seek to know what to its disadvantage it does not know, and that it must persevere in burdensome duties and strive to overcome the difficulty of well-doing, and implore the Creator's aid in its efforts.[71]

Again, under such a theory, one is only responsible for personal sins, which are at least the soul's refusal to act on its insight and implore God's aid to improve itself and to govern the body well.

The fourth, and last, theory that Augustine presents in ***De Libero Arbitrio*** is associated with Plato,[72] Origen, and Plotinus. This theory maintains that "souls existing in some place are not sent by the Lord God, but come of their own accord to inhabit bodies."[73] Accordingly, Augustine observes, "it is easy to see that any ignorance or toil which is the consequence of their own

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69 ***Lib. Arb.***, 3.20.57.

70 ***Lib. Arb.***, 3.20.57.

71 ***Lib. Arb.***, 3.20.57.

72 See Plato, ***Phaedrus,*** in ***The Dialogues of Plato***, vol. 3, trans. B. Jowett (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 246d-e, 248c-e.

73 ***Lib. Arb.***, 3.20.58.

choice cannot in any way be ascribed to the Creator. He would be entirely without blame."[74]

In Augustine's exposition of this theory, however, the character of the soul's choice to enter a body is not clear. Origen, a proponent of the fallen soul theory, argues that

> God did not begin to create minds . . . before the ages minds were all pure, both daemons and souls and angels, offering service to God and keeping his commandments. But the devil, who was one of them, since he possessed free will, desired to resist God, and God drove him away. With him revolted all the other powers. Some sinned deeply and became daemons, others less and became angels; others still less and became archangels; and thus each in turn received the reward for his individual sin. But there remained some souls who had not sinned so greatly as to become daemons, nor on the other hand so very lightly as to become angels. God therefore made the present world and bound the soul to the body as a punishment. For God is no "respecter of persons," that among all these beings who are of one nature (for all the immortal beings are rational) he should make some daemons, some souls and some angels; rather is it clear that God made one a daemon, one a soul and one an angel as a means of punishing each in proportion to its sin. For if this were not so, and souls had no pre-existence, why do we find some new-born babes to be blind, when they have committed no sin, while others are born with no defect at all? But it is clear that certain sins existed before the souls, and as a result of these sins each soul receives a recompense in proportion to its deserts.[75]

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74 ***Lib. Arb.***, 3.20.58.

75 ***De Principiis***, 1.8.1. See also 1.4.1, 1.6.1, 1.8.4, 2.9.7, 3.3.5.

For Origen, then, it is obvious that some beings enjoy a higher form of existence than others; indeed, some apparently sinless beings even suffer in the life they are given. This fact, accompanied by a desire to defend his faith in God's justice, leads Origen to deduce that each soul must have merited its state through some sinful act committed before its birth:

> As, then, without any doubt it will happen in the day of judgment that the good will be separated from the evil and the righteous from the unrighteous and every individual soul will by the judgment of God be allotted to that place of which his merits have rendered him worthy . . . so also in the past some such process, I think, has taken place.[76]

Clearly, Origen thus thinks that the soul's descent results from its sinful choice, which choice God punishes by sentencing the soul to take a body.

But Origen's is not the only way to understand the soul's entering a body as a result of some choice it has made. For instance, Plotinus, although maintaining that the soul does in fact take a body through its own choice, views the soul's embodiment more positively:

> In that archetypal world every form of soul is near to the image (the thing in the world of copy) to which its individual constitution inclines it; there is therefore no need of a sender or leader acting at the right moment to bring it at the right moment whether into body or into a definitely appropriate body: of its own motion it descends at the precisely true time and enters where it must . . . .
>
> The souls go forth neither under compulsion nor of freewill; or at least, freedom, here is not to be regarded as action upon preference; it is more like such a leap of nature as moves men to the instinctive desire of sexual union, or, in the

76 ***De Principiis,*** 2.9.8.

> case of some, to fine conduct; the motive lies elsewhere than in the reason: like is destined unfailingly to like, and each moves hither or thither at its fixed moment.[77]

The soul, thus, does not succumb to sin when it chooses a body. Rather, Plotinus claims, the soul simply acts according to a tendency which inheres in its nature, and what flows from nature cannot be sinful. Moreover, the soul is not necessarily harmed by its association with matter:

> . . . for in fact [the soul] suffers no hurt whatever by furnishing body with the power to existence, since not every form of care for the inferior need wrest the providing soul from its own sure standing in the highest.[78]

Indeed, Plotinus adds,

> . . . commerce with the body is repudiated for two only reasons, as hindering the Soul's intellective act and as filling it with pleasure, desire, pain; but neither of these misfortunes can befall a soul which has never so deeply penetrated into a body, is not a slave but a sovereign ruling a body of such an order as to have no need and no shortcoming and therefore to give ground for neither desire nor fear.[79]

Thus, Plotinus argues, as long as the soul does not submit to its body, that is, does not treat the body as a greater good than it is, the soul does not sin. And since there is no sin, it seems, there is no need for a divine Adjudicator to sentence the soul to this world.

Both Origen and Plotinus, then, purport that the individual soul's own choice unites it with a body, as Augustine suggests in the fourth theory.

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77 Plotinus, ***Enneads***, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1930), 4.3.13.

78 ***Enneads***, 4.82. See also 1.8.14, 4.3.4, 4.7.13, 4.8.3-4.8.6, 4.8.8.

79 ***Enneads***, 4.8.2. See also 4.8.6, 4.8.8.

Interestingly, Origen's theory allows for the embodied soul's ignorance and impotence to be penal, which is the way that the fourth theory is usually understood.[80] However, Origen's theory also demands that a Judge send the soul into a body. Augustine's fourth theory, on the other hand, posits that souls are not sent by God—in fact, this is the primary distinction between the third and fourth theories: in the third, a divine Governor sends the soul, in the fourth the soul comes entirely of its own choice. If Augustine intended the fourth theory primarily to reflect Origen's hypothesis, with both God and the soul active in the soul's embodiment, why then did he draw such a clear distinction between the third and fourth theories? O'Connell, in fact, holds that the third and fourth theories are but two aspects of one system:

> . . . it **must** be a "combination" of both of these alternatives [the third and fourth theories]—but both of them operating in such an intimate conjunction that the one is the convex, so to speak, to the other as concave; the causality of "fault" must be one and the same as the working of cosmic—read "divine"—law.[81]

Presumably, scholars have maintained this position in order to protect the view that the embodied soul's innate ignorance and impotence are penal.[82] But, in order to preserve this view, these same scholars are forced to explain an odd turn in the text of ***De Libero Arbitrio***. Augustine states that

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80 See O'Connell, 137.

81 O'Connell, 38. O'Connell is surely not the first scholar to posit such an understanding of the relationship between the soul's choosing to take a body and its being divinely sent. Indeed, Plotinus, in an attempt to resolve Plato's apparently contradictory accounts of the soul's descent in the ***Timaeus*** and the ***Phaedrus***, depicts a strikingly similar idea (see ***Enneads,*** 4.8.5). Initially, I too felt that this was the proper understanding of the third and fourth theories; I am no longer so certain.

82 O'Connell espouses this reading, citing Augustine's ***Epistle 166*** as evidence. Could it be that Augustine is only discussing Origen's theory (or a similar one) in this letter?

> Similarly, on this [the antecedent is unclear but refers to either the third or fourth theory] other view, [God] would allow conquest over ignorance and difficulty on the part of the earnest and right-minded souls to count as a crown of glory. He would not lay the ignorance or the difficulty to the charge of the negligent or of those who wished to defend their sins on the ground of their infirmity.[83]

That the soul is not to be held responsible for its ignorance and impotence suggests that these conditions are not penal but natural. Those who maintain that this fourth theory supports a penal understanding of the soul's embodied state, therefore, must argue either that the turn in Augustine's thought refers to the third theory[84] or find some other explanation for Augustine's apparent divergence from his "implied equation," which states that "the greater the insuperability [of our ignorance and impotence], the greater our own culpability for it, and vice versa."[85]

If, on the other hand, Augustine intends a clear separation between the third and fourth theories, he probably considered the fourth theory to be more representative of Plotinus' thought. After all, Plotinus explicitly states that within his theory no Judge or Administrator is needed to send the soul into its body, and this lack of divine impetus is the primary feature of Augustine's fourth theory. Moreover, since, the soul's choice to take a body is not sinful, the turn in the text is not problematic: Plotinus posits that the soul's choice to order matter is made without knowledge that the matter will cause the soul to degenerate,[86] and thus it is appropriate that God should not charge the soul with sins resulting from these conditions. Of course, if one accepts that Augustine's fourth hypothesis most resembles Plotinus' theory, one must admit that man's innate ignorance and impotence are natural, not penal. Finally, it is not clear whether Augustine in fact limited his fourth theory to either Origen's or Plotinus' system and, hence,

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83 ***Lib. Arb.***, 3.20.58.

84 If this is the case, Augustine has certainly used an odd construction. Moreover, it seems superfluous since Augustine writes extensively on this very issue only lines above.

85 O'Connell, 28.

86 See ***Enneads,*** 4.8.2.

whether he maintained a true separation between the third and fourth theories. Augustine may have simply abstracted the element of individual choice from these (and even other) theories in an attempt to subsume them into his fourth category. Indeed, it is conceivable that he simply accounted for the theories circulating at the time, without further thought.[87] At any rate, this much is clear: according to the fourth theory, the soul enters the body of its own choice and, therefore, the Creator is not to be blamed for the ignorance and impotence which are natural consequences of this choice.

Each of these four theories, Augustine concludes, holds against the Manichean position, for in each theory a soul is judged only according to the sins for which it is responsible. In the first and fourth theories, of course, even the moral ignorance and impotence into which men are born appear to be punishment for each soul's sins—whether they were committed in a life identical with Adam or in some earlier state of the soul. In the second and third theories, man's moral ignorance and impotence are natural rather than penal (except for Adam and Eve in the creationist theory). Accordingly, souls are not punished for objectively wrong acts committed through ignorance or omitted through impotence; rather, souls are punished for the personal sins engendered when they refuse to use the gifts God has given them in order to live righteously and to better themselves. But, although defeating the Manichean heresy is Augustine's primary concern in ***De Libero Arbitrio***, he is also interested in finding a theory (or theories) of the soul which would support his doctrine of original sin as well as preclude the Manichean position. Now, Augustine does not consider the possibility extensively in ***De Libero Arbitrio***, although the question about original sin which sparks Augustine's exposition on the origin of souls reminds the reader that the possibility is one to be considered.[88] In the larger context of Augustine's entire writings, however, the saint often re-embarks on his search for a theory of the soul's origin which makes sense of original sin and the

87 See O'Connell, 33.

88 O'Connell suggests that the second and third theories are additions to Augustine's original text. If this is true, Augustine may have originally been more concerned with the connection to original sin, but had to retreat after considering the two new theories. See O'Connell, 70.

scriptural passages Augustine associates with this doctrine. If one considers Augustine's later writings on this matter, the pertinent scriptural passages, and the comments of several modern Augustinian scholars, it is quite possible to determine whether Augustine held one particular theory over the others. Moreover, one can discern whether there is one theory which best suits the doctrine of original sin. If such a theory is found, it might elucidate the relationship among souls, thereby resolving the apparent contradiction between an omnipotent, just God and the doctrine of original sin.

One of Augustine's most significant works on the origin of the soul is ***De Genesi ad Litteram***. In this text, Augustine comments on the problem of the origin of the first soul and, indeed, all ensuing souls:

> What, then, are we to say about the creation of the soul? Did God make it from that which was entirely non-existent, that is, from nothing, or from something which He had already made in the spiritual order but which was not yet a soul? This is a real problem.[89]

After discussing possible solutions to the problem (e.g., that the soul is corporeal; that it is born of God's substance; that it proceeds from God's substance; that it is made from a body into a soul; or that an irrational soul is converted into the first human soul), Augustine concludes that

> If the authority of Scripture, therefore, and the light of reason do not contradict us, let us assume that man was made on the sixth day in the sense that the causal reason of his body was created in the elements of the world, but that his soul in its own proper being was already created with the making of the first day, and that thus created it lay hidden in the works of

89 Augustine, ***De Genesi ad Litteram***, 2 vols., ed. John Taylor (New York: Newmann Press, 1983), 7.5.7.

> God until at the proper time He would breathe it into the body
> He would form from the slime of the earth.[90]

Augustine bases this conclusion on his reading of Genesis 1 and 2, which includes two assumptions foreign to most modern readers. First, Augustine maintains that all things were made during the first six days of creation (Genesis 2:2). Thus, nothing is being newly created ***ex nihilo*** now, only maintained. Second, Augustine thinks that the second creation account (Genesis 2) is not a restatement of Genesis 1 with a different emphasis; rather, he believes that Adam was formed from clay after the first week of creation. The saint reconciles this belief with his first interpretation by suggesting that even though ***man*** was not formed during the first six days of creation, the material and spiritual components which God brings together to form Adam were in fact created then, if only in ***rationes seminales***.[91] Augustine thinks, therefore, that when Adam was raised from the dust and God breathed life into him, nothing new was created. Moreover, he finds further scriptural evidence for his opinion that nothing is created after the first week in the Vulgate translation of Sirach 18:1: "He who lives forever created all things together." The implication of Augustine's readings of Genesis and Sirach upon his theory of the soul's origin is that he believes all souls must have been created at the beginning of time; thus, the creationist theory is not in accord with Augustine's readings of Scripture as expressed in ***De Genesis ad Litteram***.[92]

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90 ***Gen. Litt.***, 7.24.35.

91 Augustine asserts that all creatures must have been made, at least in seminal reason, during the first six days of creation (***Gen. Litt.***, 6.8.13). He also asserts that the human soul must have been created in its proper being during this week, since he can conceive of no adequate place for the seminal reason of a soul to exist except in another soul (***Gen. Litt.***, 7.22-28). For Augustine on ***rationes seminales***, see ***Gen. Litt.***, 6.10.17, 6.11.18, 6.11.19, 6.14.25, 9.17.32, 10.20.35. Taylor also gives a good summary of this idea: ***Gen. Litt.***, 253-4.

92 See Augustine, ***The Letters of St. Augustine***, in ***The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers***, vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo: Christian Literature Co., 1886). In ***Epistle 166*** Augustine proposes that a creationist might escape this objection by arguing that all things are created in **kind** during the first six days, but that individual members of the species may not be created until later (***Epist.***, 166.5.12). Augustine is giving the creationist theory full benefit of any

Now, in addition to being in agreement with his reading of Genesis, one might assume that Augustine's preferred theory of the soul's origin would also allow for his notion of the transmission of original sin. For instance, from the Vulgate of Romans 5:12, Augustine believes that in Adam all men sin.[93] Thus, any theory about the origin of the soul which does not explain how the state of ignorance and impotence into which man is born is punishment for Adam's sin is unacceptable to Augustine. The apostolic practice of infant baptism also implies to Augustine that humans are born guilty of sin.[94] But Romans 9:11 states that no good or evil is done before birth.[95] Any theory which purports that sin is committed before birth is, hence, also unacceptable to Augustine. The theories of the pre-existent soul (i.e., the third and fourth theories in ***De Libero Arbitrio*** III), then, are precluded by Augustine's scriptural principles about original sin. Under the third theory, persons are not born into a state of guilt (properly speaking) and, thus, there is no reason to say that anyone sins in Adam, nor to baptize infants. In fact, Augustine ponders,

> Can it be that this theory is not acceptable because obeying the will of God [through obeying His command to take a body] is a good action, and therefore this explanation is contrary to the principle that the unborn have done neither good nor evil?[96]

Thus, the third theory seems to contradict the Vulgate of Romans 5:12, Romans 9:11, and the belief that the guilt of sin is washed away by baptismal water. In addition, the fourth theory (read as Origen rather than Plotinus), although it allows for the soul to be born in guilt and thus is in keeping with the practice of infant baptism, maintains that the unborn soul's decision to take a body is sinful.

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doubt since it is Jerome's preferred theory, and so one must question the weight Augustine affords this argument. In addition, Augustine states that he sees no way to reconcile this theory with the practice of infant baptism (***Epist.,*** 166.6-7). Thus, the creationist theory must be dismissed from consideration anyway.

93 See ***Gen. Litt.***, 6.9.15.

94 See ***Epist.***, 166.9.28.

95 See ***Gen. Litt.***, 6.9.14, 7.25.36, 10.15,27.

96 ***Gen. Litt.***, 7.25.36.

And, thereby, this theory violates the principle of Romans 9:11.[97] In fact, since the soul's own choice incurs the punishment of being born ignorant and impotent, it is also not accurate to say that the soul shares in Adam's sin (short of interpreting both the fall in Genesis 2 and the principle in the Vulgate of Romans 5:12 metaphorically). Thus, it seems that Augustine's principles force him to deny not only the creationist accounts of the soul's origin, but the pre-existing soul theories as well.

The traducianist theory, then, seems to be the most promising candidate for Augustine's preferred view on the origin of the soul. As Joseph Colleran writes in his notes to ***De Quantitate Animae***,

> . . . in the tenth book of ***De Genesi ad Litteram***, [Augustine] considers the first two of the four views as more compatible with Scripture . . . . He inclines, however, toward the first view, later called "spiritual traducianism," or "generationism," since he thinks it accounts better for the transmission of original sin, without impairing the goodness and justice of God.[98]

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97 See ***Epist.***, 166.9.27. Augustine rejects the theory which claims that the soul enters a body because of sin, offering three reasons for this rejection: (1) the theory demands that the soul pass from one body to another; (2) if the soul can sin before birth, it can sin after death and there is, thus, no security in beatitude; (3) sinning in Adam is different from sinning outside Adam and therefore being cast into Adam, that is, into a body. Again, I offer the possibility that Augustine is speaking only to the understanding of the fourth theory which parallels Origen's thought, not Plotinus'. The third rejection is easily dealt with through a metaphorical understanding of sinning in Adam: Adam symbolizes the soul in its original state, not the body assumed after the choice. With respect to the first two objections, O'Connell observes that all theories of the pre-existing soul's choosing to enter a body demand the possibility of repeated embodiments (O'Connell, 164). There may be a solution in Plotinus' tracts on the memory of the soul (***Enneads***, 8.4.7, 4.8.6, 4.6, 4.4, 4.3.25). If the soul can remember what happened when it entered the body, it might learn the perfection of its rest in the Intellectual-Principle.

98 Taylor writing in ***Gen. Litt.***, 195.

One is at least not alone, hence, if one believes that Augustine accepts the traducianist theory. This theory seems to fit best with the practice of infant baptism, scripture, and Augustine's later ventures to discover the origin of the soul.

There are, however, also those who deny that Augustine could have been a spiritual traducianist. Robert O'Connell, for instance, writes that, when considering Augustine's beliefs on the origin of the soul,

> We are left with only two choices: traducianism or the voluntary and sinful "fall of the soul." But Augustine manifested a lifelong antipathy to the traducianist hypothesis, and the evidence of his earlier works makes this much unmistakable: if these are our only two choices, the palm must go to the "fall of the soul."[99]

What leads O'Connell to believe that traducianism is not Augustine's accepted theory? One possible answer is found in a comment that O'Connell makes about traducianism: "the connection between sin and merited punishment is unambiguously clear, but qua souls we are not 'other' than Adam!"[100] Perhaps the implicit lack of individuality among souls in the traducianist theory is why Augustine might disregard it.[101] Or perhaps the traducianist tendency toward materialistic conceptions of the soul deterred Augustine from becoming a traducianist. Indeed, Augustine, with the intention of refuting materialists, frequently reminds his readers that the soul is not a bodily substance:

> For whereas there is one form which is given from without to every bodily substance,—such as the form which is constructed by potters and smiths, and that class of artists who

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99 O'Connell, 66-67. For evidence of this antipathy, see ***Epist.***, 166.9.27.

100 O'Connell, 33.

101 Could the individuality of souls result from different bodily experiences and the use of freewill to actualize virtues which remain only potential in other souls (or indeed not acting so that what is actual in another soul remains only potential in oneself)? See ***Enneads***, 4.3.6, 4.3.15, 4.9.2.

> paint and fashion forms like the body of animals,—but another and internal form which is not itself constructed, but, as the efficient cause, produces not only the natural bodily forms, but even the life itself of the living creatures, and which proceeds from the secret and hidden choice of an intelligent and living nature,—let that first-mentioned form be attributed to every artificer, but this latter to only one, God, the Creator and Originator who made the world itself . . . .[102]

Augustine's purpose here is to refute those who believe that the soul is begotten not only as the new body is formed, but through the formation of the new body. And this is, in fact, the position of many traducianists: they believe that the soul is a bodily substance. But, as Augustine knows, according to "the definition of a body, namely, any substance occupying space with its length, breadth, and height, the soul is not that and must not be thought to be made of that."[103] Of course, it is possible (theoretically) to be a spiritual traducianist, that is, to believe that all souls were identical with Adam's yet still not material bodies. But Augustine seems to deny even this milder traducianism when he attacks the very scriptural heart of the traducianist theory. Traducianists base their beliefs on Genesis 2 when Eve is formed from Adam's side.[104] Since, in this story, God does not explicitly breathe a soul into Eve as He did when creating Adam, traducianists assume that Eve's soul is somehow begotten from Adam's. Scripture's silence on this point, they believe, is evidence that Eve's soul is not directly created by God. But, Augustine argues,

> . . . if Scripture ought to have given us any instruction at all on this point, with much greater reason it should have done so if anything happened in the case of the woman that did not happen in the case of the man; which would certainly be true if

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102 ***Civ. Dei***, 12.25.

103 ***Gen. Litt.***, 7.21.27. See also ***Epist.***, 166.2.4.

104 See ***Gen. Litt.***, 10.1.2.

> her soul came from his animated flesh, and if she did not, like Adam, receive her body from one source and her soul from another.[105]

Thus, Augustine himself seems to dismiss the traducian theory of the soul's origin. It is finally impossible, then, to determine which theory (if any) Augustine comes to accept. Each proposed explanation is unacceptable by at least one of Augustine's scriptural premises. The traducianist and creationist theories contradict Augustine's interpretation of Genesis. And the theories of the pre-existent souls violate the premises of either the Vulgate Romans 5:12, Romans 9:11, or both.

Interestingly, later scholars have revealed that Augustine may not have had all of his principles properly in order when he dealt with this problem. According to John Taylor, Augustine's doctrine of original sin rests upon a particular translation of Romans 5:12:

> **Through one man sin came into this world, and through sin death, and so death spread to all men, in whom all have sinned**; and this form of the text agrees substantially with the Vulgate. The last clause in this Latin version reads, ***in quo omnes peccaverunt*** (**in whom all have sinned**), and Augustine with most Latin writers took the phrase ***in quo*** as referring to **one man** (Adam). Apart from the fact that the relative is far removed from the antecedent in this interpretation, there is a further difficulty in taking ***in quo*** as a correct translation of the Greek ™f 2, which more probably means "because." Most modern versions, therefore, render the clause **because all men have sinned**, and this seems to be the correct interpretation.[106]

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105 ***Gen. Litt.***, 10.1.2.

106 Taylor writing in ***Gen. Litt.***, 263.

This new translation of Romans 5:12 seems to warrant reconsideration of the theories of the pre-existing soul. For if it is not necessary to believe that all men sin in Adam,[107] it might be possible for a theory of pre-existing souls to meet Augustine's other criteria. First, such a soul might easily have been created in accord with Augustine's reading of Genesis. And, second, it would be possible for such a soul to obtain a body without committing personal sin before birth (and thus not violate Romans 9:11); indeed, Augustine seems to have just such a possibility in mind when he proposes in ***De Genesi ad Litteram*** that "the inclination of the will for a body is not a good or evil act for which an account must be rendered before God our Judge."[108] Augustine, it appears, actually considered the possibility that a pre-existing soul might enter a body through its own choice and without personal sin before birth. In fact, this hypothesis is precisely the one that Plotinus proposes. From this, might one safely infer that Augustine primarily intends the fourth theory of the soul's origin to reflect Plotinus' thought? The Latin reading of Romans 5:12 probably precluded Augustine from holding such a theory since it does not seem to allow for each individual to share in Adam's sin. With the modern reading of Romans 5:12, though, this theory is much more promising. It is not immediately reconciled with the practice of infant baptism, but that does not mean that it is therefore irreconcilable. Could it be that the flesh, naturally subject to sin and death because it is begotten by Adam, necessarily infects the soul as soon as the two are united, unless the bonds of sin are severed by baptism? But since baptismal grace is easily attained, and since sin was after all a natural consequence of the

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107 Although the text of the Bible may appear to differ from Augustine's understanding of our sharing the guilt of original sin, the Roman Catholic Church will undoubtedly claim that he maintains the right belief. In his appendix on Plotinus, O'Connell notes that Plotinus' theory allows for all souls to be one in as much as they proceed from one principle (349). O'Connell, if I understand him properly, uses this unity to develop a variation of the traducian theory, in which variation all souls descend in Adam from their beatitude and are then born into their own bodies. I think it would be more in keeping with Plotinus to say that Adam is a metaphor for the soul's existing in peace and unity with the All-Soul, and that each soul falls as Adam does when it becomes engrossed in matter. See also ***Enneads***, 4.3.5, 4.9.5.

108 ***Gen. Litt.***, 7.25.36.

soul's free choice to enter the body, the Creator is not to be blamed for each soul's sin.

Whether Augustine ever fully considered this possibility is not evident from his writings. It is likely that his respect for scripture as a basis for faith would not allow him to question Romans 5:9 as he knew it. More practically, scholars agree that Augustine had limited skill in reading Greek, which shortcoming might have prevented him from ever discovering the mistake in the Vulgate translation.[109] Or it might be that Augustine, who often writes in response to a particular assault on the faith, never had the proper occasion for divulging this possibility. In ***De Libero Arbitrio***, as stated above, Augustine's primary concern is to argue that humans are freely responsible for their sins. Augustine is not at leisure here to discuss the matter of the soul's origin purely for the sake of knowledge, but only as it relates to free will and the immediate crisis. Yet, Augustine's search for the origin of the soul is both significant and intriguing. Significant because it is a seminal episode in the encounter between faith and reason which many argue is the essential dynamic of western civilization. Intriguing because fifteen hundred years later the door Augustine sought to enter is still locked. And the key may very well be tucked away in the thought of one who defined and structured this encounter, one like St. Augustine.

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109 See Taylor's notes in ***Gen. Litt.***, 271.