SELF-KNOWLEDGE

IN THE

AGE OF

THEORY

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Chapter 1

Theory

The terms 'theory' and 'theorizing' are often used imprecisely to refer to thought and thinking of any kind, as synonyms for 'thinking.' My use of these terms is, however, limited to more precise meanings, e.g., the meanings implied by the human scientist's claim that his task is the construction of theories and by the philosopher's claim that "all thinking is theorizing." It is necessary to begin by spelling out as precisely as possible just what theory and theorizing are.

The most essential characteristic of theory and theorizing is abstraction: a theory is an abstract system, theorizing is a process of abstraction. 'Abstract' and 'abstraction' are, of course, themselves in need of more precise definition. And the immediate response to the description of theory as abstract is that any attempt to say anything about anything is necessarily abstract: words are not the things they name or talk about. I will try to make clear, in the course of the discussion of the characteristics of theory, what it means to say that a theory is abstract. But Crites's description of abstraction will serve as a beginning: abstraction is a strategy "in which images and qualities are detached from experience to become data for the formation of generalized principles and techniques." This description contrasts abstraction with narrative: "Such abstraction enables us to give experience a new, non-narrative and atemporal coherence."[1]

It is because of this abstract character that theory cannot be the self-knowledge we seek. Abstraction loses touch with the particularity and the affective dimension of the self. In Percy's terms, the self cannot be encompassed by theory: "No matter how powerful the theory, whether psychological or political, one's self is always a leftover. Indeed the self may be defined as that quality of the person which cannot be encompassed by theory, not even a theory of the self. This is so because even if one agrees with the theory, what does one do

then? Accordingly the self finds itself ever more conspicuously without a place in the modern world, which is perfectly understood by theorizing."[2]

Theory has, for the most part, replaced philosophy as the locus of the "real business" of understanding anything. It is commonly held that the traditional subject matter of philosophy has now been broken up and distributed to the various specialized disciplines. Cosmology, for example, belongs to the physicists and astronomers. There is virtually no philosophical speculation about the being of the whole. And metaphysics has been pronounced dead.

With respect to human being, the sciences of psychology, anthropology, and the whole array of social sciences have divided up the philosophical terrain. What these sciences share is a view of human life and being that comes not from philosophy but from biology. It is difficult to find any English-speaking human scientist who does not feel obliged at least to genuflect in the direction of the theory of evolution. The human sciences have come to replace philosophy as the discipline whose task is the most comprehensive account of the human. This is especially obvious in the case of moral philosophy. In his critique of the social sciences, *The Battle for Human Nature*, Barry Schwartz recognizes that "a significant part of what used to be taught as moral philosophy is now taught under a different name: social science."[3]

But within moral philosophy itself, the task is understood to be the construction of moral theories. The moral philosopher is a "theorist" and the individual who must make some decision is mirroring what the moral philosopher as theorist has to do: he must construct a deductive system through which he can discover true answers to moral questions. For Barry Schwartz, "deciding on what should be depends upon having a moral theory."[4] There seems to be rather general agreement that only a theory can save us now.

The notion that *all* philosophy is theory or theory-construction is quite common and goes back at least as far as Quine. The task of the philosopher does not differ in purpose or method from the other sciences;[5] it differs only in the breadth of its framework.[6] Philosophy is, at best, a theory of theories. It provides an epistemological explanation or justification for what is going on elsewhere in the sciences. Or philosophy is a "second reflection" on the objects of science, art, and morality.[7] The subject matter, the starting-points, for philosophy must be supplied by the other first-order disciplines. The "data" for philosophical investigation come from the human sciences. Then the philosopher, depending upon his philosophical specialty, appropriates these data for his own theorizing. The moral philosopher, for example, cannot theorize responsibly without taking into account the findings of sociology, psychology, etc. Both views imply that there can be no direct philosophical confrontation with human

reality.

Finally, the claims of theory-construction have spread to all forms of thought and to all human activity. All thinking is theorizing. The theorist engages in this activity in a usually self-conscious manner. The rest of us do so unconsciously. Decisions are all acts of theorizing. All human activity takes place within a theory, and human life, then, is entirely "theoretical."

The attempt to replace philosophy with theory, both by the human sciences and within the professional discipline of philosophy itself, entails the denial of the significance, uniqueness, and comprehensiveness of the philosophical task. The human sciences claim to be superior to philosophy, to be able to accomplish what philosophy has failed to do. As E. O. Wilson puts it: "ethical philosophy must not be left in the hands of the merely wise."[8]

In this chapter I will examine the notion of theory in order to show that it does not and cannot replace philosophy as the search for self-knowledge. I will begin by clarifying what is meant by 'theory' as that term is intended by those who understand themselves to be in the business of constructing theories. I will then focus on one essential move within the process of theory-construction, a move which is generally referred to as 'abstraction.' It is here that the task of theory-construction reveals most clearly its questionable relation to reality, especially to the human world. Finally, I will turn to the issue of agency and autonomy in order to bring to light one of the most important deficiencies of theory.

Meaning

The terms 'theorizing' and 'theory' are often used imprecisely and unselfconsciously simply to mean thinking and thought without any implication concerning what the precise nature of that activity and its products might be. But when these terms are defined by those who see themselves as theorists, we notice several almost universal characteristics, and these can be grouped in terms of three claims: a theory is a set of sentences; there is a relationship between 'data' and theory proper; a theory is composed chiefly of "theoretical terms." I will discuss the issue of 'data' first because the other two claims are so closely related and are more important for my purposes.

For some theorists, and certainly for the human scientists, a theory is related to data or to "observation." The human scientists understand their own activity as one in which data are collected and theories are then constructed on the basis of these data. So far, then, the move from data to theory looks like what could be expressed in more traditional philosophical terms as the move from appear-

ances to reality. But the nature of the relationship between data and theory is open to debate. The data may be sensory input or stimuli, but this input is more or less already formed by the theory. Data are what appears to the observer within a situation that is itself constructed in such a way as to allow the relevance of the data to appear. For Quine, a theory is like an arch, grounded in sensory stimuli.[9] But for most contemporary theorists, there are no preconceptual or even pretheoretical data. If all thinking is theorizing, if we are always necessarily within some theory, then the distinction between data and theory loses its force.

The data are supposed to be the theorist's link with reality; the data are the touchstone, the "hard evidence" on which the theory is based. Quine's metaphor of the arch with its feet in concrete observation or sensory stimuli suggests this way of seeing the matter. Human scientists consistently make their claim to rationality by appealing to the fact that their sciences are grounded in hard data. But if the data are the product of the theory, how can they legitimize the theory? What does it matter if one appeals back to the data if the data have no independent status? And how could *significantly* new data ever appear?

The theorist claims for himself an openness and objectivity that are tied to the claim that theories are always open to revision. New data must be accommodated; and if it is important new data which the theory cannot accommodate, the whole theory may have to be dropped and a new theory constructed. But if perception were wholly determined by theory, then it is not clear how any significantly new data could appear. And if perception were wholly constituted by theory, we could never be genuinely puzzled about what we see.[10]

Whatever the status of the data is ultimately held to be, the movement that thought makes in theory is from data to underlying regularities. Churchland defines 'theorizing' as finding regularities that lie behind or beneath the superficial regularities.[11] The theory of evolution finds "natural selection" to be beneath or behind the data, and sociobiology finds "maximizing inclusive fitness" even further beneath the data. This way of thinking is generally contrasted with "argument," the implication being that argument is mere words.

My own criticisms of theory do not rely directly on establishing the necessity for theory-independent data, but there is a connection between the difficulties I have pointed to here and the issue of appearance and reality as I take it up later in this chapter. The notion of theory as a system and the character of theoretical terms are directly relevant to my own concerns.

A theory is said to be a system of sentences, a self-contained, constructed, coherent whole. This characteristic is often expressed in the metaphor

of a "fabric," or "web," or "network." A theory is said to be a "conceptual scheme." The concepts and sentences of a theory are related to each other so as to form a coherent whole. Each science is such a system, and so-called ordinary language and even ordinary life, ordinary experience, all take place "within" a system.

A theory, as a conceptual scheme, is "abstract" in two senses. The theory as a whole is abstract and its theoretical terms are abstract. In the first sense, theories are at different "levels of abstraction." Quine claims that physics is more abstract than zoology because physics entails a "more ruthless abstraction from differences in detail."[12] Philosophy then is even more abstract, seeking the "most general traits of reality."[13]

It is most important to see that theorists do recognize some version of the distinction between appearance and reality. I will return to this point later, but for now it must be noted that a theory, that is, a scientific theory, is held to refer to reality. (There is, I think, a significant inconsistency here for those who maintain that "ordinary language" is a theory because ordinary language and ordinary experience are supposed to refer only to appearances.) Because of the status of the terms of the theory, the theory refers as a whole to reality.[14]

Levels of abstraction range from the least abstract, i.e., ordinary language or "folk-psychology," through the various sciences, to philosophy at the highest level of abstraction. In this sense abstraction seems to mean 'generality'; a level of abstraction is a level of generality. Theorists often speak of "choosing" a level of abstraction. We can move in and out of theories, from one level of abstraction to another at will, and still be talking about the same thing. The biologist and the physicist can both talk about a cat, but each will be interested in different aspects of the cat. The physicist speaks at a higher level of abstraction than the biologist because the physicist is concerned with those features that the cat has in common with all other physical objects, e.g., it will fall if thrown out a window.

A level of abstraction is a way of referring to and taking up the objects for study. The higher levels of abstraction are said to get at the more abstract features of the object in question. There seems to be a kind of implied correspondence between level of abstraction and the abstract character of the aspects of reality, i.e., a correspondence between the level of abstraction and the level of reality. Further, the level of abstraction is chosen according to the explanatory needs of the theorist. My point here is that the notion of a "level of abstraction" is not metaphysically neutral. Certain features or levels of reality itself are assumed to be "abstract."

It must also be noted here that 'generality' and 'universality' are not the

of the sensory environment takes place in the association cortex between the several sensory areas."[24] This is as far as the account of abstraction goes. The theorist uses a notion of abstraction that is reminiscent of accounts of how universals are arrived at, but he simply ignores the metaphysical issues and simply denies, because he finds distasteful, any acknowledgment of an agency that would, in his view, have to be non-material.

There is, finally, the process of abstraction that results in theoretical terms, a process of which the theorist is more or less aware. In order to display this kind of abstraction, we can look to what is regarded as the most important theoretical term in the theory of evolution, i.e., 'natural selection.' Natural selection belongs to the theoretical framework of evolutionary theory, that is, it is not directly observed but is inferred from what is observed. Futuyma refers to mutation and natural selection as the "theoretical mechanisms of evolutionary change."[25] 'Natural selection' is a theoretical term that has its meaning fixed by its role in the framework of the theory.

Darwin began from his observations that breeders are able to control the quality of animals by selecting out the best for breeding. We might call this 'artificial selection,' i.e., selection according to the principles of an art. From his observations of what goes on in nature, he concluded that something similar occurs. So he referred to what goes on in nature as 'natural selection.' Darwin's use of this term was metaphorical. There is no conscious, intelligent breeder acting in nature, working to bring about some end. Putting the two words 'natural' and 'selection' together has to result in a metaphor because there is a sense (the literal sense) in which these words are incompatible. I will follow Goudge's account of how this term became a theoretical term:

> The term 'natural selection', like many other scientific expressions, has its roots in ordinary, non-scientific discourse. The word 'selection', for example, before it became part of the language of biology, had an established meaning in everyday language, where it designated a kind of purposive activity performed by human beings; the activity involved choosing some object . . . from a number of available alternatives. This is the sense in which Darwin first used the word . . . when discussing the effects of the breeding of domestic plants and animals. By 'artificial selection', men exercised a deliberate choice of the parents of each generation. Darwin then proceeded to employ the term 'natural selection' to designate a process which goes on 'under Nature', quite independently of human intervention. In this new context, 'selection' ceased to have a literal meaning, as Darwin clearly saw, and became a metaphor.

But the move from the literal to the metaphorical turned out not to be sufficient. For the evolutionary theorist, "a sounder policy is to disregard the metaphorical significance of 'natural selection' and take it as a technical expres-

sion whose meaning is fixed by its role in the framework of evolutionary theory. The expression can then be freed from its associations with the idea of conscious choice which arise from the use of 'selection' in everyday discourse."[26]

The kind of abstraction that results in theoretical terms is an abstraction from metaphor. In what does this abstraction consist? All vestiges of any suggestion of consciousness, intelligence, and purpose have been removed from the term's "ordinary" meaning. Now the term has its meaning only in relation to the theory as a whole. We can, then, see that the two senses of abstraction—the sense of having their meaning determined entirely by their place in the theory and the sense of abstraction from metaphor—are indeed intimately related with respect to theoretical terms.

The procedure of abstraction from metaphor is common in evolutionary theory and the human sciences that depend on it. For example, we can speak of the striving for survival and reproduction as two 'purposes' in a metaphorical sense.[27] The notion of adaptation "makes implicit use of the concept of 'purpose' or proper function."[28] We can say that reproduction is the link that connects the individual members of successive generations in an unbroken series provided we keep in mind that we are speaking metaphorically and that expressions such as 'the continuity of all living things' cannot be taken literally.[29] A living thing may be defined as "any semiclosed physical system that *exploits* the order it already possesses, and the energy flux through it, in such a way as to maintain and/or increase its internal order."[30] Organisms "serve the interests of their genes," but the interests of the organism can clash with the interest of genes. DNA "communicates" with protein to instruct and guide its growth and behavior.[31] Genes have "purposes."[32] In pair-bonding species, males "know" where their genes are.[33] Gluttony is explained by the fact that the control centers in the brain "think" that the surplus of food will end.[34] There were selective pressures for more complex brains: a problem-solving capacity, an information storage capacity, and even abstract thought were "needed" at various times in the course of evolution.[35] The term 'soul' is a metaphor for our subjective experience.[36] Even Gibson, who resists so much of what is commonly accepted in the social sciences, refers to 'extracting' (the extracting that constitutes perception) as a metaphor.[37]

I am not now criticizing the sciences for the use of metaphor. What I am concerned with here is the status of these metaphors with respect to theory and to theoretical terms. Terms or expressions are taken over from so-called ordinary speech and are used "in special ways" to convey scientific ideas. "At first these expressions have a predominantly figurative or metaphorical meaning in their specialized contexts. Repeated use, however, tends to alter the meaning so

that the metaphorical aspects disappear. The expressions then become wholly technical terms whose significance is determined by their role in scientific discourse."[38] It is not at all clear how or why a metaphor could become a theoretical term on account of "repeated use." Metaphors can become literal expressions through repeated use, their metaphorical character forgotten. But more than repeated use would seem to be necessary to turn a metaphor into a theoretical term. The expression starts out at the literal level, then becomes a metaphor, and then turns into a theoretical term. At that point the term is entirely cut off from its literal meaning.

The theorist's response might be that what I am calling the literal level is really just another theory. But that does not take care of the difficulty. The metaphorical level makes sense only if there is a literal level. The metaphorical character of 'natural selection' is seen only if we are familiar with the literal meanings of 'natural' and 'selection' and are able to be impressed by the strangeness of putting these two words together. As David Novitz says: "We can only recognize that an utterance is a metaphor if we know that it should not be taken literally: and this, of course, requires familiarity with the literal meanings of at least some of the words and phrases deployed in the utterance. Equally obvious is the fact that we cannot understand or be appropriately affected by a metaphor unless we are acquainted with the literal meanings of the terms used within it."[39] The literal meaning does not disappear when the word is used metaphorically. The metaphor is dependent on the literal meaning. The literal level, then, is in some sense primary. The theoretical depends on the metaphorical and the metaphorical on the literal. The theorist kicks away the linguistic ladder by means of which he ascended and presumes to stand in mid-air.

The term 'natural selection' has no literal meaning. But it is supposed to refer, in a non-metaphorical way, to reality, to what is really going on beneath the appearances. I would not want to claim that it is possible to trace the process of abstraction so clearly for every theoretical term. But in these clear cases, the character of theoretical terms can be seen. When the theorist refers to a term as theoretical, he wants it to be "taken" in this same way, to be understood as referring in this abstract way.

The procedure of disregarding the metaphorical meaning of a term and then using it as a theoretical term with a certain, univocal meaning is ultimately arbitrary. Goudge explains that "when a technical word is coined to designate some non-linguistic phenomenon, or when a word . . . is taken over from ordinary speech and used to designate the phenomenon, a new semantic rule is required" to specify the range of application of the word. The formulation of the rule is "a

human decision," and there is no point in complaining that this is arbitrary, "for there is no other or better way of arriving at semantic rules."[40] As Churchland admits: "The abuse of accepted modes of speech is often an essential feature of real scientific progress."[41] Within the context of criticizing certain notions of "abstract numbers," Frege describes the magical effects of abstraction: if you find that some property of a thing bothers you, you simply abstract from it and "in your possession of these miraculous powers you are not far removed from the Almighty."[42]

The procedure of arriving at theoretical terms in this way is not unlike what Quine means by 'analysis.' It is presupposed that the literal level (or so-called ordinary language) has the same origin as the technical vocabulary, that literal meaning is arbitrary, a human decision. When Quine explains what he means by offering an 'analysis' or 'explication,' he says that "we do not claim to make clear and explicit what the users of the unclear expression had unconsciously in mind all along. We do not expose hidden meanings, as the words 'analysis' and 'explication' would suggest; we supply lacks. We fix on the particular functions of the unclear expression that make it worth troubling about, and then devise a substitute, clear and couched in terms to our liking, that fills those functions. Beyond those conditions of partial agreement, dictated by our interests and purposes, any traits of the explicans come under the head of 'don't-cares.' Under this head we are free to allow the explicans all manner of novel connotations never associated with the explicandum."[43]

For Quine, "the positing of . . . extraordinary things [like molecules] is just a vivid analogue of the positing or acknowledging of ordinary things: vivid in that the physicist . . . posits them for recognized reasons, whereas the hypothesis of ordinary things is shrouded in pre-history." We cannot speak of the motives for this "archaic and unconscious hypothesis of ordinary physical objects" but the positing in ordinary language does not differ in function and survival value from that of physics.[44]

But in spite of the fact that the theorist wants to deny any special status to the literal level, he recognizes the primacy of literal meaning because he claims to impart "literal truths." For Quine, relativity physics is "the literal truth."[45] For Churchland, "folk-psychology is literally a theory."[46] The "literal application" of such concepts as 'witch' has been permanently withdrawn and the concepts of folk psychology await a similar fate.[47]

The theoretical term simply becomes a literal term, takes on a literal meaning. Although it is two (arbitrary) steps removed from the original literal level and although it is supposed to have its meaning only in relation to the theory, it is the only speech that is said to be truly precise, that is supposed to refer direct-

ly—non-metaphorically—to reality.

It is important to make explicit just what is implied in the claim that a theoretical term has its meaning not from some thing to which it refers but from its place in the theory, in relation to the other terms of the theory. If a term has its meaning entirely by virtue of its place in the theory, then the term is fully specified, wholly determined in its meaning. This is part of what is entailed in calling the theoretical term a technical term. A theory is a web of univocal meanings. And this is in keeping with its scientific character. On the view that all thinking is theorizing, that ordinary language is folk-psychology, all theories are essentially scientific. As Oakeshott says, "the sole *explicit* criterion of scientific ideas is their absolute communicability."[48] Absolute communicability requires univocal meaning. This is why the scientific ideal is quantitative expression.

Another way of describing the fully specified, wholly determined character of theoretical terms is suggested by Quine's claim that ordinary physical objects are "posited" in ordinary language and that this positing does not differ in function and survival value from the positing that occurs in physics. On this view, all theories, including ordinary language, have their origin in their usefulness; all are "technical" in function.

Charles Taylor illuminates this feature of theoretical terms when he contrasts "the normal and fundamental condition of meaningful expression" with such specialized languages: "We have to be able to make for our interpretations claims of the order: the meaning confusedly present in this text or text-analogue is clearly expressed here. The meaning, in other words, is one which admits of more than one expression, and, in this sense, a distinction must be possible between meaning and expression. . . . It can be plausibly argued . . . that this is the normal and fundamental condition of meaningful expression, that exact synonymy, or equivalence of meaning, is a rare and localized achievement of specialized languages."[49] For the theorist, all language is "specialized."

What is further implied is that all language is the result of conscious choice, that the origin of language is the deliberate decision of human beings that a certain sound is to have a certain meaning. This is what occurs in the stipulation of technical terms. Ordinary language or folk-psychology is said to have begun this way, but the reasons for the original choices are covered over now. And we find ourselves with meanings that we no longer need or want, with meanings that are ambiguous because they express what we now know to be false appearances.

Theoretical terms are supposed to refer precisely and directly to what is real. The distinction between appearance and reality is fundamental here. For Churchland, "it is the job of science to throw back the enveloping shadows and

nature, but we can speak of "ostensible design or plan" and of "apparently pur-
posive forms of behavior."[57] Schwartz expresses the same notion: "Natural
selection provides an unintelligent, non-teleological mechanism to account for
what seem to be highly intelligent and goal-directed characteristics of organ-
isms in the natural world."[58] It is "natural" to say that selection "produces"
effects and "this mode of speech readily suggests the idea of an *active force* at
work."[59]

But this appearance must be rejected: "The system *seems* supremely pur-
poseful, but this is only an appearance." Words like 'purpose' or 'interest' are
only convenient anthropomorphisms "used to explain a process that involves no
volition or intention on the part of agents."[60]

In his description of the Western "folk-model" of the mind, D'Andrade
points to one of the major disagreements between this folk-model and the aca-
demic (psychological) model. The disagreement centers around the question of
motivation. The term 'motivation' has its roots in the folk-model but has come
to have a specialized meaning: 'motivation' does not refer to a phenomenologi-
cal state or process, i.e., it does not refer to the conscious experience of the per-
son. "Instead, motivation refers to a condition of deprivation or arousal of the
'organism' that is only variably correlated with phenomenological experience. .
. . Most psychologists consider motivation to be a real rather than hypothetical
state of the person but not a state that the person is necessarily aware of." The
psychoanalytical model, on the other hand, regards unconscious states and
processes as the center of the causal system. D'Andrade concludes that "even
though the academic and psychoanalytic models have their origins in the folk
model, both are deeply at variance with the folk-model. That is, the folk-model
treats the conscious mental states as having central causal powers."[61] Schwartz
expresses this somewhat differently. For the behavior theorist, "'intelligent'
action is not the result of planning and foresight; it is the result of selection of
behavior that works by the principle of reinforcement."[62] The sociobiologist
says that one must look beneath the surface for the true source of behavior—
inclusive reproductive fitness. We may want to deny this, but we only deceive
ourselves. In the words of R. D. Alexander: "Selection has probably worked
against the understanding of such selfish motivations becoming a part of human
consciousness, or perhaps being readily acceptable."[63]

This way of dealing with the issue of motivation is a clear instance of what
Taylor has called "the drive to analyze away the language of desirability."[64] The
premise that is "buried deep in the naturalistic way of thinking" is that "the
terms of everyday life, those in which we go about living our lives, are to be rel-
egated to the realm of mere appearance. They are to be taken no more seriously

for explanatory purposes than the visual experience of the sun going down behind the horizon is in cosmology."[65] Behaviorist descriptions fail "because most of the terms in which we can describe behavior effectively do refer to the experience of the agents as well." Mary Midgley refers to behaviorist descriptions of action as the "disinfecting" of language.[66]

My point here is not to defend the notion that there is final cause operating in nature, that our minds are transparent to us, or that our own motives are fully understood by us. My point is that the human sciences do not reveal to us the causes of those appearances. The appearances may be, in fact, misleading. The natural scientist may leave the appearances far behind but he sees himself as obliged to give an account of the underlying reality that would explain to the human observer why the appearance is what it is. The sun appears to move across the sky from east to west. The reality is quite different. But the calculations of the earth's rotation, etc., make sense to us why it is the sun that appears to move. The human scientist cannot tell us why we have the experience of consciousness, of motivation, of agency. The appearance of agency is systematically rejected in the human sciences. The terms in so-called ordinary language which express agency are declared to be metaphors.[67]

For the natural sciences the appearances are of little importance. They are the starting-points of investigation because, without them, we would not know there is anything to investigate. But they are "less real" than the underlying reality. The appearances are merely manifestations of the reality. They are all instances of the same causal operation. From the scientist's point of view, they are all the same; their individuality is of no significance. The appearances are to the senses and the senses do not have access to the underlying reality. In fact, they would deceive us if we had no other access to the real.

But the distinction between appearance and reality is not the same in human life as it is in the non-human world that is the object of the natural sciences. The attempt by an observer to understand a human action is not an attempt to get at the underlying reality behind a sense impression. This is the posture of the scientific observer of the human, but it is not what an appearance means within the human world, to an observer or to an actor within the human world.

As Taylor says, the requirements of making sense of our lives "are not yet met if we have some theoretical language which purports to explain behaviour from the observer's standpoint but is of no use to the agent in making sense of his own thinking, feeling, and acting."[68] For the scientist, the behavior of the human subject must be described in the same way as the behavior of the rat or monkey. But 'data' are not appearances. 'Data' are isolated bits of information which are allowed to appear by the theory and which are suitable for univocal

naming. Appearances in the human world are, at least, complexes of non-univo-cal meaning calling for interpretation.[69]

The second difference between the natural sciences and the human sciences with respect to the distinction between appearance and reality is that, in the human realm, the appearances are not less important than the reality. In fact, the recognition of this has led some to the conclusion that, at least in the public domain, the appearances *are* the reality.

It is here also that the issue of causality in human life can be raised. The underlying reality is usually held to be the cause and the appearance is the effect of that cause. In the natural sciences this seems to be the case. The sensation of heat that I feel is the effect of the rapid motion of molecules that I do not feel. But again the human realm is quite different from the world that is the object of the natural sciences.

For the scientist, what is observable in human life, what counts as 'data,' is always the effect of some underlying cause. The effects are no more important for understanding a human life than for understanding a rat's sequence of behavior. The individual instances of the rat's going through the maze are not important in themselves. The slight differences in the rat's performance from one day to the next are of no interest to the theorist. Each performance is just a piece of behavior. But just as the appearances have an importance of their own in the human realm, so the "effects" of any supposed underlying causes have an importance of their own. They are only effects, "merely" effects, if they are taken as mere behavior.

There are two difficulties with the attempt to account for what goes on in the human realm in terms of cause and effect. If we consider the relationship between a source of heat and boiling water, we see a case where the cause and the effect are the same, i.e., heat, and proportionate, i.e., there is enough heat transferable from the source to make the water hot enough to boil. But in human life there are often cases in which anything that might be identified as a cause is insufficient to explain the effect. This happens often in the case of psychoana-lytic explanation when, for example, the behavior of the mass-murderer is explained by the fact that he had an unhappy childhood.

The second difficulty is that any science would seem to presuppose the prin-ciple of "same cause, same effect." But in the human realm, the same cause pro-duces opposite effects and opposite causes produce the same effect. In his *Confessions* Rousseau makes this point explicitly and illustrates it with stories from his childhood. For example, he shows how two spankings produced in him opposite effects, the hatred of domination and the love of domination. True, the scientist can respond to this difficulty and claim that when one really gets deep

enough, the underlying cause does account for opposite effects, the effects being merely appearances. But this often amounts to citing a cause that is so remote that it can be made to account for anything. So, for example, "maximizing inclusive fitness" is supposed to explain everything from family life to homosexuality.

I will return to the distinction between appearance and reality and to the relationship between cause and effect in the chapters that follow. My point here is that in the final analysis the human sciences reduce human action to behavior and that this reduction does not produce explanations that are adequate to the appearances.

Even Gibson ultimately falls back on a stimulus-response account of perception. He insists that "perception is not a response to a stimulus but an act of information pickup,"[70] that our perceptual systems are active, not passive.[71] But when it comes to explaining what this information pickup is, he refers to "extraction" as a metaphor and he likens it to 'resonating' or 'being attuned to.'[72]

The human sciences cannot get beyond an essentially stimulus-response account of human action and meaning. For Quine "words mean only as their use in sentences is conditioned to sensory stimuli, verbal and otherwise. Any realistic theory of evidence must be inseparable from the psychology of stimulus and response, applied to sentences."[73] Churchland defines intelligence as "the possession of a complex set of appropriate responses to the changing environment."[74] E. O. Wilson defines mind as the summed activity of a finite number of chemical and electrical reactions.[75] Action, both intellectual and moral, is reduced to behavior.

Agency and Autonomy

The reason why the human scientist cannot get beyond the stimulus-response account, even when he really wants to make room for distinctively human action, is that he sees action only in terms of force. Gibson notes that "animate objects differ from inanimate objects in a variety of ways but notably in the fact that they move spontaneously." Like inanimate objects they can be moved by external forces, "but they can move actively under the influence of internal forces."[76] Action is internal force. The human scientist may use the terms 'action' and 'agency,' but he is really always describing a passive process. The claim is made, for example, that genes are agents, "the real actors," and that they "possess the power of causation." Action is held to be practically synonymous with having consciousness (by those who sense the

inadequacies of the stimulus-response account[77]), but consciousness is described as a kind of self-observation and any active dimension of consciousness itself remains to be explained.

The human being as the object of the human sciences is, then, simply passive, subject to forces both external and internal. His responses to stimuli must always be "selfish"; he only deceives himself if he believes that he ever acts for other reasons and from other causes. Mary Midgley notes that for sociobiology, "altruism" is the central theoretical problem. She puts the question this way: "How can altruism, which by definition reduces personal fitness, possibly evolve by natural selection?"[78] And as Oakeshott says: "The myth of the necessarily egocentric agent is a denial of agency."[79] In spite of the appearances, agency is denied both in nature and in man.[80]

But the agency which is denied to man as the object of the human sciences is returned to him by these same sciences. This is the spectacular reversal, the absurd inversion brought about by abstraction. There has never really been *true* agency. But now it is possible to be absolutely, unconditionally autonomous. True agency or real agency is held to be the same as autonomy or, at the very least, to require autonomy of a certain kind. Autonomy, in turn, is practically identified with "conscious choice." We can be autonomous agents only through theory. Theory frees us from nature and gives us the power to truly direct ourselves.

Man is distinguished within nature by the fact that he is "the only living thing who is able to formulate a theory of evolution."[81] And this "pure knowledge is the ultimate emancipator."[82] The human species can change its own nature through the science of genetics,[83] and the "genetic analysis of behavior can lead to an increase not only in human welfare, but in human freedom."[84] Finally, the purposiveness which was so thoroughly expunged from nature is reintroduced. The theory of evolution is itself adaptive. The theory has enabled man to grasp important truths. "As long as he was ignorant of these truths or embraced false beliefs about the world and himself, he was faced with the problem of adapting to an environment which was a mixture of illusion and reality."[85] Until now "man has not guided the overall course of his own evolution. And he has obviously not guided his own social and political history. What has happened in both these areas has been very largely blind! What *can* happen in the future has at least the possibility of being 'planned,' since man has arrived at the point where his knowledge makes him increasingly able to modify, or even to direct (within certain limits), his own physical and cultural evolution. Should he ever succeed in doing so on a sufficiently grand scale, the evolutionary process will be purposive in a way that it has never been before."[86]

depends upon the character of the hearer. A coward will reject an argument that a courageous man accepts. Indeed, there is a sense in which the coward will not even *understand* the argument that persuades the courageous man. If deliberation were simply reducible to theorizing, then habituation and character-formation would be useless. If human beings make moral choices entirely "within" a theory, then a moral theory has to be a consistent, coherent, self-contained set of sentences about ends and means. But it seems to me that this view cannot allow for genuine contingency or for the particularity of the moral situation. Everything necessary must already be there, available to the one making the choice. The idea that something is actually brought into being by one's deliberations, choices, and actions, that a state of affairs that would not otherwise exist is brought about, seems impossible if the agent is always working within a self-contained web.

Further, the experience of moral struggle cannot be adequately addressed on this view. In the imagined case of the individual choosing a theory, the choice involves comparing theories. But there is no way to do justice to the phenomena of conflict within the will or conflict between the will and the passions. Indeed, the education of the will is not really given a place. The overcoming of the passions or the failure to overcome a passion is also left out. A moral failure is not a mistake in theorizing. It may be due to the corruption of the will or to moral weakness, but it is not a theoretical mistake. In fact, what could count as moral failure if choice is theorizing? The assumption is that one "has" the theory, whole and entire, with all its ends in some order and all its goods already weighted. The only thing that comes close to real choice is the choice among theories.

Although theorists tend to dismiss rhetoric and even to be contemptuous of it, there is almost always a highly rhetorical slant to their own writings. That is, they are often proposing some action, some change, to improve our moral selves or to overcome the hardships of our condition. Suddenly our passions are being addressed. In his introduction to *Matter and Consciousness*, Churchland writes: "It is the *imagination* of the general reader, and of the student, that I am here aiming to capture" (emphasis mine). What he is proposing is a "conceptual revolution," and he claims that this revolution "would reduce human misery" and lead to a "more peaceful and humane society."[97] But these values are simply the preferences of the theorist. They do not follow from his theory, and the theory could never persuade anyone to share these values. One reviewer, discussing the comprehensive claims of neuroscience, concludes that "perhaps then this materialism is less a coherent epistemology than a moral crusade."[98]

The agency that is denied to us by theory is returned to us by theory. But

this is not, of course, the same agency. The autonomy at issue here is a liberation from nature. Abstraction is the instrument of our liberation; abstraction is the assertion of autonomy with respect to speech. True agency will make it possible for us to overcome our condition of mere nature. There is a real incoherence in the theorist's theoretical position and his rhetorical position. For how can a being that is wholly within nature (nature understood as matter and the motions of matter) be freed from nature? How can freedom from nature be an adaptation of nature?

The theorist's position can be put this way: all human beings do all of their thinking and acting within a theory. The theory that is ordinary language or folk-psychology is "deeply confused"[99] and they do not, at this level, even realize that they are thinking and acting under severe constraints. They assume that they are acting freely. But language itself constrains thought and choice in all kinds of ways. Language is purely conventional. It was, in the distant past, a product of conscious choice, but it cannot be freely chosen by us. So the present state of human beings is one in which the mind is dominated by meanings that have not been freely chosen. We can free ourselves by moving to a higher level of abstraction, to "conscious theorizing."

Ordinary language is the political dimension of theory. If the meaning of a term is wholly determined by its relation to other terms of the theory, then *a fortiori* it is wholly determined. It must have one and only one wholly transparent meaning, and this is achieved through abstraction. Thus, abstraction reveals or results in only the meaning that coheres with other meanings. Now, if all thinking is theorizing or thinking within a theory, then all thought is wholly determined by language. This excludes the possibility that any aspect of thought might be pre-linguistic or non-linguistic. And it also has political consequences. If all thought is wholly determined by language, then all thought is under severe political constraints. So-called ordinary language is shared by a community of speakers and, on the theorist's view, it is learned through the stimulus-response mechanism. Thus, thinking is wholly determined by the group.

The attempt to control language is a political act. It is in this sense also that theory is often rhetorical. Ordinary language has no special status. Indeed, it is hopelessly primitive and deeply confused. Therefore, its terms carry no moral weight; its emotive content can be allowed no authority. Science is authoritative. And it is no exaggeration to say that the human sciences claim the right to rule in the human world. They do so on the basis of their superior wisdom. Again, E. O. Wilson is quite clear on this subject: "ethical philosophy must not be left in the hands of the merely wise," i.e., the philosophers. For Churchland, a completed neuroscience will embody the essential "wisdom" about our inner

nature and will mark a great advance in "self-understanding."[100]

The human sciences' claim to rule relies on a view of human passion that reduces the passions in man to mere animal impulse. This reduction is implicit in the stimulus-response account of action and the identification of action with behavior. But human nature is not identical with animal nature with respect to the passions. And the human sciences themselves reveal an implied recognition of this: one of their chief concerns is the restraint of human aggression and this restraint would not be such a problem if human aggression were merely animal. As Niebuhr maintains: "Human nature knows no animal impulse in its pure form. Every biological fact and every animal impulse, however obvious its relation to the world below man, is altered because of its incorporation into the human psyche." The sexual impulse is also an especially good example of the boundless character of human desire because so much is made in the human sciences of the biological phenomenon of reproduction. "Man has difficulty in controlling the vital force of the sex impulse not because nature has endowed it with an impetus beyond the requirements of human life; on the contrary the sex impulse is controlled with difficulty because it is *not* embedded in a total order of natural process in man as in animal life. Each physical impulse, freed from the restraints which hedge it about in nature, can therefore develop imperial tendencies of its own."[101] The boundless character of human desires is "unnatural." As Midgley says of human desire, some "natural" impulses are unnatural when we look at nature as a whole.[102]

According to C. S. Lewis, what is really meant by the "instinct" to preserve the species is that we have a natural, unreflective, spontaneous impulse to do this. Lewis poses the question to anyone who is a father whether he has a spontaneous impulse to sacrifice his own son for the sake of the human species in general. "I am not asking whether he would so sacrifice his son. I am asking whether, if he did so, he would be obeying a spontaneous impulse. Will not every father . . . reply that if this sacrifice were demanded of him and if he made it, he would do so not in obedience to a natural impulse but in hard-won defiance of it? Such an act, no less than the immolation of oneself, would be a triumph over nature." [103]

Theory cannot account for the passions and cannot speak to the passions. Character cannot be formed by theory. Such a mistaken view produces men who, "convinced of their own benevolent motives, . . . mistake the exercise of these for moral conduct."[104] Theory replaces action. Character is a "conceptual scheme." Thus, Niebuhr can speak of the "self-righteousness of modern culture which imagines that a man's acceptance of ideals of justice and peace proves

that it is some one else and not he who is responsible for injustice and conflict."[105] And Camus goes even further. "As soon as a man, *through lack of character*, takes refuge in doctrine, as soon as crime reasons about itself, it multiplies like reason itself and assumes all the aspects of the syllogism."[106] Theory can justify anything.

Deliberation and rhetoric are, at best, ignored by the human sciences for they can recognize no distinction between persuasion and force. Ideas can only be stimuli in the environment to which the human organism responds or responses in the organism to external stimuli, either external forces or internal forces. There is no essential difference, then, between persuading a man—addressing him as a free, intelligent being—and physically compelling him, except that the latter is generally more efficient.

The Insufficiency of Theory

In sum, theory cannot satisfy the desire for self-knowledge because theorizing is abstraction. The kind of universality that abstraction attains has lost all touch with human particularity: its universality is without meaning for human life. Theory is completely cut off from the human experience that sparked the desire for self-knowledge in the first place and cannot express itself in the metaphors and literal speech of that experience.

Theory is also devoid of any affective or moral dimension. It can talk *about* moral issues in its own abstract way, but its own activity is not transformative of the self. So it cannot allow for or recognize any real, meaningful change in a human life. Theory itself cannot persuade or form character. But on account of its abstraction, it can justify anything: the desires that it cannot speak to are free to use it without restraint.

Chapter 2

Anti-Theory

In turning to "anti-theory," we turn to a mode of thought that promises to encompass the self that is left over from theory, the self that is rhetorically accessible. Anti-theory wants to do justice to the particularity of the self, its situatedness, finitude, and contingency. In response to the dominance of theory in ethics, anti-theory calls attention to moral dilemma and moral ambiguity, opposing the utopian projects of those "rationalists" who seek to reform moral life by submitting it to universal rules.

But there are many kinds of anti-theory. In some cases, anti-theory takes the form of an appeal to custom or tradition as authoritative. This often leads to a defense of narrative as the ultimate mode of self-knowledge. I will discuss this version of anti-theory in my third chapter. The three sub-sections of chapter 1 (Meaning, Appearance and Reality, Agency and Autonomy) provide a framework for specifying which versions and aspects of anti-theory I will discuss in this chapter. In each case, anti-theory reveals remarkable similarities to theory.

First, anti-theory rejects, at least implicitly, the notion of univocal, abstract meaning. And it recognizes the rhetorical character of speech. But its own notion of language, its own rhetorical project, brings meaning under the power of "conscious choice." This stance toward meaning bears a significant resemblance to the theorist's "abstraction." Second, anti-theory claims to do justice to those aspects of human life that theory regards as "mere" appearances. But the manner in which anti-theory deals with appearances leads to two consequences, the first of which is really a version of the theorist's position: an "underlying reality" of false consciousness and a contracted, fragmented, discrete self. Third, the rejection of theory as universal rule of action leads anti-theory to a view of autonomy that amounts to the rejection of all constraint and to the justification of arbitrary force. The anti-theorist may see the ambiguity and the contingency of moral situations, but his response is not practical

and political consequences of things as they really are." The promise of modernity and of the Enlightenment in particular has not been fulfilled. "The fact that we do not seem to have a coherent view of things as they really are is obviously explained by the fact that, outside of reason's dream, there are no 'things as they really are.'"[5]

So the rejection of constraint entails the denial of a requirement of any link with reality. At this point it should be noted that, in spite of their anti-theory position, both Rorty and Fish accept one of the most basic assumptions of the claim that all thinking is theorizing. Rorty refers to "normal discourse" as the "conceptual scheme" of our own culture.[6] And Fish describes our beliefs as a system or network.[7] He says that "all thought is totalizing in that its successive incarnations always deliver a fully articulated world, a world without gaps or spots of unintelligibility."[8] And, like the theorist, each allows for revisability. Rorty speaks of "abnormal discourse" and, in Fish's "assemblage of related beliefs," one belief "can exert pressure on any other in a motion that can lead to a self-transformation."[9] But abnormal discourse is another conceptual scheme and the self-transformation of belief leads to a more or less revised system. Here the lines between theory and interpretation seem to be blurred. An interpretation looks like just another theory. And from the point of view of hermeneutics, a theory looks like an interpretation, especially since no theory is definitive.

In his attempt to defend theory against the criticisms of the anti-theorists, G. B. Madison makes precisely this point. Hermeneutics is a "theory of interpretation." In fact, it is a "meta-theoretical" discipline, an "attempt to formulate plausible theories . . . about how it is that particular theories (scientific, religious, metaphysical, or other) come to be formulated and believed." There seems to be no real difference between describing hermeneutics as "a theory about theory" or as an interpretation of interpretations. And like theory, no interpretation "can legitimately claim to be . . . a 'correct' reflection, representation or model of 'reality itself'—unless, of course, 'model' be understood to mean 'metaphor.'"[10] How then are theory and anti-theory to be distinguished?

Meaning

The most stark contrast that can be made against the background I have tried to paint is in terms of the question of meaning. For theory meaning is wholly determined. For anti-theory meaning is wholly indeterminate. By "wholly indeterminate" I do not mean that all anti-theorists hold meaning to be, in its origin, wholly stipulated or a matter of conscious choice. Indeed, most anti-theorists

hold that we are "prisoners" of meanings that we did not choose. But the task of anti-theory is to recognize the oppressive and arbitrary constraints imposed on us by culture through language and to free us from this tyranny. This is the real point of the attack on constraints. There are to be no constraints on meaning. In particular meaning is not to be constrained by any link with "reality."

A comparison with a very different notion of language may be useful here. In his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals,* Hume proposes a method for discovering these principles: an analysis of "personal merit" as it is understood in common life. Here, "the very nature of language guides us almost infallibly in forming a judgment." All languages contain equivalents for such epithets as 'humane,' 'merciful,' 'generous,' etc.[11] We can, on the basis of this testimony of language itself, proceed to the principles of morals. Hume is assuming that there is some link between ordinary language and reality, at least with respect to moral phenomena.

What it means to say that, for theory, meaning is wholly determined is that theoretical terms have their meaning only by virtue of their place in the theory: their meaning is fully specified in relation to the other terms. The theory as a whole refers to reality. According to David Novitz, Derrida sees these two features of science and philosophy as being in conflict, i.e., he wants to refute the link with reality by affirming the notion of theory as a system. For Derrida "both science and philosophy assume the presence in all that they do of a real world, of observable truths, causes, origins, which can be referred to, captured, and conveyed in ordinary discourse." But each discipline is really "a system of signs, and each sign gets its meaning not by latching onto some extra-linguistic entity which it then signifies, but from its relationship to other signs within this system."[12] In fact, it is the place of the term within the system that allows it to refer to reality at all. This is what I have been calling the "abstract" character of theoretical terms.

What Derrida is ultimately attacking here is the claim that science imparts "literal truths." The vocabulary of science is just one vocabulary on a par with all other vocabularies which seek to resolve our puzzles, and can claim no special ability to impart literal truths. For Derrida all meaning is metaphorical; there are no literal meanings.[13] Literal meaning implies a link with reality and thus introduces a constraint.

Fish pursues a similar line. Literal language is naïvely equated with neutral, objective, plain, scientific, denotative, explicit language.[14] But for Fish, the meaning of a word is not determined by reference to anything "real." Rather, meaning is identical with the speaker's intention of the moment.[15] A literal meaning would be a meaning that is prior to interpretation, and such a meaning

would serve as a constraint on interpretation. "There is no such thing as literal meaning."[16] Indeed, the denial of independent constraints is one and the same with the denial of literal meaning: for Fish, everything proceeds from the argument against literal meaning.[17]

Derrida's procedure of "erasure," as described by Novitz, seems to me to bear a strong resemblance to the theorist's process of abstraction. The procedure of erasure consists in writing the word and then crossing it out. "By placing a cross neatly through the word 'sign,' Derrida furnishes us with a mark of the absence of any signified and so takes himself to destroy the metaphysical baggage which normally accompanies the word 'sign.' So too for the word 'literal,' the word 'metaphor,' or any other word or expression which seems to commit him to something that he wishes to deny." But whereas in the process of theory-construction abstraction results in a univocal meaning that coheres with the meanings of all the other terms of the theory, the procedure of erasure results in ambiguity and only provisional meaning. In using a word under erasure, "one exploits its literal meaning in order to convey a specific sense, but having done so, one immediately disowns this meaning. It is this trace or 'echo' of its literal meaning which gives provisional sense to the utterance: a sense which is instantaneously withdrawn and denied."[18] It is never quite clear what the meaning of a word under erasure might be.

It is, I think, worth noting that Derrida's procedure, with its resulting indeterminacy of meaning, looks remarkably like the theological enterprise as it is discussed by St. Anselm, especially in the *Monologion*. In fact, the origin of this way of referring may be ultimately theological and justifiable only on theological grounds.[19]

In chapter 65 of the *Monologion*, Anselm discusses the question of how it is possible to speak about God at all since God is ineffable. Has his inquiry been of any value at all? We necessarily speak about God in *human* language. But God is so far beyond any nature to which our words ordinarily refer that it would seem impossible to say anything about him. "For what sense have I conceived of, in all these words that I have thought of, except the common and familiar sense? If, then, the familiar sense of words is alien to that Being, whatever I have inferred to be attributable to it is not its property. How, then, has any truth concerning the supreme Being been discovered, if what has been discovered is so alien to that Being?"

The ordinary sense of words applies in the human world, but the supreme Being is entirely other so that "whenever any statement is made concerning it in words which are also applicable to other natures, the sense of these words in this case is by no means that in which they are applied to other natures."

Speech about God, then, must use our ordinary and familiar language but, at the same time, the familiar sense must be denied. The speaker must not intend the familiar sense, yet he uses a particular word (rather than another) because it does express something of what he wants to say.

The all-important difference between what Anselm is doing and Derrida's procedure of erasure is that Anselm believes that he is speaking about a being who is real. Indeed it is the infinite reality of God that makes human speech so inadequate to express what he is. The common and familiar sense of words is the sense they have in a world created out of nothing. God is not a being within that world. And Anselm is careful to insist, in his reply to Gaunilo, that the meaning of "a being than which nothing greater can be conceived" is *not* that God is the greatest being. As "greatest being" he would still be within the world, and our words would apply to him in their common and familiar sense.

The second difference is that Anselm does hold that it is possible to say something true about God. "Has there in some sort been some truth discovered regarding this incomprehensible object, and in some sort has nothing been proved regarding it? For often we speak of things which we do not express with precision as they are; but by another expression we indicate what we are unwilling or unable to express with precision, as when we speak in riddles." We can never claim to completely or precisely express the being of God. Yet our words do refer to God and achieve some measure of truth.

The imprecision of our words, however, is not due to the absence of any constraints on speech. On the contrary, theological speech is so highly constrained by the fullness of God's reality that it must always see itself as imprecise. It is least subject to human desire and will.

The second reason that Anselm gives for the claim that we do express some measure of truth about God is that we are able to look at the image of God. "Often we see a thing, not precisely as it is in itself, but through a likeness or image, as when we look upon a face in a mirror. And in this way, we often express and yet do not express, see and yet do not see, one and the same object; we express and see it through another; we do not express it, and do not see it by virtue of its own proper nature."[20] The image of God is man: this being, within nature, is the created image of the uncreated being who is entirely and radically distinct from nature. When I look at this image and think of the being whose image it is, my words achieve only a "shadowy signification." I always recognize the gap between the meaning suggested by my words and the being my mind is attempting to signify.

Speech about God, then, is not univocal. But neither is it wholly indeterminate. It can never be adequate to the reality it attempts to express. That reality is

fixed meaning."[23]

For anti-theory, meaning is indeterminate in a sense that is consistent with the view of the self as ever-changing. This kind of meaning is captured in Foucault's notion of ironic distance and Rorty's notion of "ironist theorizing." This is an irony that allows the speaker to disown his past, his previous temporary stances. It is a version of irony that saves the ironist from the constraint of any commitments.[24] Bradbury's response to deconstruction reveals both the intellectual and moral emptiness of the ironist's position. "When writers are censored, imprisoned, killed or threatened with death for their writings, this is not because they are the disciples of undecidability."[25]

Appearance and Reality

In the previous chapter I tried to show that theory fails to recognize the importance of appearances in human life. It treats the appearances as "mere" appearances that conceal an underlying reality and, in this, it imitates the natural sciences. One of the ways in which the appearances are very different in the human realm from what they are in the world that is the object of physics is that appearances in the human realm can be manipulated. They can also be used as means to bring about some end. Neither is true of the appearances that the natural scientist seeks to understand. The way in which the appearances are manipulated and made useful in the human world is through speech. Anti-theory takes the form of the claim that all speech is rhetorical. Rhetoric is concerned with appearances: it is the art by which actions are made to *seem* good or bad. For the anti-theorist, this is not to be taken to mean that there is a real good or bad and that the speaker intends to deceive, to cover up what he himself knows to be truly good or bad. Rather, there are only the appearances, only the seeming.

Just before his trial Socrates engages in several conversations, one of which is presented in the *Theaetetus*. The question "What is knowledge?" is raised and Socrates investigates this question with Theaetetus, a young mathematician. The definition that Theaetetus first proposes is that knowledge is perception (a surprising definition from a mathematician). Socrates immediately identifies this definition with the saying of Protagoras that "man is the measure," and after pursuing several lines of argument, he completes his refutation of Theaetetus' definition by describing what happens in a court of law. When a true verdict is reached, a true opinion arrived at, the jury has accomplished this not through perception but through the testimony of witnesses. The jurors themselves were not eye-witnesses but, in the best case, they hear the testimony of those who did witness the crime with their own eyes.

whole cultures say that they hold, even believe that they hold, and by which they justify what they do. In fact, what is really going on, according to the anti-theorist, is the pursuit of power; what is really always at work, except in the philosophical moment, is the desire for power.

Hume addresses this kind of rejection of appearances in his discussion of the philosophical tendency to reduce all motives to self-love. "This principle is, that all benevolence is mere hypocrisy, friendship a cheat, public spirit a farce, fidelity a snare to procure trust and confidence; and that, while all of us at bottom, pursue only our own private interest, we wear these fair disguises in order to put others off their guard, and expose them the more to our wiles and machinations."[26] For Hume this way of reasoning is an example of "the highest stretch of philosophy," of "philosophical chemistry," and he has nothing kind to say about the moral character of those who seriously hold this principle.

The self of anti-theory is desire for power. As Charles Taylor expresses it, the self of anti-theory is constructed through relations of power[27] and "the awakening of the self is paid for by the acknowledgment of power as the principle of all relations."[28] Speech, then, is purely instrumental. What the exposure of false consciousness reveals is that we are in the power of others. These most fundamental facts about ourselves are hidden in ordinary consciousness. As an example of just how deep this coercion goes, Fish uses the practice of suttee: suttee's "deepest victims" are women who *want* to die when their husbands die.[29] Fish denies that we can ever escape coercion. "The removal of *independent* constraints to which the self might or might not conform does not leave the self free but reveals the self to be always and already constrained by the contexts of practice (interpretive communities) that confer on it a shape and direction."[30] Nor can we ever be said to act freely. There is never "a moment or place where consciousness becomes transparent to itself and can at last act freely."[31] The best we can do is to simply recognize that we are always coerced. But, by a strange twist, this recognition itself makes us free. Indeed, once power is acknowledged as the relationship that constitutes the self, freedom becomes "the highest value of all"[32] and unconstrained freedom, often understood as self-creation, becomes the greatest good.

Thus the recognition that we are not free, that we always act under constraints, makes possible a certain kind of freedom, a kind very different from the freedom we always thought we had in our state of false consciousness. This new freedom is achieved in the anti-theorist's moment of absolute transparency, the moment of transparency that grants him his freedom from all commitment, his ironic distance, his true autonomy.

Both Foucault and Rorty approach the question of autonomy in terms of our

contemporary relationship to the Enlightenment. It is as if the Enlightenment had promised us a kind of freedom without constraint but could not deliver on its promise. Anti-theorists seem to agree that Enlightenment rationality has failed us. In particular our political problems have not been solved. Rorty's move from epistemology to his version of hermeneutics is made because the ideal of epistemology, the ideal of universal agreement has not been achieved. Further, we can now see that it is impossible to attain. The elimination of perpetual, undecidable rational disagreement depends upon providing a common ground for the disputants and the hope for such a foundation depends upon establishing links to external reality.[33] Rorty wants to maintain the values of the Enlightenment without Enlightenment rationality.

Here we can see Rorty's own rhetorical position. He assures us that "the preservation of the values of the Enlightenment is our best hope." This notion is "entirely justified." He is attempting to "cut the links which connect these values with the image of the Mirror of Nature."[34] It is noteworthy that he treats the Enlightenment notion of rationality as an "image." He does the same thing in a passage in which he goes a step further in spelling out his own rhetorical project. "The ideals of the Enlightenment not only are our most precious cultural heritage but are in danger of disappearance as totalitarian states swallow up more and more of humanity. But the fact that the Enlightenment ran together the ideal of the autonomy of science from theology and politics with the image of scientific theory as Mirror of Nature is not a reason for preserving this confusion. The grid of relevance and irrelevance which we inherit almost intact from the eighteenth century will be more attractive when it is no longer tied to this image."[35]

The values of the Enlightenment which are implied in Rorty's project, in what he seems to be trying to maintain, are some version of universal agreement and some notion of autonomy. But the universal agreement cannot be dependent upon any links with external reality. Both values find expression in Rorty's subsequent defenses of democracy.

Foucault also wants to preserve Enlightenment values while giving up on Enlightenment rationality. He rejects what he calls "the authoritarian alternative" that says "you either accept the Enlightenment and remain within the tradition of its rationalism . . . or else you criticize the Enlightenment and then try to escape from its principles of rationality."[36] Like Rorty, Foucault sees in the Enlightenment a requirement for a link with reality. The Enlightenment is an enterprise "for linking the progress of truth and the history of liberty."[37] According to Foucault, we now know that truth is impossible but that does not mean that we must give up on the ideal of "the constitution of the self as an

autonomous subject." We can pursue this ideal without subscribing to Enlightenment principles of rationality. Foucault's task in his essay on Enlightenment is to inquire into "what is not or is no longer indispensable for the constitution of ourselves as autonomous subjects."[38]

Foucault's approach to this task is revealed in the objection that he puts to himself. "If we limit ourselves to this type of always partial and local inquiry or test, do we not run the risk of letting ourselves be determined by more general structures of which we may well not be conscious, and over which we may have no control?"[39] In the post-Enlightenment age, only partial and local inquiry can escape the naiveté of Enlightenment rationality. The threat to autonomy is from unconscious domination.

For Foucault, enlightenment values must be distinguished from humanist values. He opposes the two because humanism implies a "human nature" whereas the Enlightenment value is the "creation of ourselves in our autonomy."[40] Thus the kind of inquiry demanded for the preservation of Enlightenment values is one that is aimed at revealing the contingency of what we are. "Criticism is no longer going to be practiced in the search for formal structures with universal value, but rather as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying. . . . It will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think. It is not seeking to make possible a metaphysics that has finally become a science; it is seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom."[41]

Rorty also acknowledges the threat that seems to be implicit in his attack on Enlightenment rationality. "To suggest that there is *no* such common ground seems to endanger rationality. To question the need for commensuration seems the first step toward a return to a war of all against all."[42] Rorty's response is his own notion of rationality, which he calls 'hermeneutics.' This particular kind of hermeneutics is described in terms of "conversation," presumably because people engaged in a conversation must constantly interpret what the other is saying. The threat here is not presented as unconscious domination but as the war of all against all. Conversation of the Rortyan type is supposed to hold off the Hobbesian state of nature, but without the political constraints that Hobbes thought were necessary for peace. Foucault is not so optimistic. The struggle for power is "all against all . . . Who fights against whom? We all fight each other."[43]

I think it is clear, then, that the anti-theory posture is itself highly rhetorical. In this it is like theory. But anti-theory is self-consciously, not naively, rhetori-

cal. It promises transformation provided our deeply rooted illusions about ourselves are exposed. Novitz claims that "Derrida's aim . . . is avowedly rhetorical: he is trying to bring us . . . to another view of language. This is no more than what he calls 'an adventure of vision, a conversion.'"[44] Rorty's hermeneutics offers us "hope." Hermeneutics is not a discipline or method or research program. Rather it is "an expression of hope that the cultural space left by the demise of epistemology will not be filled." But this is not merely a hope for the future of philosophy of a certain type. It is equivalent to the hope "that our culture should become one in which the demand for constraint and confrontation is no longer felt."[45] Confrontation and constraint are to be replaced by conversation. Given his rejection of the Enlightenment, foundationalist ideal of rationality, the hope that animates this conversation is somewhat surprising. "Hermeneutics sees the relations between various discourses as those of strands in a possible conversation, a conversation which presupposes no disciplinary matrix which unites the speakers, but where the hope of agreement is never lost so long as the conversation lasts."[46] Here, agreement is neither presupposed nor necessary for conversation but seems to be the end of conversation. Must we, then, practice a self-conscious self-deception and hope for an agreement that we know in advance cannot be achieved? The final step in Rorty's rhetorical move is to describe hermeneutics not as another way of knowing or understanding but as another way of "coping."[47] The agreement to be hoped for is not agreement in the truth but in action.

Rorty's adoption of the term 'conversation' is a good example of the way in which anti-theorists tend to exploit ordinary meanings. 'Conversation' carries with it certain ontological connotations, connotations of presence, self-disclosure, truth-seeking. The anti-theorist masks himself, hides behind these traditional, favorable connotations. But what do these terms really mean for him "under erasure"? In the case of Rorty's "conversation," the term is emptied of most, if not all, of its favorable connotations, but these are exploited while being denied. Conversation is reduced to chatter. The same is true for the anti-theorist's use of 'freedom' and 'autonomy.' Both turn out to be ultimately empty because no content for the good to be chosen can be specified.

It is noteworthy that Derrida aims at a "conversion" and that Rorty offers us "hope." Conversion, of course, has decidedly religious overtones. And hope is a theological, not a natural, virtue. Perhaps this is what Dreyfus is pointing to when he says that what he finds strange is Rorty's "talking about 'preference' and 'conversation' when what he really means is salvation."[48] Rorty's response makes clearer his own relationship to the Enlightenment. "If you think of the conversation of mankind not as chat, but as standing for the whole human enterprise—culture, if you like—then 'conversation' is a perfectly reasonable word

order. Quintilian, for example, speaks of "true rhetoric" as the rhetoric which befits a good man and which is in fact a virtue. True rhetoric entails the ability to distinguish between the honorable and the base, clear perception, knowledge of the nature of justice, and courage in the face of the threats of popular turbulence and the hatred of the powerful.[52] This is clearly an understanding of rhetoric that requires a distinction between the good and the bad uses of the art. When the doctor uses his art to murder, he substitutes his own purposes for the end that exists entirely apart from his own purposes. So too when the speaker uses his art to pursue his own purposes, he abandons the proper end of rhetoric. Anti-theory claims or assumes that all speech is rhetorical and that there is no natural end of justice that rhetoric seeks. All speech is for the speaker's own purposes. Anti-theory denies the distinction between rhetorical speech and non-rhetorical forms. (Fish, for example, claims that theories are themselves rhetorics.[53]) And it denies the distinction between the good and the bad use of the art.

How does rhetoric proceed? Persuasive speech is directed toward action. It attempts to bring about a certain state of affairs which would not exist if certain actions were not taken. These states of affairs, then, are contingent upon the decisions and actions of human beings. The contingency of human affairs is part of what it means to say that we have the experience of agency, autonomy, and freedom, and that we experience ourselves as causes.

Persuasive speech must begin from the mood of the hearers and address them in terms and with arguments that they can come to accept. The very need for speech in order to bring the hearers to a certain position indicates that they are not already there. The speaker must know the character, not only the present mood, of the hearers. He must know what kinds of argument they will accept; the "middle term" of a rhetorical argument must be a claim that all can agree upon. Part of what it means to move the hearers toward action is that the passions must be affected by the speech, either to be aroused or to be suppressed. But rhetoric does not simply address the passions. It is a form of speech and, if it is to have any effect, it must be understood and the arguments must be accepted. This is why the speaker must know the character of his hearers: the acceptability of an argument depends to a great extent on the character of the hearer.

What this brief account reveals is that the end of rhetorical speech is in the hearer. Thus, the hearer, the addressee, determines the character of the speech and, to a certain extent, the meaning of the speech.[54] This is perhaps true of all speech, but it is especially true of rhetorical speech directed toward action. Now, why is rhetoric so much despised by both theorists and anti-theorists? In part it is despised because it does appeal to and attempt to affect the passions.

with manipulation? How can a form of speech that secures consent be held to interfere with autonomy?

The agreement or consent that results from persuasive speech is not precisely the same as what both theorists and anti-theorists mean by "conscious choice." And true autonomy is identified with conscious choice. Being persuaded vitiates conscious choice because I cannot give my consent in advance to having my passions affected in a certain way. I cannot know in advance what my state of mind will be once my passions have been moved by speech. Therefore, I cannot consent to what I cannot know and, if I cannot consent, my state of mind would have been forced. (Seduction is rape.)

In a similar vein, Carl Rapp has identified the source of dissatisfaction with the notion of authorship. "The notion that authors have authority over their own texts, and by extension over the readers of their texts, is disturbing to those of us who see in such an authority an infringement of readers' rights. Like priestly or kingly authority, the authority of mere authorship is an outrage since it interferes with the intellectual autonomy of readers. It is much more edifying to imagine that the world is all before us as we read, that infinite interpretive possibilities are beckoning to us, inviting us to take our pleasure as we will. That way we can think of ourselves as determiners of meaning rather than as slavish recipients of meanings determined for us in advance by lordly authors."[55]

Like theory, anti-theory can make no distinction between persuasion and force. Therefore, it can make no distinction between the good and bad use of rhetoric. Fish is quite straightforward on this question. He defines 'force' as "a name for the assertion of some point of view" and describes it as "interest aggressively pursued."[56] Force entails aggression. But this does not distinguish it from rhetoric: "rhetoric is another word for force."[57] The full import of this position is felt in the discussion of law. "If the gunman is the paradigmatic instance of force outside the law, interpretation is the force that resides within the law."[58] And these two kinds of force are essentially the same. "The force of the law is always and already indistinguishable from the forces it would oppose" or, in other words, "there is always a gun at your head."[59]

Rorty acknowledges that the denial of any common ground seems to be "the first step toward a return to a war of all against all" and to be "advocating the use of force rather than persuasion."[60] He wants to deny this consequence. Yet in describing what the judge does, he claims that the judge "simply beats the text into a shape which will serve his own purpose."[61]

Of course it is true that law entails coercive power. But this does not of itself and necessarily lead to the identification of law and force. Take, for example, Aquinas's definition of law: Law is a command of reason, for the common

good, made by him who has the care of the community, and promulgated. Authority is distinguished from violence. Law is distinguished from force by virtue of its source in reason and its direction to the common good. I know that the anti-theorist regards this view of law as terribly naive and as a manifestation of false consciousness. And I do not simply want to assert Aquinas's definition as true. I do want to try to spell out just what is entailed in the anti-theorist's identification of persuasion and force.

If rhetoric is really force and all speech is rhetorical and rhetoric is for the sake of power and domination, then there is no common good. The public realm is thus simply the arena in which I assert my own private interests and desires. G. B. Madison makes this explicit: "While hermeneutical theory most definitely prescribes a *theory of justice*, it is not involved in the business of determining particular, concrete *goods*. For hermeneutics, as for liberal theory in general, anything can qualify as a 'good'—so long as it is arrived at by means of communicative rationality. . . . Hermeneutical 'goods,' it could be said, are, like all liberal goods, essentially procedural, not substantive."[62] For Rorty there is no way to bring self-creation together with justice at the level of theory.[63] Thus no one is ever really arguing for the common good, although he may deceive others and even himself that he is. And it may happen that the interests of several coincide; there may even be a majority interest. Finally, it may be possible to speak of a common interest. "A consensus about a recommendation to accept a norm . . . expresses a 'rational will' in relation to a common interest ascertained without deception. The interest is common because the constraint-free consensus permits only what all want."[64]

But a common interest and the common good are not the same thing. A common interest is a (perhaps merely accidental) coincidence of preferences that can make no *moral* claim. The common good does make a moral claim and may demand the sacrifice of the most cherished preferences of most or even all. For example, the common good may legitimately require me to go to war, risk my life, and even give my life. Here we would be talking about something like the defense of my country's liberty or opposition to aggression against the innocent. In other words, the notion of the common good entails a specifically moral content. The notion of interest, even a common interest, entails no moral content. I may calculate that certain sacrifices are worth making for securing the interest, but the pursuit of the interest requires no exercise of virtue. Interests can change, goods cannot. The coercion that law can exercise is justified by virtue of the direction of law to the common good, of its being a command of reason that is so directed. But what can justify force in the name of a common interest, or a majority interest?

Rorty denies the possibility of universal agreement, even the agreement implied by the common ground of a shared language. Yet he asserts the moral superiority of democracy over totalitarianism. This must be merely his own preference. Rorty's democracy would have to be the self-assertion of the majority. It does not seem to be a constitutional democracy, for which the constitution serves as common ground. If there is a constitution, it must not be allowed to constrain interpretation.

Charles Taylor's discussion of "common meanings" is especially illuminating here. Common meanings "are not simply a converging set of subjective reactions, but part of the common world."[65] Taylor contrasts this with the notion of "consensus" that dominates much of mainstream social science. "Consensus" entails the view that meaning is simply for an individual subject. Hence, 'legitimate' is not a word that can be used in the description of social reality. "It can only be used as a description of subjective meaning. What enters into scientific consideration is thus not the legitimacy of a polity but the opinions or feelings of its member individuals concerning its legitimacy."[66] Taylor is arguing for the claim that "the meanings and norms implicit in [social] practices are not just in the minds of the actors but are out there in the practices themselves, practices which cannot be conceived as a set of individual actions, but which are essentially modes of social relation, of mutual action." These meanings are "the common property of the society."[67] Rhetoric is concerned precisely with these common meanings, to identify, articulate, and perhaps criticize them.

The common good (as distinguished from the common interest) can only be established and maintained rhetorically. It has its existence through rhetoric. This does not mean that it is a fiction, even a useful one. Political reality is constituted rhetorically: it can appear only in rhetorical speech, and its appearance is not different from its reality. Rhetoric only makes sense if there is still a notion of the common good at work. "Rhetoric is no longer possible in a world that takes the plurality of norms as a norm in itself."[68] (I am referring, of course, to rhetoric in the traditional sense, i.e., the sense in which it is possible to make a distinction between rhetorical and non-rhetorical modes of speech and between the good and bad use of the art.) For it is assumed that the individual may be asked to sacrifice his own private interests for the common good. Only in such a situation, a situation in which there still is a common good, can rhetoric be valued. The denigration of rhetoric in modern thought goes hand-in-hand with the rejection of the notion of a common good. It cannot be valued where the individual is required to sacrifice his own interests for the sake of the interests of others, even a majority interest. In this case consent can only be secured by force or the threat of force.

For anti-theory the highest value is not the common good but autonomy, and autonomy is virtually identified with "conscious choice." At this point, it is no longer possible to distinguish between theory and anti-theory: their views of language are remarkably similar. Human beings are constrained at the deepest level by language itself. So-called 'ordinary language' is a theory that we did not choose. It is full of all kinds of unconscious meanings that commit us in ways that we do not or should not want. 'Ordinary language' is the theorist's analogue for 'false consciousness.'

Foucault's statement of our situation with respect to language is, in many ways, the same as Quine's. Man "lodges his thought in the folds of a language so much older than himself that he cannot master its significations."[69] And "how can he be the subject of a language that for thousands of years has been formed without him?"[70] I am not suggesting that language has no history or that the history of words is unimportant. I am pointing to the fact that for both theory and anti-theory it is of the utmost significance, a grave difficulty, that we just find ourselves using words whose meaning we did not choose.

The assumption seems to be either that at some point in the distant past, men did choose the meanings of words in accordance with their primitive folk-theories or that language is an autonomous system with no subject behind it. "Ontological commitments" are made either through stipulation or unconsciously. Over the centuries meanings get added on or subtracted; all kinds of unconscious processes and motives are at work, and these are reflected in what is our "hopelessly confused" ordinary language. For anti-theory, language conceals the very structures of domination and oppression. It is the first and most important place where conscious choice must be exercised.

What is implied in the anti-theorist's approach to language is that thought is *entirely* determined by language. The attempt to control language is the attempt to control thought. But the objection that I made to theory can also be made here: if thought were *entirely* determined by language, there would be no way out of "false consciousness."

Deliberate change of language is, of course, not merely a change of language. James Boyd White describes legal argument as "an organized and systematic process of conversation by which words get and change their meaning."[71] He sees the legal case as "an invitation to the reconstitution of the language."[72] And he says from the outset that "an alteration in language of the kind I mean is not merely a lexical event, and it is not reversible by insistence upon a set of proper definitions."[73] A change in language is a change in culture. Deliberate, consciously chosen alterations in language are instruments of cultural change. "Law . . . makes our choice of language conscious rather than habitu-

to make speech . . . as nearly as possible independent of consciousness."[80]
Exercising conscious choice with respect to language is the necessary first step
in freeing language from its customary meaning, in breaking the constraints: we
did not consciously choose these meanings and we are, therefore, not bound by
them. But once Oldspeak is forgotten, there is no more choice. Real choice is
eliminated in the name of conscious choice. The means of expression for any
not-yet-fully articulated insight are no longer available. Robert Scholes in his
Textual Power and Tzvetan Todorov in his review of Scholes's book agree that
this kind of posture toward language calls to mind the Orwellian universe in
which the Party is the "interpretive community" that decides on what the mean-
ing of words is to be.[81] Rorty does not intend that his conversation should be
coercive or "totalizing," but that is what it must be.

What is the self that emerges from this account of anti-theory? What is the
proper form of self-knowledge? The self of anti-theory is both radically isolated
and totally political. It is radically isolated because it is absolutely discrete in
this sense: if the self is desire, and specifically desire for power, then friendship
is impossible. But because the desire is for power, the self is totally political.
All action is political and all relationships are political. Because all relationships
are political, the only way we can act toward each other is within the political
realm, through political means. This is especially clear with respect to relation-
ships between men and women. For radical feminism, natural relationships are
insignificant. They are not consciously chosen. Sex is not consciously chosen,
but 'gender' can be brought into the sphere of conscious choice.

Self-knowledge for anti-theory is captured in the flow of the Rortyan con-
versation and in Foucault's description of the philosophical life. "The critical
ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine,
nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be
conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of
what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that
are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond
them."[82] We are always on the crest of the wave.

The self of anti-theory is Crites's contracted self, discrete and concentrated
in the present. It is not the contracted self of sensual pleasure but of the intellec-
tualized pleasure of power. This form of vitality needs the justification provided
by anti-theory because, unlike sensual pleasure, it needs the political realm. But
it must be noted that the political realm is not the realm of glory: the desire of
the self is for power, not glory, and not the immortality that glory brings.

It must also be noted that the initial impression of self-examination and self-
criticism created by anti-theory's posture of unmasking is empty. If theory is a

benevolence is really hypocrisy, all friendship really a cheat, all fidelity a snare. This principle, Hume says, proceeds from a depraved disposition. He asks "what degree of affection and benevolence [such a man] can bear to a species whom he represents under such odious colors."[91] If we do not want to ascribe to him a "corrupted heart," we must at least admit that his examination of moral matters is careless and precipitate.

MacIntyre's analysis of Foucault (and, in general, of those "genealogists" who follow Nietzsche) is especially acute in this respect. The anti-theorist's exemption of his own speech from criticism is self-indulgent.[92] The anti-theorist exempts himself from scrutiny and makes of himself the great exception. His "ironic distance" means that he cannot give an account of himself in terms of "an unironic relationship to a past" which he disowns.[93] Most importantly, the ironic distance of the anti-theorist makes it impossible for him to acknowledge in his past any failure, especially "guilty failure, which is also the failure of the same still-present self."[94]

What MacIntyre shows is that the very project of masking and unmasking presupposes a narrative, that acts of disowning make sense only in terms of a self-narrative. Behind the anti-theorist's narrative of disowning "there is always a shadow self-congratulatory narrative."[95] For the anti-theorist, there is no guilt, no remorse, no repentance. The project of anti-theory presupposes but does not itself acknowledge the continuity of self that narrative and, thus, moral accountability imply. This is the constraint from which it seeks to escape, and this is why its autonomy is ultimately empty.

The Insufficiency of Anti-theory

In sum, just as the universality of theory is an abstract and therefore meaningless universality, the particularity of anti-theory is a meaningless particularity. The self of anti-theory is a fragmented and dissipated self held together by an empty notion of autonomy. There is constant change but no meaningful change, for meaningful change presupposes an underlying continuity.

Like theory, anti-theory can justify anything. The self of anti-theory is morally self-complacent. The unmasking activity of anti-theory can never amount to interiority because the evil that unmasking reveals is always external to the "ironist."

PRAISE FOR

SELF-KNOWLEDGE
in the
AGE OF THEORY

ANN HARTLE

"At home in the philosophical tradition of the West, Ann Hartle draws on its resources to depict philosophy as the fullness of human experience. *Self-Knowledge in the Age of Theory* is both provocative and profound. It is provocative in its argument that philosophical self-knowledge is acquired neither through a theory about the self nor through an anti-theory that dissolves the self. It is profound in its exploration of the way self is displayed in narrative and in its search for an even deeper, interior self-knowledge in philosophical conversation."

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