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**The Phenomenology of Civilization:
A Dialogue Between Profs. Gabriel Breton and George Drury
At Monteith College
Plus, Two Associated Commentaries on Civilization by George Drury**

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This dialogue on the nature of civilization took place on the stage at Wayne State University fifty- seven years ago on January 29, 1964, and shortly thereafter. It was part of an interdisciplinary course titled “The Science of Society,” given by Monteith College.

Monteith was a small, experimental interdisciplinary college, funded by the Ford Foundation and established within Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan. The college began in 1959 and was closed in 1981.

The overall purpose of the experimental college was “to test whether a small college on a large university (campus) for commuters could provide a first-rate education for average undergraduates, support the individual student in his quest to find himself, replenish the vitality of general education, and do these things as effectively as the best private liberal arts colleges.”¹

Thus, the college itself was launched with the following characteristics in mind (drawn from a larger list of goals):

1. It was to be kept small in size, with a ceiling on enrollment at about 1,200 students.
2. It was not to be an honors college *per se* but would admit any student eligible to enter Wayne State University.
3. Students were to be taught, for the main part, in small discussion groups beginning in their freshman year, with an emphasis on acquiring the art of dialogue - that is, on expression and communication of ideas orally and in writing, with peers and professors.

¹ This is drawn from the Monteith College Archives Collection and may be found at <https://reuther.wayne.edu/files/WSR000453.pdf>

4. The objectives were restricted to those of imparting a coherent general education across four years on the undergraduate level and developing the student's capacity for independent work and communications.
5. The curriculum was designed to implement the idea that there is a body of knowledge which every educated person should possess. The founders of the college maintained that the primary task of general education is to identify and impart this knowledge.
6. The basic courses were not intended as technical introductions to specialized disciplinary studies. Nor were they to be simply tastes or surveys of the various traditional disciplines. Rather, they were to be truly integrated attempts to ask the large questions that transcend departmental boundaries and to bring to bear evidence, concerns, and methods from a wide variety of sources.²

Research evaluating the ultimate outcomes of the college, undertaken as a study by The Center for Research and Development in Higher Education at the University of California at Berkeley, indicated that, in the end, the graduates of this experimental college resembled more the intellectual profiles of Ivy League graduates than they did those who graduated from large state universities.

The basic curriculum of the college consisted of team-taught one- or two-year sequences in "Humanistic Studies"; "Science of Society"; Natural Science; plus, a Senior Colloquia, and the Senior Essay. The "Science of Society" course was represented by the following diagram of the order and topics covered: Man > Relation > Small Group > Pattern > Little Community > Socialization > Complex Organizations > Work > Social Movement > Civilization. Overall, the assigned readings for the course consisted of material drawn from the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, psychology, political science, and philosophy.

The following dialogue (edited, in part) involved two thinkers oriented to the nature of civilizations.

The first participant was Gabriel Breton, a sociologist and social philosopher. He was a founder of a journal entitled *New University Thought* (continued as *New University Studies*). The entire run of 3,000 issues of this journal sold out upon publication, and the journal upped its print run to 10,000 for the print edition.

² Ibid.

The editors declared that they “desired to live in an intellectual community which does not suffer from internal fragmentation or alienation from the larger society, one which provides constructive social and ideological leadership.” In 1961 he engaged in a fascinating debate with David Riesman in the journal.³

The other discussant was George Drury, a philosopher and social scientist. He received his PhD at the University of Chicago and was widely known as a founder and sustaining force in the movement for democratically-based education. He was a student of the distinguished philosopher Richard McKeon and taught, before Monteith, at the Bishop Sheil School in Chicago; that institution was active in promoting social justice issues and liberal Catholic thought. A charter faculty member of Monteith College, he was invited in 1971 to participate in the founding of Empire State College, and later on he moved to Rochester to be part of the Genesee Valley Center.⁴

The following slightly edited dialogue is from the files of Dr. Kenneth Feigenbaum, who was also one of the founders of the Monteith College experiment. It is followed by two lectures given by Prof. Drury on the topic.

The Phenomenology of Civilization: An Exchange Between Gabriel Breton and George Drury, January 29, 1964

Gabriel Breton: I suppose you could characterize what I am going to do for just a few minutes, until I yield the floor to George, as a kind of phenomenology of civilization. Now, even if we don’t talk about the underlying material forces — material in the Marxist sense of social, economic, and technological — that either bring about or accompany civilization, it doesn’t mean that we are unaware of their existence or that we ignore them or consider them unimportant. But I think we’ll be saying very little about them.

The reason I said “the phenomenology of civilization” is that I would like to describe the features of civilization that strike one, let’s say, on the surface, as opposed to the underlying forces that either cause or determine or bring about these features or aspects of civilization.

³ See the “Columbia Daily Spectator,” Volume CVI, No. 5, October 3, 1961. Peter Trooboff’s article is entitled “New University Thought Plans Larger Fifth Edition.”

<http://spectatorarchive.library.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/columbia?a=d&d=cs19611003-01.2.3>

⁴ See his obituary at

<https://obits.democratandchronicle.com/obituaries/democratandchronicle/obituary.aspx?n=george-f-drury&pid=142992228>

The two things that I find striking about civilization are that civilized man perceives himself as distinct from nature and that he perceives himself as distinct from his clan or his tribe or his society, his group, which means that a new kind of relationship has developed between himself and nature and between himself and other men.

As a matter of fact, others could probably better describe or characterize the opposite of this in a tribal world; the fact is, for instance, that the tribal man does not really *feel* a distinction between himself and nature. I don't think that words like "he feels part of nature" are accurate, for in a certain sense the distinction man/nature doesn't exist for him, nor do the distinctions individual/group or individual/tribe exist for him.

However, I don't want to go into that. First, I don't really know what it can feel like to be in a tribe and not know these distinctions. I have no idea of what the opposite of this could be or feel like, although others have attempted to convey a sort of feeling about this to us.

When man begins developing the notion of nature, that means that he is also developing a notion of the nature of Man (with a capital "M"). Thus, he perceives these two notions as the two terms in an antithesis, or a dichotomy: the notion of nature is also, at the same time, a theory of nature, or at least a theory of the relationship between man and nature.

This distinction, this distance, between man and nature that begins developing in the process of civilization implies reflection. And with reflection come rational principles, abstract principles, reasons, and of course philosophy. And in the sequence, the existential sequences, if you wish, between the motion and the act, in T.S. Eliot's phrase, falls the shadow. But what falls there is an important moment; it is the moment of choice, or the moment of reflection. This little gap can broaden, become very wide, or it can narrow. The sequence, however, becomes more and more complicated.

This is the characteristic of civilization; you can complicate the sequence between, let's say, the intention and the result, or the action. However, the fact that you cut the sequence — I'll repeat Eliot's terms; I think poetic terms are probably better than any other here — between the motion and the act, the conception and the creation, this brings about the play of the imagination as — is it Huizinga who discusses this? — elements of possibilities, alternatives, choice.

Man becomes preoccupied with this, with what can fill in this little gap. And that's really when he develops such things as *methodologies, codes, styles, rules of etiquette* — that is, the manner, the means and the ways of doing things, and ethical principles, ethics. He reflects on the means of doing things and the general style, which is artificial, the general artificial style develops.

Instead of having just a spontaneous ritual of the whole tribe, you have, for instance, the theatre, for which people have written rules, and things like this.

Instead of acting or behaving based on myth, you now behave based on some philosophy.

You can have more than one way of doing things. When you break the sequence, you become aware that there are more ways than one in which something can be done. Then the choice of the way, the choice that you are going to make, is based on, as I say, the philosophy. You now do something because it's rational, or you do it because it's refined, or because it's civilized, or because it's natural. (Maybe George will talk about that — this business of the *natural* which automatically implies a theory of nature, or a view of man's relation to nature.)

I mentioned that man now perceives himself as distinct from other people. What I should say is "distinct from the clan, or from the group," because he always perceives himself as distinct from other people. But his consciousness in the tribe has not developed to a point of an elaborated notion of "the individual." As has been noted, in the tribe they didn't have a word for "self."

I wanted to say something about the attitude of man towards the stranger, the concept of the stranger. It has been said that in a tribe, the tribal man knows no strangers; the only strangers he ever sees are either dead ones or running ones.

Now, in a civilization — especially a civilization like ours, an urban-type civilization — you meet nothing but strangers of the tribe, where there isn't anyone that you ever meet who is a stranger; you know everyone and are related to a large number of them. In fact, in an urban setting, you have the exact opposite of that; the great majority of people, probably ninety-eight percent, that you meet, are strangers.

There are, however, ways of dealing with strangers in a civilization: First, you admit the existence of a stranger; and then there are all kinds of ways of dealing with him. This is, I think, probably parallel with what I was talking about when I was saying that man starts thinking of ways of dealing with nature, and it involves things like ethics and rules of etiquette.

George Drury: As we examine civilization and its contents, we might describe what I intend to do as trying to reflect on Gabriel's reflections.

Civilization, I think, strikes Gabriel and me, among others, in a way that perhaps it does not strike those with a different approach. And perhaps our real effort is to associate in a fruitful way these approaches.

Thus, it does not strike us, I think, that civilization is something natural, a kind of natural growth. Now, this might be one view, that after all man is in some sense part of nature, or at least the things he does are presumably — most of the time, and so far as certain limits are concerned, all of the time — within the possible extension of his nature; he is doing, so to speak, what comes naturally.

So, from this perspective, it would be the case that civilization (here presented at the end of our rather long and often wonderful deliberations in social science) should flower somewhat naturally, that there should be, if you will, a continuity, that the growth from tribe to civilization would represent a continuity.

But there might be certain difficulties in taking on intellectually or conceptually, fruitful to social science, this larger magnitude, but after all the line of continuity would be there. In other words, the proper approach to a civilization would be to consider it. And, as with Ruth Benedict and thinkers like her, you do get a great deal from this kind of consideration.

But for Gabriel and me — at least this morning — there is a discontinuity involved in civilization. And the very fact that he this morning turns to the phenomenology of civilization is a sort of indication of that gap, that break, that discontinuity, because to say that things appear certainly says that they are at some distance, that there's some sort of elongation of what it is that you are concerned with as phenomenon or appearance. If I hold my hand immediately before my eyes, I see neither my hand nor anything else. But if there is some distance created, then there is an appearance, a phenomenon that needs to be accounted for.

Now, in what I hope is not the senescence or old age of civilization, it does strike many thinkers concerned with these problems that this distance is hard to traverse, that it is hard, let us say, to bring our consciousness to join that which appears. Hence Gabriel's statement that in civilization from this view we are concerned with the features which strike one.

I suggest here that features are aspects of appearance. That they should strike one suggests that they are a certain distance off, if only to wind up in order to strike one. Or, as Paul Valery says, the whole business of philosophy is concerned with what transpires between the object and the perceiver. And he says it's a business which is never finished. And this, I think, is what Gabriel meant by saying that we create the gap and then within that gap we complicate the sequences. And they become ever more complicated. As we try, like Achilles and the tortoise, to cover this distance, we find more and more things intervening.

So, as we consider civilized man, preliminarily, we must develop an essay in aid of an eventual phenomenology of civilization, distinct from nature.

And, as we were saying, distinct from his fellow man. Instead of it being merely a kind of presumption that one's fellow man is one's fellow man, the whole attempt is to try to reach him so that he may be indeed a fellow man.

It is suggested that this is a new relation. That is, it is not just continuous in what might be called a kind of natural growth. There is this gap; there is this distance. And, as Gabriel suggested, we try to join the two extremes of this gap, without, hopefully, falling through. But as you know from your reading and your considerations, this is often the dismay, the kind of terror of our time, that reflection instead of being able to join the other is apt to fall through. There is, so to speak, a "hole in the bottom of the ocean"; instead of something, we find that what sustains the sequence between me and the other is a kind of nothingness.

Put another way: In an allusion to Eliot's notion of between the creation — that is, the tribal, the organic, the living, the consanguineous, if you will, the relations in the sense of blood relations, and so forth — between this and those conceptions or concepts which our consciousness developed, is indeed discontinuity, is indeed a kind of gap.

Man embarks upon the adventure of, let's say, thinking up things for himself. Instead of, we might say, the dumb raptures (as John Dewey once called them) or the organic experiences of life (this at least is our imagination of the tribal consciousness), instead of that sort of thing we do have this gap in which a number of things can intervene. And instead of dumb raptures we have consciousness, awareness of what we are doing. Consciousness itself might be described, if not indeed defined, as a drawing back, as a pause, as a kind of hesitation. It is as though we step back from life to rehearse what our next step will be.

This has given us the various things that we have, such as tall buildings, speedy modes of transportation and communication, and electric lights. Often, we are self-congratulatory about it. But we realize also that in addition to its glories, modernity also brings, via this very gap, problems which we have somehow to take on, both in knowing the dimensions and character of the gap and in somehow bringing back together or associating these extremes — the creative, organic, tribal life and the life of conception, the life in which Man who has Nature begins to show up. This does not wholly perplex us.

Yet this is the problem: We say that we would have a solution if only we could bring the conceptual, the theoretical, the universalizing, the consciousness, the estrangement, if only we could bring this to join more richly, more appositely, more significantly, with life. We have a nostalgia on the one hand, but on the other we are in concept-land. This perhaps is our modern mood, to shuttle back and forth between the nostalgia for a golden age and the pride which we have in our accomplishments since, as Marx said, we first stepped out of nature and began to make things for ourselves.

This straddling, this shuttling back and forth, at least in imagination, in the play of the imagination, the development of modes, styles, thinking up things, is what we would mean by reflection. And we might say that philosophy, or the phenomenology of civilization as we are here talking about it, attempts to bring our attention to bear upon this gap: to see what is its significance. What are possible tracks by which we could bring the two together again?

We are concerned here in the last of our courses in social science to consider the maximum stretch, if you will, of interaction that is significant to consider. It's not likely to be the case, if only because we began as behavioral and always maintain that tie, that here at the end of our course we'll say, in a philosophical fashion known as stoicism, that the human race constitutes one vast whole or unity, not at least in any realistic sense for us as social scientists. This may be one aspect, may be the conceptual side of our ideal.

But none of us as social scientists, having been through Korea, Cornerville, *Two Worlds of Change*, and the rest, has only this concept. This would require delivering up too much of what became so meaningful in our going through various environments or instances or complexes of interactions. That is, none of us at this point, I think, shows much enthusiasm for becoming whiffs of smoke in a kind of dream of universalized man. If we join up with humanity and work towards its greater unity, we want to do this with what we want to take along, namely, what has made us what we are.

We want to carry our values with us, so that while the conceptual or universal appeal is there, there is also the strong and very vital valuing of that which we want to take along with us.

It has been said that the stoic ideal of humanity was so much skywriting. But instead of skywriting, we want something that has a local habitation and a name. (It is undoubtedly the influence of the Clarence Hillberry Theater stage behind us that leads to all the quotations from Shakespeare this morning.)

So, if we want something definite to be designated when we say civilization, let us indicate those complexes of interaction, those groupings, vast as they are and must be, of human beings living together who have entertained the problems set by the gap between life on the one hand and consciousness on the other.

I think that Gabriel's and my reflections say that if the whole that you are going to study is a civilization, then what you will be looking for is a whole containing a gap within it. The gap that we look for is the gap between the natural, the organic, and the conscious, reflective, philosophical, or scientific life.

In keeping with Gabriel's last point, we can ask: When the strange or the stranger shows up, what sort of accommodation, what sort of arrangement for encountering him, is made? There are solutions in times past which said, well, a stranger shows up and you take him in or take him out. We have certain aspirations to do better than that; we don't want perhaps so much any longer to try to close the gap by absorbing the stranger. We don't want to give up the stranger; his strangeness has perhaps become wonder.

How then to bridge the gap? What can be done about it? Experience of civilization leads us to try to take advantage of the gap, to say that this gap which is so much on our minds (or, if you will, in our minds) these days tells us something about ourselves, tells us something about ourselves as human beings. Perhaps it is the case that we don't want not to close it, since we don't want to give up the glories of consciousness by a mere return to the tribal, or in Marxian terms, by a return to nature as such.

I suppose that what we are looking for is something to fill in the gap, some kind of medium which will re-join the natural life of man, which remains something that we value, even as we watch it succumb to the productions growing out of our adventure with consciousness. What we seek is closing of the gap which will bring us the benefits of a return to the tribal conditions or to the natural life but with retention of consciousness of where we have been.

Gabriel Breton: I want to ask you a question. I want to ask about the attitude that man takes towards nature, or the theory that he develops of nature, which has taken the form of imitation of nature in the case of art.

I should have prefaced this by saying that the methods, the ways that man fills the gap that we have been talking about are based on either his theory of man or his theory of nature — or his theory of both. Now, this theory of nature has been in the case of art for a long time the idea of imitating nature. And in science, especially nowadays, we speak of dominating nature. I want to ask what you make of this.

George Drury: Well, I think that if you take the gap from the shore of consciousness and seek to re-join the other shore of life from let's call it the scientific or rationalistic standpoint — that what you seem to move towards is the notion of art as imagination. In other words, there are more things in heaven and hell than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

On the other hand, if you (I make no claims here; I'm just taking a logical counterpart) take your stand on the tribal shore, as we've been calling it, perhaps then you would conceive of art — if you knew about consciousness; maybe this is even your first approach to consciousness—as the imitation of nature.

You might see art as carrying out Aristotle's notion that we owe a good deal to the earlier mythmakers because, although they expressed themselves in stories, what they did express were many of the truths which Aristotle and his successors have, from their point of view, cleared up a bit by getting rid of all the good things in the story.

Maybe if you and I were to stand midway — if we had whereon to stand, and perhaps my reflections on your reflections and your reflections on my reflections would give us whereon to stand — perhaps what we think of there as filling the gap would be art as expression, art as expressing and making something of our straddling of both the shore of the organic and that of the conscious or universal.

Well, this is what we in broad intention have to say. We didn't know that it would turn out quite this way.

Some Reflections on “Civilization as Reflection.” By George Drury

In a lecture that I gave to some predecessors of yours I developed the thought that civilization has not only a descriptive meaning but also represents a kind of obligation — without the form of imperialism with which it sometimes has been associated: civilized beings have to take into account, or to envision the taking into account, of the whole wide world. By what terms is this to be brought together and its parts associated, and so forth?

We need a further dimension in which to accomplish this. We need to consider science itself. This is the meaning of the previous remarks, “reflection on reflection.” In a way science reflects the world. So, we might say that we need to consider that account, if only to accommodate it with other accounts that we may encounter.

I might call that, broadly, a kind of logic. When I delivered those remarks, I was thinking in terms of *method* as being very closely associated with, even conditioning, what your science, your account of the world, or your philosophy might be. At that time what I was concerned with was the possibility of discourse or association between people, thinkers, who would want to take everything into account, who would want to give you “the whole works,” and those with whom I would associate my own views, who were more partial. The latter were more concerned to be busy with the details, leaving perhaps the total account yet to be written up, to come sometime, with the strong suspicion that when this did come it would be more an association than a synthesizing, an englobement, an absorption, or a swallowing up.

I think one of the messages about civilization is that in it we are not so much at business as at play. Maybe this is the element that we are trying to discern. We are looking for room in which play might occur, the play of our accounts with other accounts.

Let us use Isaiah Berlin's distinction, based on a quotation from Archilochus: "The fox knows many things. The hedgehog [or porcupine] knows one big thing." It's a question of how whole, or holistic, views talk to partial views. Whatever may be the ultimate disposition of that problem — that is, how do we get one civilization or one civilized person to talk to another? I think a practical resolution is to decide to carry on the talk, not to cease the colloquy, seek as disinterestedly as possible to describe what the other person is doing.

If we have that proviso, then perhaps we need not be so much concerned about views which attempt to be holistic views, as Gabriel Breton and I were discussing. The problem for foxes would be to avoid being taken in, taken up, absorbed, described, and involved in a kind of big washing machine that they really didn't want to be involved in after all. But then there was the notion that we both, foxes and hedgehogs, face perhaps the same thing: How to get that partial impartiality, how to get the room from which, let's say, to bring about peace, which would be one of the things that, if not the fact, of right ought to be a feature of civilization?

After we spoke about "Civilization as Reflection" I began to think not so much of reflection as of a consideration of the logic or the methods to which the scientific or knowledge enterprise was conjoined. In terms that Gabriel and I introduced, the *tribal* (or to take away the special meanings that that term may have as a classification or tool in some special discipline, the *organic*) and the *conceptual* might not so much be themselves our problem; but our reflecting on reflection would rather involve our seeking in each of these for a reflection of the other — that is, some vestige of our having either separated or brought these together.

In any case, they have been looking at each other. Our reason has tried to look at our life or the world. Can we find in each of these something of the other reflected in it? What difference does the presence of the organic make in the conceptual? How is that reflected in this? And in our organic life, how is the conceptual or the rational reflected there?

What I was looking for was whether, at least in principle, we could find the reflection of the organic in the conceptual and the reflection of the conceptual in the organic. We could thus perhaps accomplish, whatever showed up, finding a principle which would be one of power for peace — that is to say, that the reflection in our conceptual accounts, in our philosophies, in our rational constructs, of their origin in the modes of life, in association with which they grew or were produced, might yield some power to reason or give some vitality.

With regard to the organic, we might be able by considering the reflections in it to make it more reasonable, though not in ways which would be destructive of it, since it would be yoked in our view of this to the empowerment of the conceptual.

Thus, we might find some way to avoid what is, in some ways, the biggest difficulty about the organic, namely, its futility. We're born but we also die. Take the smaller instance that frequently comes to minds of thinkers these days, "women's work."⁵ You dust, and the dust is all back again very soon. As one of these thinkers says: "We clean the world each day, and it's pretty untidy and dirty the next day." This kind of avoidance of futility is at least a problem.

When Gabriel and I were talking about the phenomenology of civilization, we said that while there may be these reflections, there is still a problem of what we called the "gap," or, in a not unfortunate metaphor, we were talking about two shores.

One of my colleagues has been going around ever since waving to me and saying that he's on the opposite shore. Well, I told him that I saw *La Dolce Vita*, too. All right, you can find one shore. Now, the solution of the problem, at least the solution of the problem as you might encounter it here in reflective ways, would be that you would find on the one shore something that you expected to find only on the other. That may not get us all across, but at least it throws a kind of rope bridge across the chasm.

Here we might quote Kenneth Burke: At the end of one of his books he says, "Man is a being who is nervously loquacious on the edge of the abyss." Well, we might get over at least for a visit to each other's shore.

Now, this would, as I say, constitute a kind of philosophical solution. The implementation of this may be a matter of the next centuries, who knows? But this is in effect, I think, what philosophically we would be trying to do. In other words, the closing of the gap means that you find something on both sides.

Some thinkers in their discussion of the gap sometimes talk about it as "the absurd." Well, the absurd literally, I suppose, and radically, would mean that there is no hearing — *sourde*, meaning "deaf" — there is no hearing from one side to the other. If you can get at least an echo, there may be a chance that you're in communication with the other side.

Let us try to look at that gap and see whether we can perhaps hear reason from the side of life. Let's see if from the side of reason, we might not be able to make some sort of discernment or distinguishing of life on the other side. While the gap may remain, still we might be said to have come somewhere in terms of a solution.

Suppose that we talk a bit in terms which in the lecture on "Civilization as Reflection" I make kind of the paradigm.

⁵ This observation, made half a century ago, would no longer be delivered today. (Editor's note).

Suppose we use (since I'll be talking, or trying to talk, about some French thinkers who are of interest to you to see what they make of the gap) fraternity, equality, and liberty. (See Figure 1.)

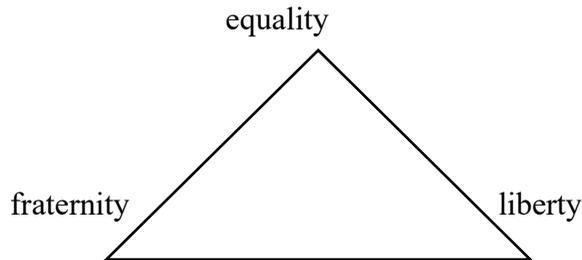


Figure 1. The Paradigm

What sorts of reflections are elaborated by those who consider that something needs to be done about joining the fraternal — the organic, the living, the solidary — with the rational — the equal, the precise, the universal.

These thinkers are French, which means that they are apt to be extremely precise and to carry the reasoning to ever finer and more precise points. Second, we are but trying to examine the kinds of reflections that we have been making in connection with civilization considering what Sartre, Camus, and Merleau-Ponty might be said to be doing in this same regard.

Suppose that in terms of these themes or, if you will, in terms of reflection, we take a stand here in “liberty.” We find there is a gap; there is a gap between consciousness and life; there is a gap between the “for itself” and the “in itself.” Having discerned the gap causes us a good deal of excitement, because if there is this kind of gap then there is also a kind of gap, or chasm, or absurdity, or a lack of communication, or even lack of other things amongst us severally. What have these people, to use the title of Marjorie Grene’s book about them, having encountered “dreadful freedom,” to do about it?

This is from Merleau-Ponty’s book called *The Phenomenology of Perception*. He says: “Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world’s basis. It steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire. It slackens the intentional threads which attach to the world and thus brings them to our notice.”

I have difficulty in talking this way about the work of a man — and this quote is from his preface. I’m trying to indicate what he is doing. Maybe the real value here is not so much the exposition but the contrast.

Suppose that having decided to reflect, suppose that having undertaken to reflect on reflection, having said, “We will draw back,” we do draw back. We see what our science and our philosophy, make of the world, or attempt to make of the world.

The thing that Merleau-Ponty is here saying is that a philosopher might try to withdraw back to the unity of consciousness as the world’s basis. You might conclude that Merleau-Ponty is saying, “All right. Suppose I draw back and take my stand and say, ‘Now what about science and the world?’”

Let us say that this generation of philosophers is looking upon, reflecting upon, and thus practicing, civilization.

In an earlier generation sometimes philosophers making this kind of reflection said that everything happens out of and comes out of consciousness. But later reflection, notably by a philosopher that Merleau-Ponty is chiefly concerned to talk about here, Edmund Husserl, said that it isn’t so much the case that we, so to speak, draw back and fall off the edge into nothingness. Husserl says that our proper address to the world — what you encounter if you draw back — is wonder at the presence of the world.

Let us say that having withdrawn back on all this reflecting upon the world, you might say, “Where am I? I’m a kind of disembodied mind floating off not even in space anymore, off in nothingness.”

But that’s not what happens when you stretch a little further. The most important lesson of the reduction (that is, Husserl’s attempt to say, well, let’s make this kind of reflection) is the impossibility of a complete reduction. “There is no thought,” says Husserl, “which embraces all our thought.” The philosopher, in other words, encounters here, you might say, something that won’t go away. The experience for Merleau-Ponty is that the reflection discovers when it is carried out with sufficient thoroughness — this is perhaps not very exciting merely in summary, but it was exciting to Husserl and afterwards to Merleau-Ponty — you find the unreflected discovered by reflection. You have here something more than you had, let’s say, when you just decided to reflect and go off to find out what this adventure might be. “We loosen,” he says, “the intentional threads which attach to the world, and thus bring them to our notice.”

In other words, we’re tied, you might say, to the world; there is an unreflected. (See Figure 2.)

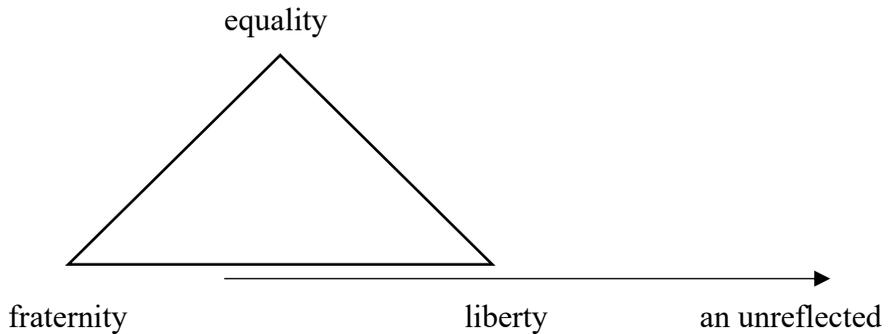


Figure 2. Merleau-Ponty's Reflection on Liberty

In our attempt at rapid survey, let's move to a consideration of something by Camus. I know that some of you are reading this author and that some of you have already discussed what I am about to indicate. Camus talks about murder and its relation to rebellion. Camus is saying: Well, we have discovered the gap between equality and fraternity. We put questions, which should be answered by reason, dealing with life. What we find is no answer. We get no response. We encounter absurdity, or this kind of silence. Then he says: Well, what are we going to do about that?

But Camus says: Well absurdity, while it might be a starting point, is not yet all there is. If I encounter absurdity, it is I who encounter it, and there is the matter of my dignity; it would be undignified for me who discovered this to do away with myself. I will carry on the inquiry and see what does in fact show up. In effect, I will rebel. Now, what you might rebel against would be the rational or rationalistic, the formalistic, the arrangements which tend to cookie-cutter us, so to speak, to make us all the same, and thus to be no respecter of our persons, and perhaps to enslave us.

One of the things which he says in that book, *The Rebel*, which some of you have encountered, one of the things in the many changes that he rings on this theme of the discovery that he makes, one of the many reflections which he makes is one on murder, one that seems particularly clear to me.

Suppose I am a slave and I make the reflection that I, too, am a man: I didn't decide to kill myself. I have rebelled. What should I do? Well, one of the things — and it seems to me this is a kind of underpinning of Camus' long reflections — is that I don't enslave the master in turn. "He rebelled [this is the murderer] in the name of the identity of man with man. And he sacrificed this identity by consecrating the difference in blood." As a slave I would rebel in the name of identity of man with man, because "...this world has no higher meaning, or if man is only responsible to man, it suffices for man to remove one single human being from the society of the living to automatically exclude himself from it."

If, in other words, my responsibility is to man. If I decide as a slave to rebel, what Camus is saying is that I had better not carry that rebellion to its ultimate — for all the power and energy that it does muster, because then I really haven't done anything except change places with the master. In other words, the rebellion is a contradiction, because I rebel against the condition of slavery, but after my rebellion there are still as many slaves and masters as before. Hence my rebellion is no rebellion.

This is why he says that it's in the void that we begin to discover some texture, that there is some kind of guidance, that there is what he calls a place for thought at the meridian, that there is the mid-point at which our rebellion, and this goes for rebellions both metaphysical, individual, social, and political, we had better consider stopping short of going the whole way. (See figure 3.)

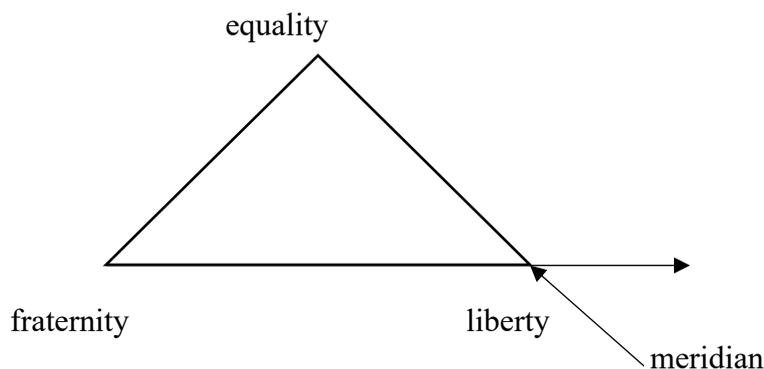


Figure 3. Camus's Reflection on Liberty

So, it seems to me that here are two reflective thinkers who show us that reflection really involves considering the other two notions of fraternity and equality. Maybe this is what we are suggesting, that as civilized people we do have to consider these other views.

With an emphasis on freedom or liberty as a starting point, this is the way in which they are considered. It's one thing to say, "Well, I am free. I will carry this as far as it goes." Merleau-Ponty says that whatever else may be true, there is an unreflected element. We aren't set free completely. Or, put another way, our freedom is finite. So also here, if we say, or reflect with Camus, that I am the equal of anybody, or my nation or my group is the equal of any, that still in all, if we are really to act and not to do nothing we have to encounter, if you will, the limitation of a logical sort. In a sense, morals encounter an aspect of being which sets up limitations.

Let us consider something similar from Sartre. Sartre wrote "The Question of Method" for a Polish Marxist journal, which had asked for an account of the relations between Marxist thought and existentialist thought. It's published in his book called *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*.

He tells this story: About the year 1949 there were numerous copies of a poster which covered the walls of Warsaw. It said: "Tuberculosis curbs production." Sartre says these posters grew out of the fact that there had been a decision by the government and that this decision was based upon a good enough feeling.

But he says that the content marked quite evidently that man had been eliminated from their thinking about man. That is, the man with the tuberculosis was not mentioned.

Sartre says: "At this point man is eliminated from a science of man which would be purely science. Tuberculosis is the object of a practical science. The doctor knows this and knows how to cure it. The Party determined the importance in Poland of the statistics. They figured out what the incidence of tuberculosis would do to production."

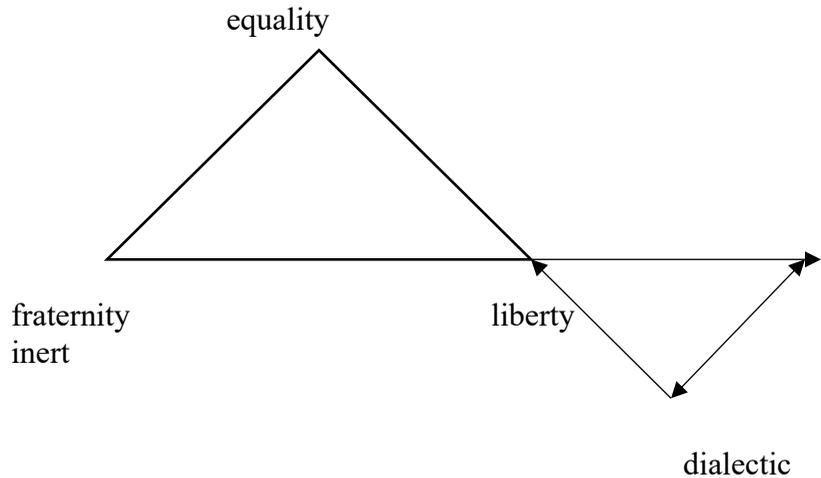
He writes that what you could read on these posters eliminated the tuberculosis person and refused to him his elementary role of being the mediator, or the bearer, between the sickness and the number of products produced in the factories. And he says this reveals a kind of new and double alienation in a socialist society at a certain moment in its development. The worker, he says, is alienated from the production. And in the theoretical or practical order, the human foundation of our knowledge of man is swallowed up in science.

In other words, there's a gap here. Here is your worker with the notion of the alienation that he undergoes in working in the factory. Here, on the other hand, is a sign that he's further eliminated from consideration; he can't even have his disease. With the notion of production itself, the man who has the disease drops out of the picture and we have only the disease.

Sartre's further notion is that once you have discovered the gap and even alleviated it you had better hold onto it if you can. You'd better, if you can, perhaps by action, keep it operative. He provides for this in the book in two ways: One, by saying you need to keep reason dialectic, that is, active, subject to the action or practice of man. On the other hand, you'd better realize that practice itself always encounters an inert element unless it be tied up with the actions of human beings.

Thus, you encounter the matter with which you're working and to some extent you can't take it over by your action completely.

Hence, in order to maintain freedom, we say, “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.”



Maybe we must go on to say, “It is the function of liberty to provide this vigilance.”

Let’s broaden the whole consideration and leave our three thinkers for now. We might say that they have filled out the meaning of “civilization as reflection.” We must consider that there are other things, that in addition to liberty, authentically to consider; you must consider equality and fraternity. But, likewise, if you take your stand in fraternity, then there are considerations in equality and liberty which you must keep also in mind. You must manage all three.

Perhaps civilization is the kind of juggling, which I’ve tried to introduce, at least in a certain frame, here this morning.

“Reflection” in Relation to “Rationality,” “Work,” “Freedom,” and “Power.” By George Drury

“Reflection” is frequently understood, particularly in American usage, as consciousness itself. You might say it is thinking about what we are doing. There is, however, also another meaning of “reflection,” and that is thinking about thinking about what we are doing.

This is the more usual meaning of the term “reflection.” It is the difference between consciousness which accompanies our trying to do responsibly whatever it is that we are trying to do and coming back upon how we are thinking about what we are doing. An example: Suppose you are studying history and you say, “Well, I’m not doing so well as I would like to do in my study of history.” You might then reflect, “How am I studying history? Maybe changing my procedure might make it all ever so much better.”

The themes of this course on “civilization” are:

- reflection,
- rationality,
- work,
- freedom, and
- power.

These concepts might sound a kind of chord or might constitute a kind of theme upon which variations might take place to our mutual enrichment. What I am going to try to do in this first brush with these themes is to ask what reflection might make of these other themes; what stands it might take, and what discoveries it might unfold to us.

Leon Sirota will talk about rationality. There’s a kind of central persuasion, at least in the West, which he will no doubt allude to, that this is a matter of a good deal of importance. In trying to bring reflection to bear on this, I suffer a certain embarrassment before coming before you. I am tempted to go through a lengthy but interesting trip or journey through the thought of the West developing around rationality and reflections on rationality. But I don’t want to pre-empt what Leon or others will have to say about rationality.

Hence, I thought I might give you reasoning, or rationality, in Aristotle’s somewhat simple sounding statement of the matter. Aristotle says that reasoning is a discovery that certain things, having been laid down, lead to results other than these things but which necessarily result through them. Something being laid down, if it’s reasoning, something follows. All our attention to reasoning is presumably to ensure that consequences are following by necessary connection.

To condense time, let’s enter the time machine. Let’s arrive about the time of Pascal — he lived from 1623 to 1662 — if only to indicate a notion of reflection as a kind of mirror, a notion of the mind in which what would be important is not so much your reflecting but that your mind or intellect contains the reflected. In other words, in one meaning of “intellect” (which has been derived from “to read within”), the notion would be that the universe, the cosmos, the world, would write itself, reflect itself, in the mirror of the mind, and that would be knowing.

When the accent is on the reflected, when one thinks he lives in that kind of world, then reasoning, or the rationality, is probably at its most stable, its most valued. There isn’t too much reasoning about it, because what reasoning does is try to sort out and arrange in consequence or following ways, inferential ways, what is reflected in the mind. Pascal asserted that if you attend to space the universe engulfs you, a human being, as a kind of tiny point. We can bring it in and have reflecting thought. But by thought, he says, we comprehend the cosmos, the universe.

Pascal presents for us this notion of the universe reflected in the mind. But he also has considerable worries, you might say, historic worries, worries which I think we import into our own century from the seventeenth century and find extremely interesting. It is true, I think, that after Pascal many people did think of the universe as rather well constructed according to geometry and written within easily if one didn't place too many obstacles within the mind.

But what we want to do is, I think, to keep rationality or reasoning as a kind of center, an enclosed part that we won't enter, since we propose to talk about reflection. It's true that the mind says, from the time of Aristotle on, that you can't reason about everything. In other words, everything can't be a conclusion. Somewhere you must have first premises, first statements, the given.

Reflection is concerned that you don't exceed your premises, that you do have consequences. It rides close to the process of reason going on. While reflection in its logical concern looks at reason, there is on either side a sort of lingering or a lurking possible consideration: We might call these *whence* what you reason about and *whither*. What do you do with what you reason about? I mean, what practically, or morally?

The question I think we might turn to now is how these lurkings — which may become for reflection the whole story — how do they come up for us? In terms of our own experience, I thought I might try concretely to indicate how reflection comes into, it seems to me, our consideration of the notion of civilization.

It occurs to me that a good way to indicate what reflection is might be to have reference to a kind of folk tale — that's concrete enough. This story concerns the search for the strongest man in Ireland. The searcher goes to a village and he sees a blacksmith who hasn't any fire in his forge. He's bending the horseshoes around the anvil and putting the cleats in with his thumbs. And the searcher says, "Well, you must be the strongest man in Ireland." The blacksmith protests that he is not anything compared to the man who lives a little further along. So, the searcher goes along the road and he sees a man in the fields plowing without horses. He says, "Well, surely you must be the strongest man." The plowman says, "Oh, no, the strongest man is in the next village, as a matter of fact, at the fair. I'd be there myself except I have all this work to do." As the searcher gets to the fair, he sees a crowd gathered. He works his way through the crowd, and here indeed is the strongest man, saying, "And for my next trick I'll grab myself by my belt in the back and hold myself out at arm's length." Reflection is somewhat like that.

Maybe the idea can be put very quickly with this quotation from the late nineteenth and twentieth century philosopher Maurice Blondel. I think this very short presentation he makes of reflection will bring out the notion of its power and its interest. He says:

It seems possible to present the different meanings of the term ‘reflection’ in a connected and systematic fashion. In a general way, reflection means [or implies] a double meaning which is spontaneous or voluntary or a kind of folding back on itself or psychic life. This means a kind of apparent or temporary inhibition of what’s going on; we stop and bend back. It constitutes, on the other hand, a kind of new fact, an original initiative force above and beyond the elements which have occasioned it. And this deploys or orients itself in two symmetrically inverse directions.

Insofar as it looks to the antecedent, what went before, the antecedent and effective conditions of either the fact of consciousness or of the given reality which is the object of its study and which it connects up with general ideas or laws, reflection is an analytical retrospect. And this carries itself forward towards the intention and the final concrete singular realization which is the practical term of its complex and total movement, reflection is a prospect.

If the word ‘reflection’ signifies equally these seemingly disparate steps, it is because, although in a usually implicit manner but one which can be made explicit, there is a solidarity between these two steps, these two directions.

Reflection, although it seems to suspend itself between these two meanings so seemingly diverse and independent, is only possible because it tends to constitute in the unity of the subject in which it occurs the solution of the ontological problem and the solution of the problem of destiny, or fate.⁶

Reflection is this new dimension, if you will, in our psychic life, and it has these two considerations. In other words, you might say the consideration of the conditions by which I am bound — What am I? — and the prospects of what I might do. And reflection can look in upon this to multiply and to develop some questions to examine.

Reflection finds at least, I think, this complexity when it looks to the question of psychic life. Blondel talks about the unity of the subject, recalling for us one of the things that in our considerations in social science we have found that part of what psychic life has appearing in it is interactively produced.

Here we can go back through George Herbert Mead, Thomas Cooley, and others (social interactionism). Part of what happens in our psychic life as subjects is produced by other subjects. This is a reflection which social science makes. It is also a reflection which even the loneliest philosophies seem likewise to require.

⁶ Maurice Blondel was a French philosopher who lived from 1861 to 1949. His most influential work was *L’Action*, (in English, *Action: Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*) which sought to establish a “philosophy of action” as applicable to phenomenology.

For example, Fichte, who gets pretty much down to the “I” and who says the universe is projected by me so that I may do my duty, my duty being to act freely, says that I’d better find at least one other possible human being to call upon me to be free and to do my duty.

Suppose that we, in any case, say that on one side of reason we do discover the self or an “I”. When reason is in full flower we don’t say, “Well, that’s kind of important.” Maybe, we say, “Of course *you* reason.” Think of some of the models of, say, nineteenth century science: The thing you should really do is efface yourself before objectivity. Of course, you will be honest in reporting your findings. But the important thing is not you so much as what can be given to reason.

In the book by H. Stuart Hughes entitled *Consciousness and Society*, you will find among other things reference to what he calls the *freischwende* — a kind of free-floating consciousness.⁷

Reflection discovers this when it begins to be somewhat less confident about the omniscience of reason. It runs into certain corrections and disappointments; that’s part of the story of Hughes’s book. But he does give you the notion of this.

As we reflected, there are partners in this dance. And one of the things you might hear recalled would be the numerous renditions of this partnership in Simmel. Suppose we say that important in this whole thing will be the subject, the I, the reasoner. Pretty soon you begin to get sort of lippy regarding reason and say, “Reason, you’re not so great after all. Why don’t I take off?”

One way of making it objective, although those who will talk about freedom and power will develop other aspects about this theme, would be to say: “It will be wonderful to join my freedom and power. I need and will command as much power as this somewhat heady or free-floating sense of freedom that I have. I am master of my fate, captain of my soul. I’m monarch of all I survey.” I think sometimes we do get this somewhat heady sense of freedom.

But one of the things in this complex, and one of the things that reflection will say about the situation, is that the problem of freedom — at first blush, you know, we would like to join freedom and power together and empower our freedom — the problem of our freedom ultimately is one of, you might say, being free with regard to our own power. This is one of the early themes in Plato’s *Republic*. Some of us have had discussions on this sort of theme in terms of Jean-Paul Sartre. It’s sort of a theme of the play *No Exit* that there is a freedom and power — and the “and” is difficult to manage.

⁷ This wonderful book is *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930* (New York: Vintage Book Editions, Revised 1977).

Maybe I can make it clear that this isn't only a question of the factual; matter is also inherent in what freedom is. In other words, I would say that freedom and power might be separated by a kind of gap.

In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre gives an example, a discussion of a man looking through a keyhole and another person coming upon the scene. There is this gap between freedom and power; the other can insert himself. And Sartre says therefore we metaphysically stand up and probably start to talk very rapidly; as a "thing," so to speak, he looks down upon us, and we are "put down."

We're apprehended there and so we spring up to try to regain our freedom. But it is because there is this kind of gap between the two that the other can get in. It's long developed in the play, but this is kind of the sense of it: Salvation would be to get freedom and power coincident. But that's the reason Hell is other's: because there is always this gap.

What I want to indicate is that reflection discovers the "I" of George Herbert Meade. It also discovers a kind of incomparability or incompatibility between freedom and power, which will doubtless have all kinds of manifestations. This is what we try to search for in our study of civilization, to survey the whole scene.

The other theme: Some people might say, as some philosophers do, "Let's have no nonsense about this. Reason is doubtless only a disability because it has been rarefied and hasn't been practically engaged. Let us attach it to work. Let us make of it a practical thing." You get the phrase: "Man makes himself."

Well, to change our figure a little bit, that is what we are trying to do via "reflection" or via "civilization."

Suppose we think of this as a bowl in which we would try to get interaction at its maximum extent. Now, we have already found some difficulties about spreading this consideration. It's one thing to set up an economic maximum generalization; then we begin to run into the cultural, the social, the political qualifications of that.

It seems to me that in "civilization" we're trying to take in society as a whole. Suppose you think of it as a liquid and we try to get it all in the bowl. Reflection, I suppose, might be trying to pour it in. Reflection said that reason, which would be the likely candidate for getting the whole covered, has various difficulties. Regarding something else, things keep bubbling up in what we would ideally and rationally try to make the smooth surface of civilization, the whole wide world, society, what you will. And with "freedom and power," something bubbles up and tends to spill out of our bowl.

So here we'll say let's have recourse to "work." That's a no-nonsense sort of thing. What bubbles up there?

I think about work as a recourse for the rational that reflection discovers something like this: The no-nonsense sort of thing usually finds as its first object of attack the moral, or the valuable. This is what I think tends to bubble up here and spill over the sides, so that we don't have it contained in our bowl of knowledge, our conceptual bowl.

This happens with Durkheim, who says that work itself needs to be seen as doubled, or two-fold — with the literal sense of "di-vision" or "to be seen as two": organic for solidarity, in the sense of di-vision of labor. This happens with Marx, for whom work brings along with it all that still needs to be done besides work, because what occurs, in human terms, or moral terms, the terms in which you say what's wrong in the diversity by labor, is that man gets cut up.

Can we rapidly translate "work" into a kind of consideration in which you again have a no-nonsense theme, as an important consideration in twentieth century philosophy? Let's have no nonsense, nonsense in language, the business of philosophy being to examine man's work, if you will, as exhibited in language. I think here it's either morals or art or poetry that causes the bubbling up.

Let's get on with the job, it is said, and that means the job as excluding, let us say, value judgments. But, moral judgments or statements of value get excluded from man's serious business or work-a-day exercise of reason, and yet these misbehaving value judgments keep coming back.

Another way to indicate this: Let us make "rationality" equal "work." I think this is, by the way, the kind of issue to which you might see E. H. Carr as one means of access, namely, that having made or established equality, how do we make it mean anything? Reason would ordinarily work in terms of equalities, substitutable kinds of entities, and the rest. But as a project for the solutions of all our problems, it doesn't always seem to work.

The poetic or artistic issue: A statement from the *Journal* of Delacroix, the painter, made in 1853. Reason would say, "Let's finish the job, so that we can write it up, report on it, and take it into account. The artistic or the moral orneriness of man, which seems incorrigible, says: "One always has to spoil a picture a little bit in order to finish it. The last touches which are given to bring about harmony among the parts take away from the freshness. In order to appear before the public, one must cut away all the happy negligences which are the passion of the artist."

Well, this opposition between, in Blondel's terms, the retrospective, which says, "Fine, are you finished now? Now we can study it and write it up" — the tension between that and the artist's saying, "I've just begun!" or the moral impetus in man which says, "Just finished? No! I have yet to do!"— this is discovered through reflection. Again, we get bubbling around reason these two kinds of things.

These seem to be radical difficulties in terms of reflection for the other candidate themes for civilization. But how are we to handle the problem of conceiving and dealing with in a significant way the problem of civilization, or the problem of society as a whole?

"Reflection" says, or tries to indicate, when our candidate is "reason": We haven't said much about the difficulties of reason, but all of us have these difficulties in our struggles in, and bouts with, the world that we have all come to live in.

Suppose we say that maybe "freedom," "decision," is all. Well, radical reflection says that this may appear to be all but making it all is going to be quite a project. The notion that maybe if we all work hard enough and are sober and industrious enough then all will be well, apart from whatever concrete difficulties that we have, seems to encounter a kind of irreconcilability between value, on the one hand, and work as factual or reasonable on the other.

Thus, when we try to put "civilization" in a bowl, it is suggested, it tends to boil over.

We might use as a peroration the juxtaposition in *Ecclesiastes* or *Kohelet* of the bowl and the heights of reflection. This is a time when people shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way. I suppose I might fittingly borrow for reflection the slogan: "Courage!"