

–The Deleuze mystique machine. Deleuze is just an example. The puffed-up style, the sublime-profound political bluff. Not saying he's worthless or empty. I've dabbled and can maybe even relate. But one gets tired of the theatrics.

–And the imitators.

–The faithful, scripture-quoting imitators, yes. I think of Hobbes expressing frustration with the jargon of the schoolmen, the school *boys*.

–So there's some kind of Marlboro man masculinity in the straight presentation.

–Exactly, the straight presentation. Clean cut, sans the pretentious tattoos. Back to basics, like respecting the time of your reader, like assuming that they are beyond the mystification game.

–Ethical-aesthetic dimension.

–Yes. Because it's not about doctrine. Doctrine is secondary here. It's more about an enacted image or ideal of the scientist.

–Let's get into that.

–Transactional analysis, adult to adult, peer to peer. As a style. As opposed to parent to child, guru to wide-eyed believer, not that our gurus can find many believers.

–Given the snarling vanity of young men.

–Yes. Who only (therefore) adopt the famous dead.

–The *famous* dead.

–Which gets us back to mystique and Deleuze or Hegel or who-the-fuck-ever.

–What about Wittgenstein ?

–I love Wittgenstein, but let's not ignore how indulgent the *TLP* was. Brilliant, yes, but it's form was rude.

–I know you've recently praised *Language, Truth, and Logic* by Ayer.

–Yes. A great little book, which organizes *some* of Wittgenstein, leaves out the mystical and self-cancelling, confusing stuff. It's a great little

version of logical positivism. A fixed little demystified version of Kant.

–But Ayer lacks mystique.

–Exactly. But Wittgenstein’s mystique is intact. I do think he’s great, but the mystique actually interferes with comprehension.

–True. But it motivates reading the mystified philosopher in the first place.

–Yes. That initial transference. It’s the dream of being an insider, in on the clever Knowledge, about Capitalism or whatever.

–But I don’t think you are against mysticism itself.

–Not again, but not that invested in it either. Definitely nauseated by imported boomer spirituality, the white man’s Mystical Chicken Soup. But that’s a nausea in response to an incoherent personality type. I think Hesse is great. But look how he presents it. The novel is appropriate. There’s a distance.

–What is the incoherence you mentioned ?

–Some people are caught between channels. Are they seriously scientific or not ? I don’t mean scientific in some narrow Dawkins-approved sense. I mean scientific in a larger sense of the second order tradition mentioned by Popper.

–The scientific personality is self-consciously fallible, and he or she looks to improve their current set of tentative beliefs.

–Exactly. The scientist embraces an infinite task. The guru, however, is “enlightened”. Ye shall know the guru by his binary tendencies. In or out, yes or no. Whereas the scientist is always weighing and clarifying ideas that exist in a more continuous way semantically and on a continuum of plausibility.

–I like to see the scientist as identified with a style rather than a doctrine.

–Exactly! I like that.

–Of course defining that proper style becomes important.

–Right. So one gets philosophy of science or rationality’s attempt to specify its own essence or nature.

–Let’s get back to that incoherence. Neither guru nor scientist.

–I guess I should say that even an atheist can play the guru role. It’s basically a matter of vanity. But what I especially had in mind is guru shit proper, which involves those who are “Spiritual.” But they tend to be so clearly not spiritual in the sense of noble or elevated. Their behavior in discussions betrays the usual pettiness. But their “Spiritual” self-perfuming makes them stink worse than those who are simply vain, like the asshole swaggering Nietzsche guy.

–What comes to my mind in all of this is self-sculpting. Carving a mask.

–Mask as exoskeleton or public *face*. Because one identifies with this mask. This mask is one’s signed work of art, right ?

–Fair enough. The mortal person plays the game of life, and, within this game of life, there is the sub-game of philosophy. The “mask” just *is* the face of that person *in that context*.

–Totally agreed.

2

–So what is it all worth ? Playing the game of philosophy ?

–A good question, with decent answers, I think. Despite my pessimism.

–Such as ?

–It’s amusing. It’s clever stuff. Even on the cynical level of taking it as entertainment, it really is entertaining. For those like us anyway.

–Granted. What else ?

–It’s also serious business. Learning how to die. Or learning how to dress up for one’s death. And for one’s life. Carving that face. For the entire game of life. The scientist or philosopher is one possible mask for this largest game.

–So it’s a serious spirituality in some sense.

–Yes. Though “spirituality” in its transcendence is ultimately unserious, beyond seriousness.

–Cosmic laughter.

- Exactly. Or maybe some serene state beyond laughter even. If one had to pick an image, a symbol of transcendence. Fat calm Buddha isn't bad. Little statue man.
- The face of a baby before it can smile.
- Right. And us quoting spiritual texts doesn't make us therapeutic guru phags.
- The difference being the tone.
- Right. Like Hesse, who includes that fun house. He includes sex and violence. The ferryman is “virtually” a whore, a murderer. Hesse gets real.
- But Hesse is also (just as important) not being taken here as a final father, as a guru.
- I agree. We are all brother, brothers, brothers. And maybe some sisters. I'm not against sisters. But fathers belong to an earlier stage, which perhaps cannot be skipped.
- Do you feel that we are discussing the obvious or the basic here ?
- The basic is not so obvious. But this stuff is basic indeed, but I think it's proper to return always to the basics.
- Perpetual beginner like brother Husserl.
- Even if we are probably repeating ourselves. We want to crystallize this hard-won tonality, however basic it is and however obvious it should be. But it's not obvious, and this is itself obvious from the way people talk online, even those who pretend to know and care about philosophy. But I don't accuse everyone. It's just that there are levels, and it's a climb that takes years, and there is no definite top of the ladder.
- An infinite task.
- Right. But I think it's safe to say that certain broad pieces of the picture come into focus. Like “the forum.” One cannot scientifically deny any of the conditions necessary for science.
- Logic is presupposed.
- That sort of thing, yes. But we live in an age of vain self-contradiction, where sophomoric relativism, if dressed in a new jargon, is taken as a

mark or rather murk of sophistication.

–And of course it's pointless to complain.

–It'd be like complaining about Taylor Swift's popularity. Yes it's annoying or disappointing or something to be the real thing and get overlooked for a wind machine. But such is life. It's usually happened already to people who are better than you are (more talented, etc.)

–Melancholy dad truths.

–I suppose so. But Ayer was a notorious heterosexual. Dry philosophy, but kept his end wet. Gloomy Schopenhauer got more pussy than Nietzsche. You and me are both fairly happily married.

–Your point being ?

–That negative or disenchanting philosophies are bearable for those who get sensual kicks. The world is still justified aesthetically or sensually. It's unfair and evil and so on, but our philosophy is horny, likes to fantasize and fuck. And hungry. And curious.

–So the godless pessimist positivist guy basically doesn't need the traditional ideological comforts.

–Exactly. I also like to think of random French existentialists fucking in bathrooms, godlessly, ecstatically. You aren't likely to get that side of things in a classroom, but Sartre is talking about radical freedom. That grand phaggy responsibility talk wipes right off. If there's no God up there, then we are god. Alienation is overcome. And our female existentialist is bent over a small kitchen table, having the time of her life with a novelist who only writes about his own life. Bukowski was an existentialist in some sense.

–But let's be real. You are not anti-responsibility.

–Correct. Not at all. The issue is context and tone. Sartre could be a dufus is all. But also great. The larger issue is that one **acts** with decency. Talk is cheap. Sermonizing is cheap. Consider our phony talking heads, be they "journalists" or politicians. Professional bullshitters. An industry of sentimental spin. Yet in our little local lives (which loom so large) the honest word is everything. But it's there in the actual living, in whether someone shows up, pays up, stands up. Does talking about increase the right kind of action ? Maybe or maybe

not. But I can't help but mock sermonizers who aren't in the process of proving themselves in a way that *costs* them. Our talking heads are of course rewarded for mere talk, which is completely backwards.

—Now I chime in with the dad truth that this too must be accepted.

—I agree. The way of the world. Game theory and all that, right ? Life is shitty. Life is beautiful. But all of these value judgments are “meaningless” like music without words, in a certain sense. Ayer is basically right on that. As a scientist, one does not pontificate on the value of disvalue of life. But we can be honest and say that happy people are usually more likable. And doing science is fun. So there's something anti-anti-natalist in the playing of that game or any game really, even anti-natalism.

—Because the anti-natalist has found a Cause.

—Exactly. Which organizes the world, justifies its suffering, despite what is said aloud.

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—Now I want to get a little awkward. How real are you ?

—Well I'm a fictional character.

—Yes. But at least one actual person is responsible for the words in your fictional mouth.

—True. And you want to hold that person (if there is just one) responsible for using words like “phaggy” and a general disrespect for every idol.

—Exactly. Who do we call to complain ?

—I think the problem, if there really is one, is the realism. I'm a believable character, right ? Coherent ? Eloquent even ?

—I can't help but feel that I'm interviewing an actual nonfictional person. I'm guessing readers think the “fiction” claim is just an attempt at distancing or plausible deniability.

—Well of course it is in some sense. The whole point of the “literary” is the understanding that the text is “lying,” not to be taken seriously or officially. The question is whether we can tolerate such ambiguity. I'm reading *Point Counterpoint* lately. Huxley is putting words in many

mouths in that book, so it's easier to believe that they are all secretly him. But in some sense they are.

—So your creator is guilty of dreaming you up if nothing else.

—Right. Huffendauer, Duffenhauer, Frydowski. Still others. Fictional philosophers. Ways to explore ideas. Some of them are more like their creator than others. But the point of the format is to liberate the mind, to explore paths. How could this work if an actual human was treated as if he said, without irony, every single thing any of his characters said? Fiction would be either impossible or so bland that no one would bother with it. We need to explore evil. And I don't think I'm an evil character. I'm offensively moderate, offensively skeptical and transcendent. Offensively honest and coherent. And that's why I'm a fun character to write.

—But that suggests that your creator is just you on the inside.

—Not exactly. That underestimates the random swerve. To write a character is to make choices and build on them. Clearly the collective is interested in philosophers like me, but the fictional format drives the game into the realm of the literary.

—Paul de Man stuff.

—Yes. The whole project could be a prank. That's the magic seal of the literary. "I am lying." Or "I am playing." So the literary is implicitly transcendent, completely transcendent, from the beginning. It is self-demystified. Earnest critics mystify only themselves in their humorless reductions of the game to some literal kernel as hilariously earnest as themselves.

—Hilariously earnest. I like that.

—Nietzsche bragged about his small ears. I think he was saying that the typical "intellectual" is an earnest dork. Something like Spengler talking about ethical socialism. But Spengler himself was a bit of an earnest dork.

—Does the "serious" philosophical style require one to be a dork?

—I don't think so. Let's contrast it with Derrida and his tedious style. Is *that* dorky? Because it tries so hard?

—There I think it's a matter of taste. Does the move succeed or fail? Is Derrida also in the realm of the literary?

–Half in, half out, it seems to me. Which I find problematic.

–Because you prefer doing one thing or the other.

–Yes. And even this fictional interview is still honest on the level of style. I don't try to make the ideas seem more difficult than they are. But sometimes I (however fictional) embrace the style of an Ayer.