

ON THINKING

by

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Abstract:

This is a playful critique of rationalism in general, exhibiting and meditating on the paradoxes and ironies inherent in logic and intentionality, showing up as suspect, sometimes self-reflexively, categories of meaning-acquisition. It is inspired by the linguistic pragmatist tradition and owes much to the later Wittgenstein's ordinary language philosophy. In this unabridged form it takes as its target a number of subjects: the Bush administration's pretexts for invading Iraq; classical literary theories on the relationship between poetry, virtue, and pleasure as they relate in general to the pleasure principle (Aristotle, Wordsworth, Freud); evolutionary sexual psychology (Geoffrey Miller); contemporary Western perspectives on the value of time and truth-telling; and ends with a lengthy interpretation of a couple of lines from *Hamlet* (as does the abridged form). As I take discursiveness to be inherently celebratory, indulging as it does in inclusivity, I mean this quality of the essay to steer it away from a check on certainty and more toward a celebration of certainty's limits. As such the essay argues for a faith in political transformation: form is function because truth is provisional, a principle threatened by fundamentalism in any guise.

On Thinking

It cannot be that axioms established by argumentation should avail for the discovery of new works, since the subtlety of nature is greater many times over than the subtlety of argument.

Francis Bacon, 1620

Zen practice is to open up our small mind.

Shunryu Suzuki

I sometimes feel all I have of myself is my thoughts. I *think* therefore I *am*, the philosopher tells us. So to explore all of what I possibly am, I can simply think about all there is to think about—my what a big thought, suddenly I'm enormous! But I also suspect that thought requires selection; that is, selection provides *meaning*, which makes me want to narrow down the number of thoughts to think about to the topic what thinking means. Now on first thought we might think that that first thought—all there is to think about—is greater than the second thought—what thinking means—simply because no thought, including the thought 'what thinking means,' could possibly be outside of the class of what there is to think about, and I *did* express thought two as a narrowing down of thought one, implying that the first thought is greater than the second. But on second thought, notice that the second thought *includes* the first thought, in that by thinking about what thinking means we are subsuming all possible subjects of thought, and thus the second thought is bigger than the first.

However, let's remind ourselves that that assessment was a *second* thought, and Descartes himself privileged thoughts that come to us *a priori*, prior to experience—that is, intuitively, so according to our esteemed epistemologist the first thought would be greater by virtue of being first and thus more intuitive—all there is to think about is therefore greater than what thinking means. But what if we think that thoughts should be judged not by the chronological order in which they appear in our heads, that is by their status as intuitions, but rather by a more shall we say thoughtful approach, using, say, deliberative judgment or a disinterested understanding? Wouldn't it stand to reason that the second thought is bigger, that what thinking means is greater than what there is to think about, which was our second thought?

On third thought, we could have come to that same conclusion without straying from Descartes' assessment if that second thought just happened to have been my first thought—that is, if my first inclination had been that the qualitative inquiry into what

thinking means is more significant than the quantitative inquiry into all there is to think about. But the fact remains that it was *not* my first thought, so to stay true to Descartes we must resist all this deliberation and simply believe the first thought superior by virtue of being first. But don't we wonder if Descartes' assessment came to him as an intuition or not? If it did, wouldn't that be begging the question, in that it would be an intuition supporting the qualitative status of intuitions? And likewise if, on the other hand, the assessment was derived after reasoned deliberation, wouldn't its veracity be questionable since it emerged from the more inferior of the two forms of thinking?

Descartes himself got out of this pickle by reasoning or intuiting, or both, that reason and intuition are one and the same. Being a good Jesuit, he confessed to himself, us, and God that reason and intuition are merely two different forms of God-given confessions, and that when we have thoughts we believe are true, which by virtue of being true would make them confessions, we can conclude they *must* be true by virtue of their being confessions, which are by definition expressions of God's infinite intelligence. And since God would never be so unkind as to trick us, these reasonings slash intuitions can never be false. From these premises (he was in Paris), he concluded that God exists to give him and us these God-given insights into prioritizing thoughts. Now, given how much this all sounds faith-driven, as the current vernacular would have it, you might be surprised to hear that as a Renaissance philosopher he was conducting this inquiry—you better sit down for this—to wean philosophy and thought from the medieval reliance on faith! I think this would have been good stand-up comedian material for him, but I hear he did his best work lying in bed, where he is said to have spent his entire mornings thinking big thoughts while staring at shadows on the ceiling. That in itself is a funny thought from our over-driven work ethic perspective, that one of the greatest thinkers of the modern world liked to spend his mornings in bed, but the humor gets doused a bit when we learn that he died from pneumonia he contracted from the brisk 5 a.m. air of Stockholm where he was fulfilling his teaching contract during those hours upon the insistence of Queen Christina. And even less funny is that, according to recently discovered letters to and from his doctor, he most likely died *not* from pneumonia, but from arsenic.

We would be forgiven for suspecting the Church as the culprit, given that the Roman Inquisition was in full swing and his life's work was a violation of the Church's dictate that faith always trump reason. His intention in this violation was ironically to *save* Christianity from faith by reconciling it with reason, because he knew faith alone would soon be an obsolete source of knowledge given the way science was providing an astounding array of predictable facts of nature contrary to our commonsense notions of it, which notions, one could argue, are usually founded on faith, faith in the veracity of our perceptions or in God or both, each in fact often being invoked to support the other. Yes, he wanted to bring Christianity right into his bedroom's morning light of modern thought, the light of *reason*; but I guess the Church wasn't too keen on using reason to prioritize thoughts. I'm not sure what their reasoning was, but it appears it was made *in spite* of Descartes' claim that the reason comes from God, who, he would argue, is his source of faith. And yet, their reasoning for rejecting reason to prioritize thoughts may have been precisely that it is this sort of behavior of his, reasoning that reason and faith can be reconciled, that *subverts* faith. So they may have rejected his reason not in spite of his claim that his reason came from God, but *because* of it.

Now, though of course it isn't funny that he was suffering from poisoning, and doing so while suffering 5 a.m. tutoring sessions, I confess I find this whole scenario funny, which confession of course, according to Descartes, *makes* it funny, though of course you can't *make* something funny—it must just *be* funny, intuitively, which fact, though it's funny how we got here, supports his initial claim that intuitions are a greater source of truth than faith. Nonetheless, I must confess that's a funny way of prioritizing thoughts.

But why am I so concerned with prioritizing thoughts? If I feel that to think is all I am, then do I believe prioritizing thoughts is a way of ordering myself? And why am I using bigness to denote superiority of thought? Do I really think the bigger the thought the bigger the self, such that I am only as much a self as the size of my thoughts? Why not assume, as Zen Buddhists seem to, that the *smaller* thoughts are always superior? That is, because their definition of being is as inclusive of our physical as it is of our intellectual natures, they think of thinking as, if not a minor aspect of being, at least not a major one—especially excluded in their definition of being is the exclusive type of thinking we refer to as big thoughts, as opposed to the smaller thoughts that make up the more mundane aspects of our lives. To the Zen Buddhist, therefore, small thoughts, especially if you happen to be in the midst of one of those Zen debates so small they are in fact little sword thrusts, are precisely what you are and big thoughts are precisely what you are not, and if you think otherwise while in the midst of that sort of Zen debate, well, you may not be around long enough to support or deny your conclusions.

But if Zen Buddhism keeps you alive in that sort of debate by having promoted all your sword fighting debate life the notion that small thoughts are bigger than big thoughts, and thus contributed to your practice as a skilled sword fight debater in the midst of sword fight debates, then hasn't it created and promoted for inculcation a big thought, and hasn't it done so perhaps to an extent greater than anything else it has done? In fact, couldn't it be said that *any* thought that promotes our survival is a big thought, no matter how small or large it appears? And if all survival thoughts are big thoughts, then all beings with brains are having them all their waking lives; dogs, birds, voles, squirrels, by virtue of their thinking promoting their own survival, are having thoughts as big (why not?) and certainly as often as we are.

David Hume thought differently than Descartes on the origin of thoughts, believing they come from experience rather than intuitions. But he critiqued his own favored epistemology by pointing out that when we abstract from it a cause-effect relationship among two events, which is the basis, he says, upon which we believe an event or thing is true or real, we are begging the question, in that our thinking that an event is a cause comes merely from experience itself, the habitual practice of giving an event causal status merely because it happened near its putative effect or is temporally contiguous with it time and again. That is, we conclude a cause-effect relationship among two events from nothing else but the mere habit of thinking it as such, and given that all we think we know comes from cause-effect assumptions we must conclude that we don't know anything we think we know, and furthermore, although he's an Enlightenment thinker and thus believes in the progress of science, *we never will*.

But he points out that even though we can't derive any certainty from our perceiving faculties—because the process we use to deduce cause and effect from those perceptions is begging the question—those faculties will continue to function efficiently,

and in fact, if we take the phrase he uses to describe the *reason* we make that erroneous deduction—“final cause”—as an evaluative one and say that he’s calling it a superior thought, then we’ve stumbled upon an even more astounding paradox than the one in Descartes’ logic, in that he attributes this way of thinking to—and prepare yourself—*intuitions!* Yes, he has devoted a major portion of his philosophical career to championing experiences as superior to intuitions as a source of knowledge, and now he turns around and calls intuitions the *final cause* of all causes. And he does so precisely because he acknowledges them as necessary to our survival. In a remarkable passage written, mind you, a hundred years before the publication of *The Origin of Species*, Hume attributes this habitual way of thinking about cause and effect to a process that sounds suspiciously like natural selection:

Custom is that principle, by which this correspondence has been effected; so necessary to the subsistence of our species, and the regulation of our conduct, in every circumstance and occurrence of human life. Had not the presence of an object instantly excited the idea of those objects commonly conjoined with it, all our knowledge must have been limited to the narrow sphere of our memory and senses; and we should never have been able to adjust means to ends or employ our natural powers, either to the producing of good or avoiding of evil. Those [he adds, perversely I might add] who delight in the discovery and contemplation of *final causes* have here ample subject to employ their wonder and admiration [italics his] (Hume, 369).

Perhaps this is just a rhetorical move; perhaps he’s more interested in ensuring us that just because we perceive just fine doesn’t mean he’s wrong, that just because our thinking helps us survive doesn’t mean we know anything. But what’s that business about *final causes*? Now, even if big thoughts *do* exist and can be, within that possibility, meaningful, the philosophical consequences of this thought—that an erroneous thought that nonetheless functions as a survival mechanism may be a *final cause*—would be difficult enough to think about, but keep in mind that he has said we have no reason to believe we know *anything*. It’s as if I’m in a small boat in a bathtub and sinking, and I’m bailing as fast as possible, but the water I bail goes right back in the tub—sure, my boat is sinking faster than I can bail, but I’m still just sitting in the tub.

Let’s bail anyway (not in the sense of skidaddle, though by all means feel free—it don’t get any easier)—let’s stay in the boat in the tub and bail to see how fast we can do it while we’re sinking, and when we’re sunk we’ll look around and see where we are in case we happen to find ourselves anywhere else, though since he’s saying we already know where we are, which is nowhere, we might as well sit back and enjoy our knowing that, which is also our not knowing it. Okay, he’s saying that not only do small thoughts—intuitive and what we now would call evolutionarily selected thoughts—prevent big thoughts—thoughts that may provide some real, rational justification for why one event causes another and thus provide the foundation for believing an event a fact—but they apparently prevent any thought at all, for if we can’t know if anything is a fact, then we can’t know that we exist, and if we can’t know that we exist, then we can’t say we’re thinking.

Now, you might say that just because we can't *know* we're thinking doesn't mean we're not thinking. But I would retort that if we can't know *we* are *we*, that is, if I have no reason to assume it is I who is thinking as opposed to, say, a cloud or a stone or The Empire State Building, then who is it we would be talking about when we claim we're thinking? But wait, Hume also argues that in spite of this defect in our thinking that keeps us deluded about whether one thought causes another, these deluded thoughts are necessary to our survival! He's rendered moot our debate on whether survival thoughts are big or small, in that we can't say they're thoughts at all, for we don't know anything, but he nonetheless concludes that in spite of those thoughts preventing our knowing we even think at all, they are the preconditions of our lives. We can therefore conclude, perversely I might add, that he's claiming that small thoughts, what I'm calling survival thoughts, both prevent and cause our existence.

On first thought this thought of Hume's appears to be the biggest thought possible, for it subsumes all other thoughts. It trumps all thoughts by negating them. But on second thought, we could say that it could be just a playful thought about thought itself, not meant to deny all other thoughts but merely to provide some insight into our thinking. That is, Hume may have at first been serious about his inquiry, and then, upon realizing the seriousness of his inquiry, decided not to be so serious about it. That is, at first he reveals that as a big thought itself, his thought was able, so to speak, to burst through the first line of defenses of small thoughts, peer over the castle walls, and get a glimpse of how those small thoughts conduct their business, how it is they trick us into thinking they are in fact *big* thoughts when they aren't big at all but merely small fragmented perceptions that are, though thoughts, no bigger than the smallest thought imaginable.

It must have been a delightful sight at first. To suddenly see the unknown enemy—whom all your life you'd thought of as monstrous giants—as no giants at all but a bunch of small aimless squirrels bumping into one another without a clue as to where they're going or why. But on second thought, the delight must have worn off and he must've began to see the serious side of what he was saying, which may have impelled him to lighten up, or, since he's an Enlightenment thinker, *enlighten* up; for he must've seen, on second thought, that as soon as his thought saw what thoughts are, it must've looked down to see itself for what it really is, a small thought, for it must include itself in its claim that all thoughts are merely small fragmented perceptions that have no claim on cause or effect. That is, when it saw itself looking over the castle wall of small thoughts, it saw that it was there for good, like a lobster crawling into a lobster trap, but this is no ordinary trap, for it provides a special kind of insight, or the inverse of insight, in that it allows you to see yourself as nothing but a lobster who'd previously thought it was a complex thinking being, and furthermore it now sees every creature in the trap as forever barred from the sea of big thoughts, even if now he can see the sea for what it is, which is a sea of *pseudo* big thoughts, full of mere lobsters, and that in fact the trap isn't even *necessary* to see the truth about thoughts for what they are, for every thought and every *mode* of every thought, including the trap itself, in reality is merely another lobster bumping into other lobsters thinking themselves complex thoughts yearning to get a glimpse from inside that trap, a trap that appears from the outside to provide magical thoughts but from the inside merely provides the vision that the trap, the sea, you, and all your mere lobster friend thoughts have no reason to believe exist!

But why am I assuming his thought can't break through the trap back into the sea of big thoughts, even if it *is* the sea of *pseudo* big thoughts? Why must we assume that as soon as he had the thought that thoughts are mere lobsters he suddenly developed amnesia and forgot all about himself as a complex thinking being. Or, since this is my metaphorical party and I can cry if I want to, cry if I want to, why can't he split in two like an amoeba, one half staying with the amoeba-lobster thoughts and the other with the amoeba-complex-thinking-being thoughts, the only difference being the amoeba-lobster thoughts don't know about the deluded complex-thinking-being thoughts, whereas the deluded complex-thinking-being thoughts, though they know about the amoeba-lobster thoughts, don't know that they themselves are also amoeba-lobster thoughts. Why can't he be in two places at once, each half of the amoeba with the same DNA with delusory genes manifesting differently. That thought, I think, jibes with this thought: that his claim that every thought has no basis by which to validate itself could be simultaneously true and false. That is, if we apply its truth to itself, then precisely because it's claiming that no assertion can be validated its own assertion cannot be validated, which means it could be false, and if it can be false and we apply its falsity to itself we can validate it to prove that it's true, which would in turn invalidate its own truth. Bertrand Russell must have experienced a certain degree of relief when he stumbled upon this paradox, in that it released him from the duty of finding logical certainty, a rather tall order in light of his thoughts being, as Hume showed us about 150 years earlier, mere lobsters in a trap. Being reminded that your thoughts are lobsters in a trap can be freeing. How so? I can't explain it, meaning I can't fully comprehend it, or, rather, believe its meaning is not fully comprehensible, except intuitively, which makes me think more fondly of Descartes, though no less of Hume.

Another reading of Hume's motive for pointing out that just because it appears we can think without a hitch doesn't mean we can therefore dismiss his own doubts is that he wanted to encourage us not to get depressed by uncertainty, to feel assured that even if we can't use reason to explain how we think about things it's okay, because we'll go on functioning well enough in our deceived state, and that in fact our ability to perceive, even if we can't explain it, is not only as worthy a skill as his ability to reason that we have no reason to believe we are perceiving anything, but is also in fact *of greater value!* Is this what he means when he alludes to survival thoughts, deluded as they are, as providing *final causes*? Is he possibly saying that a method of thought being evolutionarily selected to promote survival is not only a thought, which he had denied to all other thoughts, but a *special kind* of thought, a thought that causes all other causes? But if we don't know if those secondary causes are causes *of* anything, what kind of causes could evolutionarily selected thoughts be causes of? This is what I mean when I say he could've decided to take the edge off, for when he says evolutionarily selected thoughts may be *final causes*, he *must* be joking.

I believe that what Hume is saying is that our small thoughts—the ones that erroneously assume they are causes of other thoughts—are in fact big thoughts. But is that Hume or me? How would Hume answer that question given that he says we can't know who we are because all our thoughts come from thoughts that assume one minute we're one person and the next we still are, when in fact, though we can't detect facts, we have no reason for assuming that? I think Hume and I would agree with Hume and me that what we mean by survival thoughts being final causes is that just because our

thoughts on thoughts are big thoughts doesn't mean that small thoughts aren't. For Hume was no dummy, and at the risk of pointing out the obvious here I'll remind us that if we don't survive we can't *have* thoughts, I think. Unless we include the thoughts we've put on paper that survives us. Or thoughts we've passed on to our thoughtful survivors, who, presumably, were less thoughtful before our thoughts were passed on to them when we passed on. By less thoughtful, do I mean they weren't as nice? Such that we're making them nicer by passing our thoughts on to them when we pass on? It *is* true that loss can make a person more sensitive. Perhaps when we pass on, we pass on, by virtue of our absence and thus their loss, thoughtfulness to our survivors, who then pass that thoughtfulness on to their survivors when they pass on, supplemented of course by their own loss of those recently deceased. Which would mean that as a human race we're getting more and more thoughtful as the generations pass. But if all our thoughts that are making us more and more thoughtful are thoughts that have been passed on to us by our ancestors who've passed on, whose thoughts are they? Who is it that's becoming more and more thoughtful? What do you say we pass on that one?

So if we agree that small thoughts can be just as great as big thoughts (I think we may be making progress here, though it may be less the seed-turning-into-a-grape kind of progress than the grape-turning-into-a-raisin kind of progress), then our first thought—all there is to think about—could be as great as the second thought—what thinking means—not because it appeared in our head first, nor because it is judged so by a disinterested understanding, but simply because it comes from the perspective that all there really is to think about are small thoughts. I suppose, though, that if you believe differently, that big thoughts exist and are as interesting, worthy, or great as small thoughts, then the thought “all there is to think about” becomes rather large and may even be larger than the notion of what thinking means. I *like* the thought of small thoughts being bigger than large thoughts, but what does *like* have to do with it; is that yet another criterion for prioritizing thoughts? Do I even *really* like the thought of small thoughts being bigger than big thoughts, or do I just *think* I like it? Can it even possibly be true that the smaller the thought the better, such that a concern about how my unraveled shoelace is going to fit through the grommet of my sneaker is a superior thought to, say, a solution to world hunger? I don't like that. But then again, maybe I just *think* I don't like it. I'm beginning to feel like I'm in a Bugs Bunny cartoon in a tree cutting off the limb I'm sitting on, or I'm one of those faceless automatons in the M.C. Escher sketch having climbed two flights of stairs only to find myself at the bottom again, and upside down. Then again, we're always upside down half the time anyway, at least from today's perspective (will I think differently tonight?), except when we're in the transition to right-side up, that is during dusk or dawn, but of course that transition is happening all the time to someone, so who is this *we* I'm talking about?

Speaking of Escher, it's just occurred to me that by turning the thought of what thinking means into a subject of thought, we have turned it into a subset of “all there is to think about,” and thus created another paradox: simultaneous opposite answers to our question which thought is greater, A or B. That is, in the act of analyzing how thought A is subsumed by thought B, thought B has been subsumed by thought A. And thus, I might add, we have thrown light onto what it means to think. Let me point that light in one direction.

So if we can't decide what determines whether one thought subsumes another, how are we to prioritize our thoughts, and thus how is thinking to have any meaning at all? Can it be possible that *no* thought is better than another, thus making all thought meaningless? I'm afraid that that thought is not a very good thought. *Of course* some thoughts are better than others. The wish, for instance, that Dick Cheney's friend had shot Dick Cheney instead of vice-versa is not a nice thought—but I wasn't talking about nice thoughts, was I? I was talking about *good* thoughts, *better* thoughts, *superior* thoughts. Nonetheless, that thought about Dick Cheney may be not only not nice, but also not good, for without Dick Cheney who would run the country?

Is it possible to judge the quality of thoughts by simply lining them up according to their goodness? Are all nice thoughts good thoughts, so that judging them is merely a matter of determining their relative niceness? Socrates *did* hold that virtue is truth. Which would mean that nice thoughts, kind thoughts, which I think it is safe to say are virtuous things, are true, that is, big, i.e., significant and profound. But does being good merely mean having nice thoughts? The thought of eating tiramisu with a cup of rich coffee & cream, especially after an entree of grilled bass on a bed of steamed spinach & a side of mashed sweet potatoes, now *there's* a nice thought. But is it a *good* thought? But what I just did was punningly equate virtue with pleasure and ask if pleasure is related to meaningful thought. Can we do that? Can we think anything we want? If so, does that mean we can *do* anything we want? What's the appropriate relationship between freedom of thought and freedom of action?

Apparently Dick Cheney thinks he can do anything he wants, invade a country and make money from it, because, he says, he wants to preserve freedom of thought. Did he get his notion he can do anything he wants from his notion he can think anything he wants, which he gets from being the leader of a country that prides itself on its freedom of thought? So he thinks he's justified in thinking and therefore doing anything he wants by virtue of his purpose being to maintain freedom of thought and action; that is, he can do anything he wants, he thinks, as long as he claims his intention is to allow him to think and do anything he wants. Iraqis presumably can now think anything *they* want, that is if they can survive. I assume most of the people in Baghdad are thinking survival thoughts these days.

Saddam, who was famous for saying the problem is all in your head so off with your head, probably wanted to be so powerful as to ban subversive thoughts, but then there'd be no problems in people's heads for him to practice his power with by cutting them off. So this problem was in his head. So he reasoned that he could either order his own head cut off, which would be a colossal show of power but would cost him his head, or he could mastermind a plot to undermine the most powerful man in the world, himself. So he came up with the big idea that if Cheney could be made to believe he was developing weapons of mass destruction, then he, Cheney, would be intimidated enough to deny him, Saddam, his own power. But he knew that for this to work he needed to make Cheney believe he, Cheney, was the one in power, by making him believe that he was being the intelligent, crafty one, by "seeing through" his, Saddam's, lies. So he lied with his lies. And indeed, as Hamlet would say of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's treachery, he did make love to this employment.

Thus with the power of his lies he compelled Cheney to trick himself into revealing where the power really lies. For when he denied he had weapons of mass

destruction, he knew Cheney would believe him and start a war that would deny him his power, thus undermining his own subversive thoughts and proving himself the most powerful man in the world by revealing how subversive of his own power he is. For he knew Cheney only believes in doing what he wants, independent of the validity of opposing arguments, including those of his own advisors, but to gain the approval of his thoughts and deeds he needs the lies or truths to have something to spin. So Saddam supplied him with the truths that he knew would not be believed, leading Cheney to believe that it was he, Cheney, who knew whether he had weapons of mass destruction or not. That way, Cheney would be doing what he wants, at least in his own mind, which would lead him to do what Saddam wanted him to do, which is attack him in a way that would allow him, Saddam, to claim his power over Cheney, by revealing that his, Saddam's, actions were deceptions obviously meant to subvert himself.

Saddam was confident his goal would be achieved because he knew Cheney knew that we of Cheney's government, who presumably have to be convinced of the cogency of the political justifications, knew he, Cheney, knew Saddam to be a liar, which allowed Saddam to conclude that Cheney could easily convince us that he, Saddam, was lying, and he knew that we would believe Cheney when he told us Saddam is a liar because he, Saddam, knows we trust that he, Cheney, knows a liar when he sees one, because, as we all know, it takes one to know one.

Which prompts me to ask why we believed Cheney when he said he knew Saddam to be a liar when *we* knew Cheney himself to be a liar? Well, one possible reason is that though we knew Cheney to be a liar we didn't know that this was one of his lies, for we mistakenly believed that liars are liars only when they don't know how else to get what they want, and we assumed Cheney had everything he wanted, which is money and power, so we thought he was an honest man, not realizing that since money and power is what got him his money and power the principle he'd practiced was less a practice of the principle than a *promotion* of it, such that when he was in a position that his money and power got him he was left with no other principle to practice but the promoting of his own power and money. That is, he didn't know how *not* to lie and make money from it, for that was what we had told him, by giving him more money and power than he already had, we wanted him to do once he got more of it. We just didn't know that the practice of getting money and power is more a *promotion* of the practice than the practice, such that he wouldn't know how not to practice it because all he'd ever practiced was his own promotion. And, as Hume has taught us, we wouldn't have known who he was had he not lied to us, and we wouldn't have known who *we* were, who told him to keep lying and using his money and exerting his power that got him his money and power, for we mistakenly believe that a cause is an effect, and one of the effects we believe an effect is a cause *of* is our own identities, which in Dick Cheney's case is Dick Cheney the-man-who-got-his-money-and-power-by-lying-and-making-money-from-it, and in another it is *us*, people who expect Dick Cheney to lie to us. How would we know who we are if we didn't act in ways that coincided with our familiar selves each time we thought and acted?

Thus I prefer to believe that we *did* know he was lying, though that contradicts the conclusion at the top of the previous paragraph that leads to the premise, at the *bottom* of the paragraph, which serves this newer conclusion. So I'll premise it by saying that this could merely *possibly* be true. But the premise I just stated wasn't stated as a premise, for

it came *after* I stated the conclusion, so it's as likely to be the conclusion as it is the premise, meaning it must be true since it's a conclusion of true premises, which are true by virtue of the conclusion, that we *did* know he was lying, being the opposite of its true premises, i.e., false. Be that as it may, I think we *did* know that Cheney was lying when he said he believed Saddam is lying about what we now know was a truth. Why? Why did we believe him when we knew he was lying? Because we were lying to ourselves. Which means it takes one to know one, and in fact we were lying to ourselves *because* it takes one to know one; that is, in the act of choosing to believe a known liar we became liars ourselves, though we were probably liars before that act as well, by having elected to elect a known liar, which is tantamount to saying we believe you when you claim yourself to be the best candidate. But we *didn't* elect him, did we!—at least by popular vote. Which means we told the truth to ourselves when we elected not to elect a knowing liar and simply got stuck with a liar by default. But the default election was a result of an earlier election in which we had elected someone who elected judges to a body he knew would re-elect him given half the elective chance, which more than half of that body got. So we elected a known liar who elected someone who re-elected who elected him, and we elected the original elector, so we elected to lie after all.

But why would we lie to ourselves about something so serious? I believe we prefer to lie to ourselves about those things that are most serious precisely *because* they are serious. Everyone knows it's easy to be truthful about something small. Thus it makes sense that the more serious the condition, the greater the likelihood we're lying about it. Which would lead us to conclude that the only things we're truthful about are trivial, and that we lie to ourselves about all serious things. Then again, it's also common for people in the practice of telling big lies to tell small lies too. I'll give you an example from someone I knew who lied a lot, which on first thought appeared to me to be a simple and clear example, but on second thought, as examples often do, may merely complicate matters. Montaigne wrote that all metaphors limp, which could also apply to examples, except this one doesn't limp so much as it bounces around like tigger on steroids. (Hey, I just gave you an example of an example exemplifying itself. Does that disqualify it? Is tigger banned from bouncing for life—just where rabbit wanted him! Maybe he'll write his own book: *I Did It My—Tigger—Way, Without Rabbit*, but that wouldn't be true since without getting banned he wouldn't have a story to write about, for he would still be bouncing, so the title would read, *I Did It My—Tigger—Way Until Rabbit Testified Which Gave Me This Story, So This Story Is As Much His As Mine and Could Be Titled I Did It My—Tigger—and Rabbit's Way, Except I Would Have Preferred Just My Way to My and Rabbit's Way, But That Wouldn't Have Given Me a Story To Write About, Which is What This is*. I'm sure it would sell, though I'm not sure what else he would have to say, which isn't such a bad thing really—I know several books that I wish would have stopped after the title. But would I have wished that had it done it? Or, more properly stated, since it's silly to conjecture about a wish for something that is the case, would I be glad it did? How do I know that just an intriguing title wouldn't make me wish the author had tried his or her hand at writing the text for it? Oh but what a risk, to attempt a text that will live up to a great title! Which probably accounts for why most titles are afterthoughts, which practice, now that I've thought about it, I see as probably a product of much forethought, though perhaps the kind of forethought we don't think much about.)

As an excuse for missing a college class this person I knew lied to her professor

that her mother had contracted breast cancer. Now on first thought that appears to be a small lie, for it was merely a class she missed, but why such a serious cause for such a trivial effect? Why didn't she offer 'My alarm didn't go off'? Why did she need the effect to surpass the cause to such a great degree, the excuse to so far outweigh its purpose, that it would become its own great purpose. It puts me in mind of Hamlet's comments on his own scheme to subvert Rosencrantz & Guildenstern's scheme to have him killed: "'tis the sport to have the engineer / Hoist with his own petar; and 't shall go hard / But I will delve one yard below their mines / And blow them at the moon.'" She wanted the engineer, the professor, hoisted with his own petar, the petar being his demand, most probably merely implied, that she tell him why she missed class. That is, he demanded, by virtue of being a professor, what she felt was unreasonable and figured she'd match the unreasonableness of his demand with an excuse commensurably unreasonable. The professor's faith in reason caused her to blow up his demand to unreasonable proportions, and the only appropriate response was to blow his demand to the moon. But perhaps the greater reason, or thought, as to the origin of her thought, though this may merely be the same thought expressed as a greater claim, is that she felt so small herself she needed to blow herself up so big the professor could never leave sight of her. All this could lead us to conclude that when small lies generate big lies they become big themselves, which is no great thought when you think of it visually: a snake swallows an elephant it becomes as big as an elephant. Or it could just mean what we all know, that small lies are like babies, some die and those that don't grow big. It's very difficult to get an estimate of the number of babies that have died in Iraq since we and Cheney started subverting Saddam's lies with our own. I've tried and all I get, I'm sure Cheney would agree, are lies, for the numbers can't possibly be that big.

So if Cheney can do anything he wants, presumably to preserve our right to say and do anything he and we want, then why can't *we* equate virtue with pleasure? Is he more entitled to do what he wants than we are? If so, why? Because he's richer, smarter, better connected, a better shot? Wait, surely he wasn't *intending* to shoot his rich and well-connected friend, so he must be a *poor* shot. But if he's a poor shot, is it purely coincidental he shot his rich and well-connected friend in the face? Just on the face of it, isn't that a bulls-eye? And how can he be a poor shot if he's rich?

In fact, dear reader, someone has already equated virtue and pleasure. That's what's so interesting about thoughts, so few of them haven't been thought, such that just when you think you're being most original you realize you've merely stumbled upon someone else's obvious thought before you. Then again, Ludwig Wittgenstein believed that a new context to language always denotes a new meaning, such that every thought is a new thought by virtue of being new. This sounds a lot like Heraclitus's statement about feet in rivers, how you can't put yours in the same one twice, though he probably wasn't referring to *your* foot per se, though if he's writing for posterity, which he may have been, then maybe he was. Now is that the same thought as Wittgenstein's? Was Wittgenstein writing for posterity as much as Heraclitus was? How do you write for posterity if all your thoughts are new every time they're read? Was Heraclitus even writing, or just talking and someone listened and passed it on? If he *was* writing, then how is it putting a stylus to papyrus isn't like putting your foot in a river, such that with each mark the papyrus is different, or with each mark the thought is different. And if that's the case, then how is the written thought of not being able to put the same foot in a

river twice affected by the fact that you can't write something twice and mean the same thing by it, or even just *say* something twice and mean the same thing by it. Does he mean he means something different each time *we* read it? Whose foot are we talking about, his or ours? If his, then when is it he's putting his stylus back on papyrus, only when he's repeating the exact words or when he's elucidating the phrase—how would it be an elucidation if he means something different by it? And if ours, when is it we're putting our thought back in, when we read it again, or just when we think of it again?

We'll see this thought about thoughts being continuously new later in the poem, except it will be Descartes' thought not Wittgenstein's, and there will be differences in the thought, making it new and thus different. (But how do I know, if I'm writing this as I go, that that thought will reappear, or as another foot in the river, or the same foot in another river, later in these pages. Maybe it's an intuition, or maybe I've already thought that thought and written it, but I know it won't appear until later because instead of writing as I go I'm *rewriting* as I go. But how would that go? That means I'm writing something before I write it, and how can you do something before you do it and what is it that you're doing afterwards if you've already done it? Let me write on and see what I've written.)

A good example of meaning changing according to context is the shift in the value of the last seconds before death from medieval to modern times. The difference is explained in a recently published essay by the lawyer Paula Speck, in the context of a legal assignment of hers to analyze recent judgments rewarding money to survivors of those who had died tragically after suffering their imminent deaths for a few seconds. Speck practices what we might call disaster law. Presumably she does it calmly, and competently, but it must be a difficult law to practice since most of us naturally practice what we might call the law of disaster avoidance. So we might conclude that it's an unnatural practice of hers, though after practicing it for several years it would be natural for her, and us, to think it natural to her to practice it. (How do we decide when something goes from unnatural to natural? Does that transition follow some natural law? Or would it be an unnatural law since nothing unnatural can *ever* be natural because that's what natural means, *always* natural.) Disaster lawyers, though, are presumably attracted to this unnatural practice on the effects of disaster, we hope not to disastrous effects, though those who are ordered to pay disaster survivors may feel they should turn around and sue the disaster lawyers to repair them for their arguments for disaster reparation, but hiring one disaster lawyer to sue another for disaster reparation sounds like disaster to me. Who decides the value of a disaster and whether that value is a disaster worth valuing?

Our modern conception of that value is measured in money, of course, and the amount is relative to the number of seconds the victim survives, the higher the number of seconds, the higher the monetary value. Speck's research found that in our country if you were aware of your impending death for six seconds and that death was caused by someone's negligence, those seconds would be worth somewhere between \$833 and \$2500 per second. In a case in which death was almost instantaneous the survivors were awarded \$15,000 per second, which is much less than six seconds at *anywhere* between \$833 and \$2500 per second, and in a case in which the awareness of impending death lasted twelve minutes the survivors were awarded \$100,000. The message is that the longer you witness your impending death the greater you've suffered and the more

money your survivors deserve. If it was found that my negligence caused the death of someone who suffered twelve minutes before his or her death and I was ordered in a court of law to pay \$100,000, I wonder what the value of each second would be between the verdict and the announcement of my disastrous penalty. But I guess the context of the two disasters would be different, for the penalty wouldn't be death. Different context, different meaning. But that's not the difference in context I meant in the previous paragraph. By the way, if it's a fact that we're all going to die, such that all the time prior to our deaths is time we have to suffer our imminent deaths, and if we assign value only to that time prior to deaths caused by someone's negligence who has enough money to make it worthwhile to sue them, then aren't we saying to ourselves that unless you're being killed by a rich negligent person your life is worthless?

But the difference in context I meant when I brought Speck's essay up is one she points out that in contrast to now—when we believe that the little time before our imminent deaths will be time spent suffering—in the Middle Ages you were considered lucky to have a little time before you die because it allowed you to make peace with your maker. Speck goes on to note that this concept of the value of the time prior to death is the reason Hamlet doesn't kill Claudius as he's praying in the chapel; Hamlet concludes it would be too good for Claudius to be given time to make peace with his maker when he'd killed Hamlet's father with all his sins on his head. Thus, presumably, the roaming spirit of Hamlet's father. I say presumably because he might have been roaming for other bad deeds, we don't know. Of course what we *do* know and Hamlet doesn't is that Claudius's efforts to pray are for naught, for, as he confesses to himself, with us overhearing, "my words fly up, my thoughts remain below, words without thoughts never to heaven go," which simply means he's got a bad conscience and can't properly apply his thoughts to the deed he's done. His prayers are useless.

What I don't understand is how Claudius *knows* his prayers are useless. I mean, the guy is on his knees and he's *thinking* about what he's done and he obviously feels bad that his words are not hitting the mark and, sure, he's still banging his brother's wife but he feels bad about that too, so why aren't his words a prayer? If we believe Claudius that his words are *not* a prayer, then Hamlet's revenge would've been the true revenge he was seeking, thus the irony, given that Hamlet decides not to kill him precisely because he thinks Claudius's soul is clean on account of his praying. But a kind of double irony here is that if Claudius's words *are* a prayer, then Hamlet's hesitation was justified in the context of his own intentions but only for reasons he's in the dark about. There are different contexts here, but their differences are caused not by differences in time, but by differences in knowledge, or in presumed knowledge, between Hamlet's and Claudius's, Hamlet's and our own, Claudius's and our own, Hamlet's and Hamlet's, and perhaps, if one fails to read the double irony, between our own and our own. That is, we may think we know the context, which is the irony of Claudius's prayers not being prayers when Hamlet doesn't kill him thinking they *are* prayers, but we can also *miss* the context that in fact he *is* praying. Different awareness in the same context, different context and therefore different meaning.

But we were discussing, before a different context reared its head, the relationship between virtue and pleasure, and that was in the context of a discussion of whether or not new thoughts are always different from all other thoughts by virtue of being new. One way to discuss the relationship between virtue and pleasure is with what we call the

pleasure principle. Freud wrote about it and so did Wordsworth about a hundred years earlier, and of course the Epicureans even earlier and Aristotle even earlier. They all used it to denote simply the use of the maximization of pleasure and the minimization of pain as a moral measure. For Freud it is opposed to the reality principle, which signifies the educated ego's ability to wean itself from pleasure by accepting pain or deferring pleasure to gain a later, presumably greater, pleasure. Wordsworth's pleasure principle is principally Freud's reality principle, and Wordsworth feels that a moral end was one of those ends that impel an educated ego to defer pleasure or suffer pain for the greater, moral, pleasure. So when Wordsworth appeals to the pleasure principle in praise of poetry, it's a new thought, even though Aristotle discusses it about 2200 years earlier; and when Freud defines it one hundred years after Wordsworth it's another new thought.

Poetry's ability to yield pleasure, says Wordsworth, is an indication of that poetry's moral content; the pleasure and thus moral content it provides indicate its value. And accordingly poetry is pleasurable in so far as it engages a moral lesson, which lesson being inherently painful, he reasons, would otherwise cause us pain and impel us to dismiss it (Wordsworth, 487). I wish my principal in Junior High School had known about the pleasure principle when he caught me and my friends skipping school. I think he derived a perverse pleasure from the pain he inflicted, a whopping on the behind from his big long paddle, about which I'm sure Freud would have had a thing or two to say. I guess you might call my principal's principle his perverse pain pleasure principle, which, if you think about it, is principally Dick Cheney's principle. But according to Wordsworth's pleasure principle, we were to derive pleasure from the painful lesson of the principal's principle, but since we derived from it more pain than pleasure I don't know whose principles were more perverse, ours or our principal's.

Now, I believe that people who practice the pain principle primarily to ply pleasure from it may be primarily *promoting* that principle more than practicing it; that is, they may be providing a primer for proper pain principle practice *more* than practicing a punitive pain principle *per se*. That is, they may be primarily and principally practicing perverse pain pleasure principle promotion, and people who practice this promotion may think they are merely practicing it rather than promoting it, but I think, as I've said earlier in the context of the discussion of the Dick Cheney Saddam self-promotion head games, the promotion is as much or more of the practice as the practice is, and though you might think the promotion can't promote without the practice, I would retort that the promotion is the greater promotion of the two because it principally promotes the perpetuation of the practice of the practice, so it subsumes the practice in its promotion. I do concede, however, that to practice its promotion more than its practice takes a lot of practice, but I would contend that whether they know it or not people who practice it often are usually much better at promoting it than they are at practicing it, meaning that you don't have to *know* how to promote it better than practice it to promote it more than practice it, any more than you have to know how thoughts are thought in order to think them. Now, to apply this what we might call promotion principle to Wordsworth's pleasure principle—wait, how do we know if we're applying the pleasure principle to the promotion principle or the promotion principle to the pleasure principle?

If we call these words of mine a poem and agree with Wordsworth that we promote the pleasure principle primarily by plying from it pleasure, then by penning this practice of promotion, and the possible promotion of the practice, am *I* practicing the

pleasure principle (and thus promoting it)? Doesn't this question rest on whether these words ply from you pleasure or pain? That is, what principle practice are we practicing here, the pleasure or pain principle? And if I'm writing about how to decide between the two, then maybe we're applying the 'is it pleasure or is it pain principle' principle.

If the words of this poem are causing you pain, then according to Wordsworth's pleasure principle it could be the pain of the moral lesson that's preventing the pleasurable appreciation of the poetry, and thus by not being pleased you are not perceiving the moral lesson properly; but by the same token perhaps you're pain is the proof that you *are* pleased by it—it is making you pleasantly pained and painfully pleased. But if you are pained and pleased simultaneously, then it could mean that simultaneously you are and are not perceiving it. On the other hand, if these words are causing you *pleasure*, then it could signify that you are resisting the pain of the moral lesson in it, or maybe you're perceiving the moral lesson but not the pain of it. That's a pleasant thought, isn't it? Not just that we can perceive painful moral lessons with the aid of pleasurable poetry, but that pleasurable poetry teaches us moral lessons painlessly. That's what Wordsworth felt nature poetry does, naturally evoke painful lessons painlessly, though Aristotle felt that if poetry doesn't make us feel the natural pain of the moral lesson, then we naturally won't get the lesson.

Evolutionary biologists talk about pleasure as survival and sexual selection mechanisms. Now, how are we to think of pleasures in that context in the additional context of the relationship between pleasure and virtue? If pleasure helps us develop survival skills, say, by impelling us to like food and thus encouraging us to seek it out to stay healthy, and if it helps us promote the propagation of our genes—by directing us to those pleasure providers our genes tell us will maximize conception and the nurturing of children past the most dangerous stage of offspring growth—then what on earth does it, pleasure, have to do with virtue? Are we back with the thought that all thoughts that promote survival are good thoughts. But what if my desire and drive to survive and propagate conflict with yours? What if there's only one woman my body tells me I must conceive with, but her body tells her to conceive with someone else, so my body tells me to eliminate the rival conceiver and his body tells him to eliminate the conceiver that's impeding his desire to fulfill her desire for his conception in her? Where's Wordsworth's moral pleasure principle here? I guess if we believe it's working as Freud's reality principle, then it's telling me to find pleasure elsewhere, such as in big thoughts. If that's the reality of situation I might be impelled to do so.

But evolutionary psychologists like Geoffrey Miller theorize that men's big thoughts may merely be demonstrations of potential conceiving capabilities, big conceptions, so to speak, being signifiers of big and sustaining possibilities of a host of talents potentially leading to ... more conceptions: that is, these big thinkers, their big thoughts tell these women their trying to attract, can be psychologically supportive, entertaining, funny, generous perhaps, lucrative to keep the family fed of course, all of which most importantly, directly and indirectly, can make her orgasm, which biological occasion aids in conception. And we are told that women's big thoughts do the same but differently, a bit more selectively since more is immediately at stake, they being more vulnerable to being left hosting the little result of the big thought (though in reality it's usually the big result of little thought). So women's big thoughts are testing, attracting, coaxing those men they believe can make them have orgasmic conceptions. All our body

parts in fact, we are told, are simply in a manner of speaking big thoughts: breasts, buttocks, those pecs you men worked on between '93 and '98, those calf muscles everyone at the gym compliments you on, those implants you're so proud of, are all merely indicators of your orgasmic conception capabilities, which we are told these days are all products of your brain.

But if a woman is intelligent enough to take the content of this man's thought seriously, which she necessarily will be because this man with the big thoughts is obviously only interested in women who will understand those thoughts for what they are whether she understands what they're pretending to be or not (even if she doesn't understand them, she'll understand them for what they are, which is of course a greater understanding than a mere understanding of what they're pretending to be, but she's of course likely also to understand them for what they are pretending to be, whether she lets on that she understands them for that or not)—if a woman is intelligent enough to take the content of this man's thought seriously, and she in turn is only interested in him for his appreciation of her appreciation for what his big thoughts really are, then she'll perceive that if the size of his thought is an indicator of the size of his conception provider, so to speak, with which he wants to ply his own pleasure principle, then he'll be a poor match for her own set of pleasure principles. For she'll understand that his thought will appear to be whatever size it takes to get into her pants with, which, by virtue of having an ulterior motive, a mean, i.e., small, intent, will cause it to fail, that is, if she believes in cause and effect. But if she understands my own theory above, that small thoughts can be as big as you want them to be, then he's got a chance to satisfy her desire for big thoughts, which could culminate, happily we hope, in the pitter patter of several cute little ideas. I for one love cute little ideas, even if they happen to grow unexpectedly from a big thought that you thought was minding its own business. Which, when this happens, just goes to show you that big thoughts are rarely minding their on business, which is merely another way of saying big thoughts are usually small thoughts all puffed up to impress someone, and that that someone usually doesn't recognize the big thought for what it is until it's too late because they themselves were eager to take what that big thought was offering and run with it, or sit with it, or sit on it.

Is the evolutionary argument about the true value of big thoughts simply another argument that big thoughts are really just small thoughts? That women and men are attracted to people with big thoughts not for what those thoughts appear to be, but for what the thoughts indicate the thinkers can do for them? But if so, then this thought is also not only an *enormous* thought, but also possibly the biggest thought imaginable, because it subsumes all other thoughts, provides the ultimate insight into what thinking means? But if my thought is true—that this evolutionary argument is just another argument that big thoughts are in reality small thoughts—then isn't it itself, even though it appears to be a big thought, and indeed *by appearing to be a big thought*, in reality merely a small thought? That is, aren't I and Geoffrey Miller just trying to get into some woman's pants, or hoping as a result of our big thinking that she'll want to get into mine or his. There was a time in my life when, if there was a choice, I'd have preferred those pants be mine, and I guess I still do as long as the woman in question be my partner, who, I have to admit, might at times be more attracted to Geoffrey Miller's thought than mine, though upon reading this she might conclude that Geoffrey Miller and I, even if he doesn't know me, are in reality merely trying to get into each other's pants, in which case

she may invite him and me to go think ourselves into oblivion, or to go suck on each other's thoughts.

I myself have often been aroused by big thoughts, though I like to think of myself as not of that persuasion. As I've said, I think I prefer small thoughts. But don't tell anyone. It can be our little secret, just you and me, whispering in each other's ears our own little sweet nothings. Oh I'm in love already you small beautiful thought you. Uh oh, things are getting heated up—I can hear you now, oh baby you sexy evolutionary psycho-philosophical epistemologist poet you, you big ontological deconstruction phenomenologist you, fill me up baby fill me up with that big pseudo-quasi-existential narratological discourse, put that big intimation of astronomical proportion in me fill me with your big thought machine. I know what you're thinking now, you're thinking suddenly the level of this discourse has shrunk, which leads me to conclude that the size of a thought is in exact inverse proportion to its sexiness; that is, the smaller the thought, i.e., level of discourse, the sexier. On the other hand, believe it or not some people don't think sex talk is sexy and in fact feel that the quieter the thought the sexier—it's a matter of personal preference I suppose. Sex itself will usually take what it can get away with, and any way it can, which accounts for why six billion people on earth will soon be nine billion, a number ecologists cringe at. Perhaps they should invent a thought contraceptive to get people to think about something else. We've already established they can't be big thoughts, which apparently turn people on—oh baby baby stick that big thought in me, that sort of thing. We can't have any of that if we're being seriously contraceptive here. Then again, small thoughts, vulgar thoughts, gross fragmented perceptions, as much as they turn some people off sometimes seem to also get people excited at times. What to do, what to do. Maybe we should just empty the mind altogether, shoot that monkey right outta the tree.

Oh my, I just advocated killing a monkey, or eradicating penises, take your pick. It all depends on what thoughts are in your mind beforehand; meaning that just because my thought means what *you* think it means doesn't mean *I* think it means that too. But maybe shooting the monkey outta the tree is okay—Buddhists seem to think so, that's what they call over-thinking, the monkey in the tree—well, I don't know if they advocate *shooting* it—they've developed more sophisticated means, such as striking with bamboo sticks. I find that approach quite striking.

Yes, maybe shooting that little monkey outta the tree is okay. I mean, so far this little analysis has been awfully phallogentric—size size size, who cares! Let's just get rid of the things altogether. I myself am relieved at times when I get a glimpse of myself without a paddle, so to speak. Which, if you pardon the vulgarity of the metaphor in that context and allow it in another, is exactly where I've been now for fifteen pages or so, without a paddle, like a little sperm cell. Well, there goes the level of discourse again, where—where's it going, get it back, please, somebody, please get it back—like a little sperm cell, that level of discourse keeps getting away. Yes, get it back somebody please get it back somebody catch that sperm cell we definitely need a new conception here! But wait, aren't all conceptions new? As I was saying, before that sperm cell came on the scene without his paddle and—wait, if I'm a sperm cell, albeit without my paddle—what's that mean though, a sperm cell without a paddle? I guess it could only mean it's a dud cell, as opposed, I suppose, to a dude cell, who wouldn't be caught dead with dud cells. The Dude With Dead Cells—now there's a Western for you, or an Eastern

if it happens to be about a wandering monk teaching how to debate in a sword fight, though just because a monk is celibate doesn't mean he has dud sperm cells. Now, obviously plenty of duds have dude cells, otherwise there wouldn't be nearly as many of them walking around. What may in fact account for that fact is that there are as many duds with dude cells as there are dudes with dud cells. The real question here though is, is there a causal explanation for this phenomenon, that is, do dud cells *cause* dudeness. I can see how that would work itself out, that is, with a little help from the spirit of our sexy friend, Geoffrey Miller—not that he's dead, I'm just drawing on his spirit, his sexy spirit (maybe I should look him up after all): a dude finds out he has dud cells and instead of continuing in his normal dude behavior to the point of arrogance, he develops a sensitivity from his sensitive condition and promptly develops into a full-blown dude, polite, generous, conscientious, a good mate, if only he weren't shooting dud cells; whereas dudes who continue developing dude cells have no conception of genuine dude qualities and develop into duds, continuing, to the chagrin of evolutionary progressionists, to contribute to the development of duds with dude cells who develop into duds. Thus, many more duds than dudes.

But as I was about to say, if I'm a sperm cell without a paddle, trying to convey to you my conceptions, then what are you? I'll let that one be a dud.

As I was saying, I myself am relieved at times when I get a glimpse of myself without my paddle, so to speak, i.e., relieved of the conceiving impulse, say, when I happen to find myself in a cold shower or just after I've pleased myself, although in both cases the attempt to negate, as often happens in thought, merely brings the affirmative more to life—I myself find my thoughts more sex filled in times of sexual activity, which of course makes sense, since where would you find the drive if you're not thinking about it. But is that thinking made up of big thoughts or small thoughts? What would Miller say, and does the thought grow larger the more difficult it is? Well, of course it does, but only from a relative perspective, relative to familiarity that is—if you aren't familiar with my thought that I don't think is very hard, then you may think it's big, but if you *are* familiar with my thought that I *do* think is hard, then you may know it's not nearly as big as I think it is.

What do you say we lower the level of discourse and talk about Dick Cheney. Or let's raise it and talk about Amish women. I just took a walk, I mean not just now as I'm reading this to you or you're reading it yourself, but as I'm writing it. I just took a walk on a Sunday afternoon, a beautiful 70 degree day, April 2nd so it's no joke, and I'm at Geneva Park where I've stopped on my way back from Rochester visiting my girlfriend who lives there, and I'm strolling through the park—well, not exactly *now*, but a few minutes ago—right now I'm writing in the car—so I'm strolling through the park at the top of beautiful Seneca Lake, not a cloud in the sky—well, maybe a few wispy alto-cumulus off near the western horizon, which of course would be the eastern horizon if we were in the East, and if we were in the East, where thoughts are generally thought to be “smaller,” I mean of course smaller in a good way—geez one always has to qualify that term when we use it in the West. So if I were in the East, where thoughts are generally smaller, I mean more Taoist or Buddhist, that is, which, as determined above, could mean they're bigger than big Western thoughts, which are more like rocks than in the East where they are more cloud-like. Anyway, there I was strolling along with my small dog, a mini-dachshund—I told you I was of that persuasion. Anyway, I was strolling along

when what do I see but a whole field of Amish women in full Amish dress playing softball, long dresses and bonnets, some dresses lavender, the color of clouds at sunset on a day like today. In fact, as I'm typing this from my notes I'm at another park where the sun has just gone down, not *here* in the park of course, but gone down from my perspective, my Western perspective, though as much Eastern thinking as I'm doing in these pages maybe I *am* in the East—by the way, why was it the Wicked Witch of the East was the one that got a house dropped on her and the Wicked Witch of the West got to be the star of the show? Did Baum think he would be offending the Occident? Did he think he was being particularly critical of the West? And why is the good witch from the North, and all pale, at least in the movie. And though powerful, where the hell is she when the Wicked Witch is harassing our heroes?

As I was saying, there I was strolling along with my little dog, whose name is not Toto, when I see a whole field of Amish women playing softball in full dress, the lavender dresses the color of sky at sunset on a day like today and the blue dresses the color of today's sky as it is now—now, that is, not sunset here back in Ithaca, but in the afternoon back in Geneva. There they were and for the longest time the scene left me speechless . . .

Then I got to thinking (I think I've earned that one, don't you?). I got to thinking, how did they get there? I didn't see any cars and I know they don't drive and I didn't see any buggies, and then a woman rode past me on her bike talking on her cell phone, I mean not her bike on the cell phone but the woman, though you could argue it wouldn't have mattered really, it occurred to me, for when you give up being where you are by talking to someone else where you are, especially as you're moving, you might as well be a mechanical thing, for you've given up you're being in the world by choosing to be somewhere else in the world than where you are. But then again what's one piece of technology have to do with it? Aren't we all living in a sea of technology, even the Amish women on their baseball field with cars whizzing past them and people on bikes on cell phones whizzing past them?

Speaking of whizzing, a funny thing happened on my walk after I saw the Amish women. I stopped and lowered myself down below the rock wall near the water so I'd be out of anyone's sight to take a whiz, and I was taking my whiz when all of a sudden I noticed a dead fish, a large bass in fact, watching me with its upturned one dead eye seeing the whole show—wait, I'm not finished. And then my mini-dachshund walked up to it, smelled it, stepped right up on it, squatted, and peed on it. I thought, now *there's* ... something... what?... synchronicity? cause-effect? fortuitous randomness? Whatever it was, it blew out of the water any big thought I might have had about technology and Amish women playing softball while a non-Amish woman rode past them on her bike talking on her cell phone.

But what I was thinking about, before I started thinking about moral pleasure & pain principal principles & Dick Cheney & whether Dick Cheney is my Jr. High School principal & tiramisu & Escher & grilled bass & mashed potatoes & sexy evolutionary psychologists & dead dude sperm cells & Amish women playing softball & bass again, this time getting whizzed on by my dog while I'm whizzing myself, well, not whizzing myself, I don't believe that happened, I mean I too was whizzing—what I was thinking about was whether chronology should be a factor in determining whether a thought is superior to another. If we agree with Descartes about the superiority of intuitive thoughts, and we agree that we are constantly thinking, and if we don't think too much about it and let our thoughts emerge one from the other, then each thought is greater than the one before it by virtue of it being an intuition and having a greater context, that context being the intuitions that came before it. The new thought is *ipso facto* a greater thought. What a delightful thought! No matter how brilliant one thought is, rest assured your next is even more so; and no matter how wrongheaded, misguided, or just plain stupid your thought is, your next thought will be less so! An infinity of ever less stupid thoughts and greater ones!—as long as you live, that is.

But is this a good thought? Is even the thought upon which it rests a good thought, that we are thinking all the time, or are we only thinking when we're, say, doing algebra or playing chess, or writing a poem. And when I'm writing a poem can I also be 'thinking of you'? Is 'thinking of you' a different kind of thinking than thinking while writing a poem, or thinking about writing a poem? (I'm not referring, of course, to those poems that are actually *about* you, dear, though rest assured all my poems are about you—it's just that sometimes when I'm writing a poem, which is of course always about you, I'm also thinking about things that may not be you exclusively.) So, can I write a poem while I'm 'thinking of you'? Now some lovers might not like that we're able to write poems while thinking of them even if the poem is about them, which of course it always is. That is, if our lovers think that when we're thinking of them we should be thinking of them *exclusively*, then they might feel slighted that we're not doing so. But we might argue in our own defense that when we're writing a poem while thinking of them, or even merely thinking of writing a poem while thinking of them, we're not necessarily thinking any less of them.

Speaking of thinking about whether one can think of someone and write a poem at the same time, even if that poem is about that person, and whether some thoughts are better than others and how to determine how to determine how to decide that, can you out-think someone? I think I'll start a thinking club, maybe have thinking matches and thinking tournaments. But we members will have to think about whether we want to promote competitive thinking or not, and if we do, then we must think about the rules, but we'll need to establish rules for thinking before we can think about them, and I don't know if that logjam would take place before or after the election of officers, which would have to take place after we determine requirements for membership. Wouldn't it make sense to make membership exclusive to thinkers? But how do you define a thinker? Should we allow dissenters? Is a dissenter of thinking even really a dissenter—how would we know they are dissenters if they don't express their dissent in thoughts and wouldn't that expression merely confirm their status as thinkers as opposed to *dissenters* of thinking? And what about animals? If animals can be members and we decide to have competitions, do we want them in the competitions?

I think we may want instead of a thinking club thinking dances, but we'll still have to think about whether we want to dance while we think, or think *about* dancing, or simply think about dancing. And would the thinking about dancing constitute the requisite activity for the club, or to be doing something would we actually have to dance while we think? Perhaps we should practice dancing while *not* thinking, empty the mind as the Buddhists say. But if it's a club in which we practice not thinking while doing something, then wouldn't it be a non-thinking club? Perhaps the two clubs could have their meetings in adjoining rooms. We could get together for cheese and crackers, no eye contact, everyone standing around, one half wondering what to talk about, the other just eating, maybe dancing a little between bites.

But of course not to think isn't exactly what is meant when Buddhists exhort us to empty our minds. Emptying the mind is merely a metaphor—it doesn't mean to stop thinking. For to stop thinking is to die. But we all know that if you never stop thinking you'll think yourself into the grave! Now, we know we can't think ourselves out of the grave—but wait: say we eat big macs all day every day like Bill Clinton did until we have a heart attack and doctors tell us we better think about a different lifestyle and we do and we start living more healthy, then haven't we thought ourselves out of the grave? And here's a thought: does that conclusion change what thinking means? Does knowing that thinking can think you out of the grave make thinking mean less or more than it did before we thought differently? And what changed our minds, the experience or the thought? What experience am I referring to? Must we *have* the Bill Clinton experience to change our minds about thinking's power to pull us out of the grave?

And does it add to or subtract from the number of things we thought there were to think about before we thought we could think ourselves out of the grave? It obviously adds *one*, which is that it can, but once it's answered it has subtracted the question as a question, that is if we choose to answer it (either negative or affirmative). But answering the question in the affirmative, besides eliminating it as a question, may also eliminate hundreds of petty thoughts you thought about before you were simply happy to be alive, such as whether your shoelace will fit the grommet of your shoe, and perhaps too, and perhaps lamentably too, thoughts about world hunger. How 'bout I let that one stew in its own juices—say, a beef stew, or maybe I'll ask it to the dance, a pretty date—maybe it would wear ruby red slippers and dazzle me on the floor—wait, I'm committed to someone already, so the date will have to go in the stew—it can be my sugar substitute, though that too sounds like I'm cheating, though perhaps cheating language more than people. Which all reminds me of a line from Hamlet at the end of the bedroom scene, in which he's referring to his imminent voyage to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and his expectation that on the voyage their treachery will somehow be discovered and perhaps brought to trial in some way: O 'tis most sweet, when in one line two crafts directly meet.

Now, there are multiple puns in Hamlet's line—actually two lines (Hamlet's two), and I don't mean as it's mixed with my stew (that was an inadvertent rhyme, which happens time to time, though not just then—with *time* and *rhyme*—, when it was inten...tional, which makes it more a sin than an expression genuine, more a game of ping pong than a heartfelt song, making lines rather echo like bellowing toads than sing like hummingbird wings, unless, of course, you're into that sort of thing and think echo a form of song, which it's been a long long time, as has rhyme, a part of verse, since before

we were carted in a hearse—sorry, I was desperate, which made it separate from the others—yes, when dirges mournfully filled the canyon walls and the halls of caves, for all: children, ladies, gentlemen, even knaves. But if I’m to finish this ditty of mine in due time, before I’m ... just a worm omelet, I best get back to Hamlet). The first set of puns I have in mind is a reference to the “sweetness” of Rosencrantz & Guildenstern together representing one person—“one craft” so to speak—in that we can’t imagine how anything or anyone else could possibly satisfy, as well as their being tacit twins does, the myriad thematic meanings in the play related to the effects of bifurcation—one quick example is that they represent Hamlet’s double nature and their risky betrayal correspondingly the mortal danger of that duality, especially since it is Hamlet who kills both them and, essentially, himself.

The second set of puns I have in mind is a reading of “two crafts” as a reference to the two ships involved in his imminent journey: the pirate ship he will board in mid-voyage that takes him back to Denmark and the original Danish ship that will continue its voyage to England to seal the fate of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who will deliver the letter from *their* king without knowing that Hamlet has rewritten it to direct the king of England to kill *them* upon reading the letter. And, accordingly, the “one line” in the line is Hamlet’s letter. Okay, Hamlet’s letter was longer than one line—judging from his rendition of it—but I bet a hypothetical examination of it, putative as it is, would turn up *one line* that seals the sentence. Now, admittedly “crafts” functions as a pun only if one chooses not to read it as a literal reference to ships rather than as a metaphor for a carrier of meaning. Of course Hamlet knew at the time that he was traveling by ship so, yes, he was referring to ships, but why *two* ships, and Hamlet’s language being as it is we can assume he was denoting and connoting a complex of metaphorical meanings, and too he could not possibly have been aware of the several meanings the word “line” could evoke in connection with the events that were to transpire.

In that set of puns, *crafts* has a terminal meaning (and I don’t mean it refers to their deaths, though it does that too)—that is, it represents the culmination of an intention. But if one prefers it to faithfully convey its denotation as a means to an end, in this context a *carrier* of intention, then a third set of puns may carry the day, or the minute at least. The “two crafts” could be the twin acts of rewriting and resealing the letter, and the “one line” the trajectory in opposite directions of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s trip to England toward their terminal appointments and Hamlet’s to Denmark to his.

Now, even though he doesn’t yet know the source of it, Hamlet seems to exhibit a lot of pride with these lines, and indeed it is a crafty phrase, so to speak. But there’s a profound and tragic irony in this smugness, in that by killing Claudius when he had the chance, not only would he have obviated the circumstances that compelled him to kill his childhood friends, but he would’ve also saved the lives of several other people of the royal family and court, not to mention possibly thousands of soldiers who died in the war with the Polacks. Let’s see, besides Rosencrantz and Guildenstern there’s Polonius, and with Polonius alive Laertes would not have come back from Paris hell-bent on avenging his father and died attempting to do so; and of course there’s poor Ophelia, who would not have gone crazy and killed herself because her lover killed her father and who would have instead married her noble handsome prince king; and last but not least, there’s Hamlet’s mother, who would not have become Claudius’s inadvertent victim. I said last

but not least, though T. S. Eliot would think she deserves least, given that in his essay on the play in which he coins his famous phrase “objective correlative” he considers the play a failure precisely because Gertrude’s character, so to speak, is not commensurate with Hamlet’s anxiety. That is, Eliot considers her unworthy of young Hamlet’s existential concerns—she’s not, he claims, an appropriate *objective correlative* (Eliot, 766). I would be interested to hear what Freud would say about Eliot’s assessment of poor Gertrude. Or what Vivian would say. Perhaps she did have something to say on the matter but couldn’t write it or publish it consigned as she was to the insane ward by Eliot. I wonder if Eliot considered Vivian an objective correlative, if so presumably an insufficient one. But, alas, poor Eliot, I didn’t know him once, though I know him now by way of his essay on Hamlet’s missing objective correlative. I wonder if Freud would consider the root of Hamlet’s problem “objective correlative envy.”

So I count seven people (including young Hamlet himself) whose lives would’ve been spared had he killed Claudius in the chapel, not to mention, as I say above, perhaps thousands of soldiers had he lived to be king, in which case he’d have probably kept peace in the land and resisted that war with the Polacks, which he describes in the play as an absurd conflict. And of course no one would’ve blamed him for his revenge having occurred commensurate with his vengeful intention, even though, as I explain above, he would’ve been in the dark about its commensurability.

So yet another context for Hamlet’s meaning is that the pride he expresses is in fact *shame*—for not having killed Claudius in the chapel as he was “praying” (or praying) and thus for being the future cause of all those deaths. These deaths, I might note, include his own, and being a man of keen political insight he must have recognized also that that loss of Denmark’s true and noble head of state would be a blow to the state. So in the end, his pride at having, in the future so to speak, killed his childhood friends is the opposite of what it appears, perhaps even to him. His thoughts have escaped him, for they are greater than he can bear. He must leave those thoughts, for to have them would be a little more than akin to leaving his family and state bereft. The two crafts then are *pride* and *shame*, two psychological phenomena that when combined become as small as the smallest thought imaginable, in that they become inaccessible; they build a fortress that no one can penetrate because it’s too small and thus too powerful, though when separate they can be made to purr like kittens playing in the morning sun.

What concerns us here of course is whether Hamlet could have avoided the bloodbath not by thinking more, for it’s commonly held that his problem is precisely that he thought too much, but by thinking more appropriately-sized thoughts. We know he was “thinking big” early in the play: To be or not to be, O what a rogue and peasant slave am I, Woman thy name is frailty, Fie on it O fie, this world is an unweeded garden that grows to seed, etc etc: weighty stuff for sure, though there again we could argue the opposite—I mean, isn’t it a little too easy to blame everything on your mother: my mother was a whore, woe is me—what’s not Jerry Springer about that? I guess if you dress up your poor lowly thoughts in existential high heels, highly alliterative high heels at that, and put her in a classy black dress that puts you in mind of rich soil ready for seed, then you can make your thoughts appear rich, deep, profound, hefty, weighty, i.e., big. So let’s grant him that early in the play his thoughts are big. And we know by the end of the play his thoughts had shrunk considerably, especially during his sword fight, which he was winning until Laertes failed to stick to the proper rules of debating and

stuck him instead with poison (I could have told him it was argument itself that was the poison). All this is to say that I think Hamlet and I would agree with Hamlet and me that small thoughts are bigger than big thoughts, in that small thoughts subsume big thoughts:

There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. Since no man of aught he leaves knows, what is't to leave betimes? Let be.

I believe he's saying that small thoughts swallow up the insignificance of big thoughts, ingest them into their own significance, a snake swallowing an elephant. And speaking of bloated middles, it was in the middle of the play that Hamlet might've been wise to have emptied his head and dance a little jig, eat some cheese and crackers, drink some wine, let the thoughts go.

Of course another reading of his lines on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's future betrayal, though still in line so to speak with the other readings, is that the two crafts are innocence and guilt: that when Hamlet decided not to kill Claudius in the chapel it was not because he was afraid Claudius would then go to heaven and his father's unholy murder go unavenged—that was just a rationalization. No, Hamlet was just plain scared. Sure, he'd killed Polonius behind the curtain from no great provocation, but that was someone behind a curtain, not a person he'd have to face, someone in plain sight kneeling in a chapel, and a kin at that, and a kin less than kind at that! Not only was Claudius someone who would've looked him in the eye, but someone with great argumentative skills, a real match for Hamlet in that regard. I mean, here's someone who, among many remarkable rhetorical feats in the play, not only managed to murder his brother and get away with it (thus far), but also seduce the victim's widow in time to serve the funeral meats at the wedding! This is no Elmer Fudd, no old tenor yelping behind the arras. No sir, there's matter in them there bones, which made all the difference in the world to poor Hamlet who had all the *motive* in the world, he tells us, but no *matter*, such that by virtue of his fear he was, indeed, innocent, his bones as hollow as a bird's, a newborn bird's at that. But because his innocence *caused* so many deaths, he was *ipso facto* guilty. Innocence causing guilt, the oldest holy inconsistency there is. It's Adam & Eve in the Garden all over again: how can an unknowing person be culpable? Isn't guilt the consequence of a *knowing* wrong? How can we blame Hamlet for not killing his uncle in the chapel when he's never killed anyone before? He's got a sensitive nature *and* he's in a chapel for Christ's sakes! How innocent does a person have to be to be innocent? And yet, by virtue of that innocence, he damns his own and *at least* seven other souls, some quite innocent.

There they are, two ships passing in the night, innocence pirating guilt. Two students at a school dance. What will they talk about? Will they argue? Dance? Play cards? Maybe side by side solitaire? Start a poker club? Who would be the better bluffer? Innocence keeps those big sad eyes down, matches your bet and raises you fifty. Guilt chuckles under his breath and throws his cards down face-up, two pairs, aces and tens. Guilt folded with aces and tens—he must know something. Innocence slowly raises those big baby blues and says, What'll it be Pops—that's what she calls you, Pops. You've got a full house, queens over sixes, not a bad hand. You look at the pot, you look at guilt

sipping on his whiskey and smiling a big fat smile behind his greasy moustache, and the music is playing and from your seat you get a glimpse of the sun beginning to sink behind the mountains. It's casting the most beautiful lavender you've ever seen on the landscape outside and it's pouring into the room, a patch of it over in the corner where a couple of kittens plays, innocent's kittens of course—she brought them to the card game in a box and let them out to play in the patch of sun and they're pawing back and forth a sky-blue ball of string. You look at guilt again, who's lighting another Camel and keeping his eye on you; you look at innocence, who's sucking on another mint; it's so quiet in the room you can hear that mint dissolving on her tongue and she's looking right past you. You look for the sun again, which has now sunk behind the hills; you take another sip on your own cheap scotch that burns as it goes down and you throw in your hand. You know better than to mess with innocence. Nobody messes with innocence and gets away with it.

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