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*In Response*

## IN RESPONSE

In his comments, Daniel Nicholls succeeds in saying more than a few things that I had scarcely realized about the ways in which I write and, therefore, of what I tend to take for granted. He sees in what I write a capacity 'to utilize the "obvious" whilst at the same time saying something about it.' Not every philosopher would take that as a compliment. Many philosophers and philosophies have quite other pretensions – to transcend the illusions of common thought and perception towards a higher plane of metaphysical philosophy – or of physics and mathematics. I find that Nicholls's remark both compliments and complements my work, however. The use of everyday language and example to disturb that everyday world to 'bring it into high relief' as Nicholls puts it – is a significant part of philosophical method. To juxtapose the esoteric language of metaphysics (*being-in-itself*, *being-for-itself*, *being-for-others*) with the everyday (*what there is*, *living for oneself*, *living for others*) is to haunt the everyday with a metaphysical imagination even as it reveals what metaphysics had erased from the coinage of common words. (I am thinking, of course, of Derrida's remarks about Anatole France's satirical view of philosophical language as coinage from which all marking has been erased).

Daniel Nicholls develops this theme of a heightened 'everyday' sensibility in his discussion of what I had made of Arendt's use of Augustine to describe memory and thought as a 'de-sensing' of one's perceptions. He notices how the picnic of my short fiction is a walk in the park compared with the trudge through the stony ground of thought's abstraction that philosophy is prone to take. He tells me how the comparison of sensory impression with subsequently recounting it evokes for him, in the one hit, the thoroughness with which the world 'fills up the senses' and the swiftness with which thought recalls that event in a few simple words. Nicholls dares (footnote xvi) to compare my writing with Proust's project – and manages to do this without embarrassing me by an impossibly great compliment. Proust engages in his 'recherche' for past ('lost') time, attempting both to 'recapture a past moment' and to make up for lost (wasted) time that was never recognised for what it was at the time. But the first project is impossible, and the second is self-defeating since the immense novel that Proust generates in the attempt to recapture time becomes yet one more way for writer and for reader to occupy time.

The jerky everyday conversation between people who understand each other emphasises the materiality of language. The efforts of speech and writing come to replace even as they re-present earlier experience. Working from Arendt's hints, I suggested how in our conversational shorthand we 'surpass' these modes of 'capture' of what had first escaped us. But the way Nicholls puts it gives back that idea as if quite new to me – that in the approach I evoke there is finally 'no question of capturing or of wasting' times past. We are unable to 'capture' what we experience, if only because the materiality of our speech and writing has their own new claims on our attention. This is a new twist on the old question whether *being* escapes our efforts to articulate it.

Nicholls reminds me of my having dealt with a similar thought in relation to Sartre and Beauvoir. Sartre's tensions in producing a phenomenological ontology had captured my attention, and I had tried to play out those tensions by reading his 'phenomenon' simply as 'how things are for us'. I had described this *how things are for us* as opening up what the world is. The everyday apprehension of this *how things are* neither disarms nor neutralises a metaphysical sense of reality as open to but not captured by language or experience. We can speak coherently of the *world itself*. It is this world itself *In-Itself* that is the moon at which philosophical dogs bay. The 'escape' of reality occurs for the good reason that the world presents itself to us as overflowing any current experience. There is a parallel here with the way in which experience overflows the language we use. This 'overflow' does not make language unable to describe that to which we refer. The so-called 'inadequacy' of language works to its advantage. To say that reality including the reality of another person as a conscious being *escapes* our efforts fully to comprehend or to describe it, testifies to those realities as quite other (*tout autre*). Describing is *tout autre* to 'capture'.

Daniel Nicholls and Marguerite La Caze, in their different ways, place what I wrote a good while ago (*Subjecting and Objecting*, 1982) in the context of the more recent *Genre and Void* (2003) and *Judgment after Arendt* (2007). The way they juxtapose these, shows more clearly what I had been up to in these successive projects that had seemed quite separate in their aims. As readers of Kant's third *Critique* are aware, it is not an insular or too personal remark that their work in this connection gives me a quite distinct kind of pleasure – the pleasure that Kant tells us is at the heart of judgment – pleasure in the renewal of one's sense of one's powers to understand and to come to know.

Nicholls, for instance, brings it to attention that in *Subjecting and Objecting*, in pursuing the theme of being confident, I had already moved onto the ground of judgment. If we are to be capable of judgment in some area, we have to foster conditions that produce a valid confidence, just as we have to foster conditions for our good health. To describe these conditions is to show how becoming confident is central to knowing and understanding. It takes judgment to see what we have a right to be confident about. The traditional emphasis on

*self-reflection* is too self-centred. Confidence is more outward looking. La Caze and Nicholls separately observe that as things turn out (twenty-five years later) in *Judgment After Arendt*, judgment is not only a performance of criticism but an emerging social enterprise – one that must take into account the ‘mechanisms of power.’

## SARTRE AND BEAUVOIR: GENRE AND VOID

What Michelle Boulous Walker observes in *Genre and Void* says something quite different about what I have been doing and thus, how one might develop it further. Whereas she has ‘*thought long and hard about the relation between Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, i.e. as a couple*’, I would not, before reading her piece, have been able to say that I had thought about them *as a couple*, despite having, as she points out, used the writings of each to gain a more nuanced understanding of the other. Certainly, *Genre and Void* is subtitled *Looking Back at Sartre and Beauvoir*. I ‘looked back’ at both those figures – and from time to time at them both together – because they are each philosophers of *being an object of regard*. And then, as Boulous Walker describes and elaborates so well, I was looking back at their ‘regard’ – of us now – and reconsidering that sense of being under regard. Michelle Boulous Walker is precise in her observation of the way in which I make Sartre sometimes the lead figure, and at other times, Beauvoir. And I realise from reading how she puts together what I do, that it is not only occasionally but persistently that it is their joint contribution that particularly interests me, and that I continually emphasise their degree of difference so that we can understand and use what *they* have written and done.

The ‘looking back’ of the sub-title that was most significant for me was that of *returning* the look that each of them still cast at us. I now see something more of the way in which I responded to the fact of their being a couple – sexually, emotionally, and in the intimate kind of showing and sharing their writings of all kinds that that permitted. For myself in the writing of the work, though, working from this sense of being under their regard, I thought of them primarily as two separate (though communicating) perceivers and recorders and theorists of our present social and philosophical scene. I meant to cast a look, within the sense of their regards, at each of their ways of looking at the Other and of handling being looked at. Though they communicated and modified each other’s philosophical views, each separately and in their different ways gave and received the regards of others. This contained a continuing challenge, and my use of the work of Le Dœuff and of Irigaray derived both from my high regard for their work, and from my judgment of its value, in description and critique, in separating and joining Beauvoir and Sartre. I meant neither to capitulate to their regards (as if only to give them my best regards), nor only or primarily to argue with them. But I did mean to challenge them at times – particularly Sartre. Having read Michelle Boulous Walker’s re-creation I would hazard putting it this way: I worked to contrive a way to look Sartre in the eye and not to objectify him. I was saying to his haunting spectre, ‘*See! In returning your look with interest (of both sorts) I do not make you my object – and I don’t now make an object of myself for you, either.*’

I set out to treat Beauvoir and Sartre as the individuals in a couple rather than as a couple, but Boulous Walker’s response shows how I do, without any sense of a need to explain or justify, collect them as if one when the occasion requires that. Boulous Walker sees very clearly that for me (in the writing of the book) Beauvoir’s ‘regard’ her ‘look’ at me with all the challenge it carried was not the same as that of Sartre’s. In this connection, Boulous Walker’s observations about how I sometimes identify with one or other of Beauvoir, Sartre, Le Dœuff and Irigaray are provocative. They are owed comment.

I am presently more inclined to muse than to comment on that dimension however, but Boulous Walker will feel her conjectures vindicated when I identify with one of the four figures in order to say anything about it. I am influenced by - I identify with Le Dœuff’s strategy of an ‘operative philosophy’. This means that we accept the need for theory. We do not imagine that neutral description is possible, or an ideal of what would solve philosophy’s enigmas of judgment. We do, however, retain our freedom to use parts of theories; we recognise that all theories contain parts that are in tension, and we use one or other of these ‘tensors’ in order to move thought out of an impasse. Thus I will use Sartre’s more extreme system in explaining some of Beauvoir’s commitments, and feel free to use those parts of what she has taken to modify, to show the possibilities for a future in Sartre’s. And so on, for now I am, if you like, ‘identifying’ with Boulous Walker.

So now we have a part explanation of how one can, if quick on one’s feet, temporarily identify with one and then other of the figures without inconsistency or confusion.

One needs some such method if one is, without prejudice, to deal with a *couple* (if you like) involved in a process of reciprocal criticism and close collaboration – precisely what went on between Beauvoir and Sartre when Sartre was writing *Being and Nothingness* and Beauvoir was mapping out what was to become *She Came*

to *Stay*. As from the outset, Beauvoir was coming to make freedom central in her thought while challenging Sartre's hyperbole of absolute freedom and his conviction that in viewing another as a consciousness one will objectify them.

Operating within the realm of public discussion, I look back at the look(s) cast by their writing. It is as a writing couple (no matter whether they are writing politically or sexually) that Boulous Walker, too, considers them, philosophically. In the same way, Le Dœuff follows the risky procedure of considering what they wrote to each other in letters on the same page as what they wrote in novels or theoretical books. It is as a writing couple that Le Dœuff used their letters to each other in examining the force (the '*morale*') of their philosophical views. One would say that in their wit, humour and feeling they were capable (with lapses) of a mutual regard within each other's subjectivity. Perhaps someone has to pay, for they shared their subjectivities in being prepared to objectify, between them, Sartre's 'contingent' loves, who thus had a very mixed fortune in having been involved with 'the couple'. (I read Beauvoir as the better guardian of her 'others', when communicating about them with Sartre. What mortified Nelson Algren was that she wrote about herself and him in a book – for the general public.)

Michelle Boulous Walker comments on how I unite Sartre and Beauvoir at the end of the book. I am glad to be made to look at that again. Their reciprocal encouragement and criticism of each other gave them their power as a writing couple. Each took on the critical regard of the other without being petrified by that.

## ARENDR AND JUDGMENT

Paul Formosa has two main lines of criticism of the line about thinking that I develop from Arendt's. Arendt describes Eichmann as strikingly *thought-less*. Formosa objects that it is hard to imagine that he never had any thoughts. There is evidence of his thoughts in his diaries and notes. Both Arendt and I would make a good deal of the difference between 'having thoughts' and 'thinking'. In Turgenev's *Father's and Sons*, the son says of the ageing father, 'his head is full of memories – and he remembers nothing'. Language is a flexible thing. I would have to *legislate*, I suppose that thoughtless thoughts are not to be called *thinking*. But we do recognise a difference between what people say when they tell you what they *think* and the manner and tone of their language when they engage in *thinking*. To say what you think is no more than to express an opinion. Holding opinions is what forestalls thinking. When I hear someone ranting the usual 'thoughts' about Australia now being a 'soft target' for 'illegal immigrants', I want an end to their 'thoughts'. I want them to start *thinking* about the very idea that Australia is a 'target', whether 'soft' or 'hard'. I want the person to start asking themselves how someone who is in a boat hundreds of kilometres off the coast of Australia is already an 'immigrant', legal or not. And I want them to think about whether someone who lands and requests asylum is doing anything illegal.

Someone who did think about these things might not come to an open door policy towards those who request asylum. They might come to the conclusion that Australia cannot handle larger numbers of unplanned arrivals. One can discuss that. But one cannot have a conversation or dialogue with those who 'say what they think' when they need to 'think what they say'. If I have no dialogue with myself I am in no position to have it with another. One might say I should begin to *think* what I 'think'. Perhaps Eichmann did really *think* about some matters. Our interest in him, however, is in relation to that principal part of his life for many momentous years that was the concern of the trial.

Formosa offers us an essay on the relation between thinking and thoughtfulness that is of great interest. *Being thoughtful* may be a general character trait, or a way of undertaking a particular activity. In Eichmann, this 'thought-lessness' is a trait he displays in the persistent undertaking of an activity that generally characterises the major part of a certain period of his life, and which seems (to Arendt) to have persisted (or perhaps it was reactivated) through the period of his trial. In this context it is a distraction to say that Eichmann is bound to have thought about various things – perhaps in a thoughtful frame of mind. As Formosa points out, someone may be thoughtful about their approach to one kind of issue without being thereby 'a thoughtful person' as considerate of the position and feelings of others. In elaborating Arendt's views on the significance of *thinking* I said that a conversation with oneself is a *thoughtful* interchange of expressions. 'Thoughtful' qualifies the relevant interchange. In observing Eichmann as defendant she was struck by an *absence of thinking* that she described as 'thought-lessness'. Perhaps we can imagine that Eichmann was thoughtful in the way he considered cataloguing his stamp collection. But to put this point in the context of Arendt's judgment of him would be a grim joke.

If we distinguish *thoughts we have* from *thinking that we do*, then we can keep thinking closely reined in

towards thoughtfulness. As more than the occurrence of thoughts, thinking is the effort to make some sense. Furthermore, a rant, though systematically directed at an object, is not *thinking* whether one conducts it publicly or within one's mind. To rant is to lack a critical voice that monitors and checks any one tendency of thought and feeling. This much must be kept of the idea of thinking as a kind of *inner conversation* that Arendt adapts from Plato. Lastly (to address Formosa's degree of separation of *thinking* from *being thoughtful*) I would hold to the idea that to be a critical friend to yourself in this conversation is central to being *able* to think. Arendt's example of the attempt by Richard III, on the eve of battle, to think about his situation demonstrates what Formosa makes much of – that a thoughtless person may have a complex inner life. Shakespeare does not display him as yet engaged in thinking, however. At most, he is on the verge of it. Shakespeare's Richard is unnervingly like Eichmann in how he regards the suffering his actions bring about. He doesn't like the cries of the ghosts who come to upset his dedication to ambition. His agitation does not become remorse. He cannot bring the voice of ambition into 'conversation' with voices of his victims he has internalised.

Paul Formosa makes a detailed critique of the limitations of my working out the myth of the Will in terms of the state of *being willing* – he welcomes part of my use of it. Arendt intensifies complaints about the way the will has been thought of – from that guilt-ridden paralysis of Saul of Tarsus, to Nietzsche's lampooning of 'conflicts of will' as self-interested inner melodrama. By working back from Nietzsche to Kant she can refuse the 'noumenal' status Kant gives to the will's freedom; she can establish an approach that gets her clear both of Nietzsche's satire of the will and Heidegger's will 'not to will'. Arendt does not vaunt thinking above the will, nor above action. Rather, she warns us against setting up thinking as a new ideal, as a higher form of life. Only action can solve the tension that is implicit in the existence of will, she observes. I say that someone may be forced to become *willing* to commit a crime that they deplore, and would not do but for the coercion. To have a fully resolved will we need to act willingly rather than reluctantly. Formosa says that we may have to do some things that we remain reluctant to do, and that, while unwilling, it is *strength of will* that we show in doing what may be our duty.

I would give a different account of Formosa's examples, I remain sceptical of his 'strong will' that makes us determined in our actions despite our reluctance. Of course we may have initial reluctance before becoming fully resolved to do what we ought, or must. And one could not deny that we do many things in the unsatisfactory irresolution of reluctance – of forcing ourselves to do something for which we have some strong reason. We do these things because we have decided that it is best or that we must. This does not show that there is something called the Will as an inner voice with a special power. (We do speak sternly to ourselves at times, and to some effect. That is not *the* will. Such inner talk is *part of* our being willing. But this matter needs a good deal of further work, and Paul Formosa's critique is valuable whatever the outcome of these particular points.

## GENRES

Marguerite La Caze has fastened on my work over some decades both in terms of some genres of philosophy that inform it, and a (developing) genre that has emerged in the way I approach philosophical problems. I could cross-reference her observations with a remark that John Sutton notes me making (in 1989) about a paper published in 1967.

'Yet, unlike most of those much influenced by Wittgenstein's later methods, we felt free to pay attention to the implications of causality implicit in everyday ideas about ourselves as people. This close fusion of an attention to concept and experience, with a readiness to use examples and metaphors of cause and effect disconcerted some readers. The writing was too experiential for the extreme physicalists, and, for the pure conceptualists, too 'causal' in its imagination of those phenomena.'

Working within the style of analytical philosophy on the then current controversy about the 'infallibility' or 'incorrigibility' of judgments about one's sensations led to the thought of how one misjudges those things self-deceptively. Sartre (whom I had read while studying science before I took up philosophy) gives a central role to *bad faith* in relation to the traditional 'translucence' of consciousness. My work swerved back in that direction, and then into the phenomenological tradition that stems from Husserl.

Our position here in Australia as importers of such philosophical languages gives us a particular angle of vision – and burden of translation – in forming a philosophy here in idioms that we can wear. In dealing with what are patently importations, written in languages not one's own, we realise too that this was no less the case with the British and US styles that we had been meant to accept as part and parcel of our own goods, grist to our own mills. We have to come to terms with them, too, in order to write philosophy that avoids 'doubling the text' (in Derrida's sense) and does something more than to give expositions and critiques of imported established

discourses. At any rate, that is at least part of the story of the sense of a general need that we have here to work out a genre – our genres – of philosophy.

A book like *Genre and Void* is indebted to Sartre and Beauvoir's style and vocabulary, but working through their ideas by drawing (partly) on critiques made by Irigaray and Le Dœuff – each of whom have achieved distinctive styles that register in many languages and cultures – helped provide somewhere from which to write. Marguerite La Caze suggests that I may be over-critical of Sartre at times – siding too much or too readily with Le Dœuff or Irigaray, perhaps. Sartre's sense of being joined with others by common ends when travelling on a system of mass transport may be, she suggests, more than the relief at being with others without being under the critical eye of anybody. I might have made more of the phenomenon that he lights upon in a neighbouring context – of 'joining in'. I admire Sartre's sharp eye and deft hand as he sees and touches upon such a range of activities that a philosopher may overlook. I am glad that the passage where I say that my misgivings about the direction of some of Sartre's work are expressed sharply (where they are) because 'it is as if Sartre has come so close to a solution.'

La Caze suggests that Irigaray may have (in certain criticisms) 'demonised' Sartre. I don't read her that way, but certainly she does see Sartre's way of describing things as having gained a good deal of momentum. It needs, therefore, some degree of force or sharpness to arrest it from obliterating possibilities that she wants to keep open. At the same time – as La Caze points out, Irigaray takes Sartre seriously. She finds that Sartre's text touches on just those sensitive points that she wants to write about. One might read a friendly but correcting voice in Irigaray, as easily as one might detect a note of inimical rejection of Sartre. As La Caze reminds us, Irigaray evokes how when I encounter someone I know, I am attracted towards rather than being repelled or fearful of the chasm of consciousness I sense between us. That difference is a depth to be plumbed ('divined'), not a foreign territory against which I must arm myself.

## REMEMBERING

John Sutton and Carl Windhorst's essay on the paper by Charlie Martin and myself, and on my re-working of it some twenty years later, is rich in comment and critical detail. They conclude with some very acute questions about remembering 'as from the event itself' and 'retaining information separately or subsequently acquired about the event.' They remind us that there are all kinds of causal influences from factual memory upon what may seem like a direct remembering of an event itself. They question whether one can maintain a distinction between recall as from an event and some well-founded story we are told (and then introject) that results in our 'remembering' the event equally well. They ask, in effect, whether one can maintain the distinction between remembering that one was born in a certain hospital, and remembering going to a circus.

In practice, retention of information and recall of an event are often not distinct. One *remembers* in a fusion of retention of an event and accumulation of information and subsequent images of it. (Cross-examination of an eyewitness in a law court is the attempt to restore the division.) Some things we remember are particularly liable to such fused memory. We remember *the kinds of things we used to do* between finishing our correspondence school assignments and dinnertime – roaming in the bush until dark – returning by starlight in winter when the days shortened. In remembering such *typical* doings and experiences there need be no one event – traumatic or momentous – that is recalled. The remembering of such times is not like the retention of information told to us, but the generality in such memory is almost bound to involve the integration of retention of fact. What others have said to us lends a narrative to (let us say) photographs and drawings (now forgotten) that do their quiet work in giving a rounded reality to the scattered images of 'what we used to do and experience' – the fading light, the transition to dark as the bush took on its different, nocturnal life.

I can accept that the replay of memory will be at the behest of current mood and of attitudes to the future that is served by recalling some things and quietly passing over others. And factual memory does round out and modify memory of the event. But I am not convinced that this threatens the very distinction between remembering as from the event and retaining facts. Sutton and Windhorst appear to *use* this distinction when they emphasise how we draw upon retained information in rounding out and making sense of events that come back to us. If one were to forsake the distinction, how would one describe the complication they describe so clearly? What we might need to look at more critically is the picture of a world already divided into 'things to recall' that we must match up with a subsequent 'remembering' of them. We get one picture of remembering depending on when we begin by thinking of some 'thing' to be recalled and then judge a 'memory' by how well it matches it. We get another picture when we begin by thinking of a putative 'memory' and then search the past (by any available method) to see if some event corresponds with it.

In *Remembering 'Remembering'* I tried to evoke this phenomenon of progressive grasp of the meaning of an early recollection. The narrator 'remembered' that his dog disappeared but that it used to return sometimes during the night and lick his hand. He discovers, however, that he could not have remembered the dog doing that after its disappearance. His father confesses that he shot the dog – it could not have returned in the night, as the narrator seemed to recall. Yet the narrator's memory is not only vivid, but has always been of real events – first the disappearance and then of the dreams themselves. The dreams themselves arise from the narrator's not understanding events. He had been mis-informed. The dreams become part of the source of the informed recall of what really transpired at that time.

In philosophising about memory, we relapse into the mistake of thinking of (veridical) memory as the retrieval of earlier knowledge. This is because we are concerned about whether the one who remembers 'gets it right'. Philosophers then begin to think that remembering may be of non-existent events because people who remember may be wrong in a good deal of what they say about them. We can keep to the idea that remembering is always what derives from what laid down its trace. If one is remembering and yet the statement one utters is false, then the fault lies in a misconstrual of the event remembered. That misconstrual may stem from the first perception of it.

Sutton and Windhorst question whether we can cling to an idea of a stable information-laden 'memory trace'. Who knows what theories and discoveries may come to hold sway concerning the workings of the brain, interacting brains, and cyborgs. There is an interplay, certainly, between an event experienced and subsequent information about the event; there will be continual revision of one's concept of the event itself. So long as one can correctly tell (and feel) about what one did, does it matter to the question of *recalling the event* whether it is finally the outside information that has completely taken over? I think so, but cannot fully argue the matter here. Let me remain with the established facts that worry many about the viability of a 'memory trace' as from the event remembered. What we remember *is* a complex function of effects of the event remembered and attendant and subsequent factors that inform, shape and colour the recollection. The idea of a memory trace that is informationally adequate to what one remembers can survive these worries, I think. Let me put my thought in terms of an analogy.

One would not doubt the idea of the grooves on a vinyl disc as informationally adequate to the music that was recorded years earlier. And yet, the quality, tone and ambience of the music that appears in one's room involves a complex relation between disc, amplifiers, speakers, room acoustics and auditor's taste, attention and education. We need to consider this complex interplay in order to account for changes that emerge over periods of technological change, periods during which you 'play' the music from time to time. This fact does not impugn the status of a relatively stable engram of the musical event.

The system of brain storage is not that of a vinyl disc imprint, certainly. There need be no permanent 'stamp'. A continual process of regeneration or reformation of a system that can map what was gained from the event remembered is all that stability requires. The faithful vinyl analogue disc, too, is replaced by the infinitely repeatable digital form. Then that is replaced in turn by some ghostly storage in a hard-drive. Still, each system faithfully maps, in its own way, the structure of sound of the musical event recorded.