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TRUTH AND METAPHOR:
INTERPRETATION
AS PHILOSOPHICAL
AND LITERARY PRACTICE

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

When Auerbach writes in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* that, although Homer can be analyzed, he cannot be interpreted, he puts the reader on notice that not all verbal discourse embodies the structure of interpretation. He equally shows the reader that there is discourse which, in order to be read, must be interpreted—that of the Bible and its heirs. Although *Mimesis* has long been celebrated, its readers have not properly remarked that what allows Auerbach to achieve his penetrating reading of Western literature is precisely the critical distinction which he makes between analysis and interpretation, between that which is devoid of or lacks (is ignorant of) interpretation and that which consciously involves (wills) interpretation. Given the failure to appreciate the distinction which Auerbach systematically draws between analysis and interpretation, it is hardly surprising that philosophers and literary

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critics have failed to see that the distinction between analysis and interpretation presupposes a general theory of interpretation which applies no less to philosophy than to literature.¹

In this paper I propose to show that careful reflection upon the distinction between analysis and interpretation involves a fundamental reorientation of how we conceptualize both philosophy and literature, beginning with the Greeks.² Several steps are involved in this reorientation. First, not only Homer but also those whom Plato and Aristotle rightly call his heirs, the Greek tragedians, cannot be interpreted; for the reality represented in classical epic and tragedy, and in comedy, too, for that matter, does not involve or express interpretation. Second, not only Greek literature but equally Greek philosophy, from the pre-Socratics through Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle to their Hellenistic heirs, cannot be interpreted. Third, interpretation is brought into existence by the Bible through its concepts of (among others) creation, covenant, revelation, sin, and redemption or liberation. The Bible shows that interpretation expresses existence and that existence involves interpretation. Fourth, only discourse which demands interpretation and is not merely analyzable is truly philosophical or literary. Fifth, the distinction which makes all the difference is not that between philosophy and literature but that between what is interpretable and demands interpretation and what is merely analyzable and cannot be interpreted. Sixth, and last, philosophy and literature, as involving interpretation, are grounded in the Bible and not in classical or any other extra-biblical discourse. In sum, the mode of discourse which we call philosophy expresses truth, and the mode of discourse which we call literature involves metaphor. The structure of interpretation is simultaneously truthful and metaphoric.

Both truth and metaphor demand interpretation, for like Kant's thing-in-itself, they cannot be known as objects of merely sensible

¹ Auerbach himself does not reflect systematically on the general principles of interpretation underlying his text-based approach in *Mimesis*.

² See my *Dialectic of Biblical Critique: Interpretation and Existence*, New York and London, 1986, and my forthcoming *Truth and Interpretation: An Essay in Thinking*, for systematic elaboration of this perspective.

(or immanent) experience. Nor can they be known as objects of merely rational (or transcendent) experience. Truth is not certainty; it is neither this nor that certain thing. Truth is neither certain nor uncertain. Truth is that identity which posits itself as the whole, creating the world from nothing. Metaphor is not simile, a likeness dependent on something fatally other than itself. Metaphor is neither like or unlike anything else. Metaphor is that identity which posits itself as the whole, creating the word from nothing. Truth involves the category of metaphor, while metaphor categorically expresses truth. As Hegel says, the concept is the content. Rational truth is expressed through the actuality of metaphor, and actual metaphor involves the truth of reason. Truth and metaphor together constitute the dialectic of interpretation.

Systematic reflection upon the distinction between analysis and interpretation shows us that both philosophy and literature share a common ground in interpretation, that interpretation is biblical in its structure, and that outside the Bible the appearances of the world cannot be interpreted or saved, to recall the title of Barfield's penetrating study of idolatry. The radical orientation towards how we conceptualize philosophy and literature involves showing simultaneously that both are grounded in or demand interpretation, that interpretation embodies a conception of reality which is categorical (and not merely neutral, positivist, analytical, or "scientific") in its demands on us, and that the categorical imperative of interpretation is polemical in its practice, in its being in the world. Interpretation is critique—the critique of pure reason, the demonstration, as Kant shows us, that, if reason is to be responsible to the crisis which its desire to know the thing-in-itself engenders, then reason must be grounded in the practice of constituting the world as the metaphor of the kingdom of ends.

THE GOLDEN RULE AND BIBLICAL DISCOURSE

The very ground of critique, of interpretation, of the dialectic of truth and metaphor is the golden rule, that than which no more perfect rule can be conceived as existing. The golden rule embodies the ontological argument that there is only one being whose

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non-existence is inconceivable: thoughtful existence or existential thinking—existence as the Concepts, in the discourse of Hegel; the concept of the giant of Nothingness, in the discourse of Wallace Stevens; I think, therefore, I am, in the discourse of Descartes. To think involves, as object, existence (the existence of the neighbor), and existence subjectively expresses thought (the thought of the neighbor). As Kierkegaard shows in *Works of Love*, the love of neighbor is, to paraphrase Ricoeur, the gift of thought (*le voisin donne à penser*).³ The mutual recognition demanded on the part of self and other—the neighbor—engages both parties in the dialogic relationship of I and thou such that for either to be true both must be true. The notion that two different beings are true in (and not despite) their difference expresses the difference between ANALYSIS based on the law of contradiction (and its sister laws of identity and the excluded middle) and INTERPRETATION as the golden rule of existence, which embraces the double paradox that truth is found only in its metaphors, and not in itself, and that metaphors are distinguishable from the images of false prophecy only insofar as they will the truth as the common bond of life. The basis of truth is metaphor (fiction: the making, the practice, of life); the basis of metaphor is truth (the fact that life is constituted by its common commitment to truth).⁴

The distinction between the contradiction of analysis and the paradox of interpretation is precisely that which Spinoza presupposes in his *Theologico-Political Tractatus*, in which he shows that a proper notion of political sovereignty demands a

³ The “Conclusion” of Ricoeur’s *Finitudine e colpa* is entitled “Il simbolo dà a pensare”.

⁴ St. Augustine writes in the *Confessions* that, since, according to Matthew 22.40, all the law and prophets depend on the two commandments of loving God above all others and our neighbor as ourselves and “since I believe in these commandments and confess them to be true with all my heart, how can it harm me that it should be possible to interpret these words [the opening words of the Bible: in the beginning God created heaven and earth] in several ways, all of which may yet be true? How can it harm me if I understand the writer’s meaning in a different sense from that in which another understands it? All of us who read his words do our best to discover and understand what he had in mind, and since we believe that he wrote the truth, we are not so rash as to suppose that he wrote anything which we know or think to be false. Provided, therefore, that each of us tries as best he can to understand in the Holy Scriptures what the writer meant by them, what harm is there if a reader believes what you, the Light of all truthful minds, show him to

conception of authority such that both philosophy and theology are true but only so long as each recognizes the other to be true.⁵ Spinoza does not explicitly juxtapose contradiction—as the certain law which renders all its appearances uncertain or contradictory—and paradox—as the dialectical law identifying truth and metaphor. But he does recognize that the very structure of sovereignty—uniting one and all equally and freely—is the golden rule of existence, that which he calls charity or love. Spinoza is the first, and also the last, great philosopher to make the Bible and its conception of interpretation as the golden rule of existence central to the explication of philosophy. In demonstrating that the Bible must be interpreted from itself alone and not be subjected either to a conception of truth external to itself (a literal conception of certainty) or to a conception of metaphor literally identical with itself (a conception of image as idolatry), Spinoza shows that both philosophy and theology must be interpreted and not merely analyzed, or, in other words, that philosophy and theology involve sovereign texts which must be interpreted from themselves alone. But sovereign texts demand sovereign readers who recognize that they, too, must be interpreted from themselves alone. Both sovereign text and sovereign reader adhere to the golden rule, the dialectic of existence, which shows that for each to be true both must be true. It is little wonder, therefore, that Spinoza arrives in his *Theologico-Political Tractatus* at a notion of sovereignty as democratic by means of a conception of interpretation which is explicitly grounded in the Bible as the truthful standard for all, to recall his formulation of truth in the *Ethics*: Truth as its own sovereign standard demands interpretation: it demands a reader whose sovereign authority involves and expresses the mutual recognition of the other. Spinoza does not make discussion of literature central to his *Tractatus*, but his conception of freedom of mind and expression indicates that his sovereign community, founded on the golden rule, is the true home of literary discourse, unlike the *polis* of Plato

be the true meaning? It may not even be the meaning which the writer had in mind, and yet he too saw in them a true meaning, different though it may have been from this" (XII.18,295-6).

⁵ See my paper "Spinoza and the Separation between Philosophy and Theology".

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from which poetry as actual metaphor is exorcized as reducing the Form of certain truth to uncertain or contradictory appearance.

THE LAW OF CONTRADICTION AND GREEK DISCOURSE

The distinction which Spinoza makes between philosophy and theology, such that each as the sovereign truth of itself must be interpreted from itself alone, embodies the paradox that truth is known only in its metaphors and that metaphor is the expression of truth. Spinoza, like Descartes before him, eschews the law of contradiction, as it implicitly shapes the thought of Parmenides and Heraclitus and then is explicitly formulated by Plato and Aristotle, as the law of truth. That the truth must be interpreted from its metaphors alone, that truth is incarnate in the life of human beings is inconceivable to those who are ruled by the law of contradiction, whose appearances are, with inexorable fatality, shown to be contradictory. The law of contradiction, which reduces all individuals to ignorance of opposition, to ignorance of everything opposed to them, reflects philosophical ignorance of fate, the other which blindly enslaves both gods and mortals to the reflection of the chorus concluding *Oedipus the King*: count no mortal happy until he is dead. The law of contradiction fatally condemns all appearance of happiness, all movement in the world, all attempts to seek the good to the ignorance of contradiction; for, as Socrates demonstrates with canny brilliance, to seek or to desire the good is utterly to lack or to be ignorant of the good which you seek. You can seek neither what you know nor what you do not know; for to know the good is to be at your end and not to seek it, while to seek the good is to be ignorant of that which you are seeking.

In the *Symposium*, after his fellow banqueters have delivered their speeches in praise of love (*Eros*), Socrates demonstrates that love or desire is lack, ignorance of that which one is seeking. Thus *philosophia*, as the love of (or friendship for) wisdom, is itself lack of knowledge or ignorance of the good. The gods themselves are not philo-sophic, Socrates makes clear, for they cannot be friendly to their opposites, to those who are opposed to them in their ignorance, to those who desire, that is, seek or lack, wisdom,

knowledge of the good. Philosophers are those who are ignorant of or opposed to what is good in (or relative only to) itself, to recall the distinction between things known relative to us and things known relative to themselves, which Aristotle makes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. What Socrates outlines in his speech in praise of love, that is, in praise of ignorance of the good, is then demonstrated through the contradictory fact that the good or the soul of Socrates can be known only in Alcibiades' drunken or ignorant speech in praise of Socrates.⁶ As the lover of Socrates, as the one who seeks possession of Socrates' body, Alcibiades is the perfect philosopher, for he lacks or is ignorant of that which he desires. As the one who is desired, sought, or loved, Socrates is the perfect god, the one who is not friendly to the philosopher who, in lacking the good of the soul, ignorantly desires the body. It follows, therefore, by the inexorable logic of the law of contradiction, that, if what Alcibiades drunkenly says in praise of the divine soul within Socrates is true, it is nevertheless spoken by one in ignorance of what he says, and, if what Alcibiades drunkenly says in praise of the divine soul within Socrates is falsely spoken, what he says is nonetheless true. Speech and its content are forever the

⁶ In Diotoma's preceding account of the ascent of the soul from lower beauties through higher beauties to the contemplation of pure beauty in itself, that is, to the form of beauty known only in itself, it is clear (to us who conceive of the incomprehensibility of analysis from the perspective of interpretation) that it is and will forever remain completely incomprehensible how there can be movement from the lower to the higher, from hypothesis to principle, from things known relative to us to things known relative to themselves, from opinion or appearance (below the line drawn in the *Republic* by the law of contradiction) to knowledge or reality (above the line), from effect to cause (to recall the utterly vacuous teleological or design arguments for the existence of God). Plato can only be analyzed, but he cannot be interpreted. As the tradition of philosophy comprehending Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard makes clear: to interpret engages the ontological argument for existence: I think, therefore, I am. We can argue (to existence) only FROM (our ground in) existence, *not* (from the mere possibility of existence, from what is other than existence) TO existence. Existence is not subject to the contradictory opposites of generation and destruction but is created from nothing, from nothing which is not, in the beginning, existence. The only ground of existence is existence, just as the only ground of interpretation is interpretation. One argues only FROM the principle of interpretation (not TO the principle of interpretation from some hypothesis outside of or prior to the principle of interpretation). In the beginning is interpretation, to paraphrase Buber. Interpretation is the principle.

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contradictory opposites of each other in the Greek world. Analysis is their sole possible mode of comprehension. But, unlike Socrates, *we* at least know not only *that* we are ignorant of the good but also *what* we are ignorant of: that the actual good of interpretation (the interpretation of the good) is utterly absent from the Greek world.

The contradiction implicit in *philosophia*—that it says what it lacks and lacks what it says—is reflected by Aristotle in his discussion of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Although Aristotle appears to want to argue that, in friendship between equals, friends are united in their mutual love of the good, what he actually shows is that the opposite is the case. If one wishes for one's friend what is the greatest good for him, that of being an immortal god, Aristotle points out, then the possibility of friendship ceases, for it is impossible for a mortal human being to be the friend of a god (in other words, the gods are not philosophic). It follows, therefore, Aristotle observes, that, if one is to wish one's friend the greatest good, the friend must remain the mortal being he is, that is, one who is opposed to or lacks the greatest good of the gods. Aristotle does not end, however, with this apparent conclusion, which retains the poets' traditional opposition between the mortality of human beings and the immortality of the greatest (divine) good,⁷ for he adds, in what is his final conclusion, "But perhaps [the friend does] not [wish his friend] *all* the greatest goods; for it is for himself most of all that each man wishes what is good" (VIII.7, 1159^a). The greatest good, Aristotle thus concludes, is that which each human being wishes for himself, in opposition to his friend: to be an immortal god in

⁷ We may recall that both Plato and Aristotle redefine (but in no way transform) the traditional opposition between (in-finitely changing), mortality and (finitely unchanging) immortality, that between mortal human beings and immortal gods, as found in the poets (e.g. Homer and Pindar), by drawing the line, not between humans and gods, but between the mortal body and the immortal soul (Plato) and between the mortal soul (that which animates the body) and the immortal part of the soul, *nous* (Aristotle). But, just as the opposition between mortals and immortals in Homer and Pindar is completely incomprehensible—it can be analyzed, but it cannot be interpreted, following Auerbach's distinction—so the opposition between mortal (changing) life and the immortal (unchanging) soul (*nous*) is utterly contradictory and incomprehensible. The distinction between what is knowable only relative to us and what is knowable only relative to itself can be analyzed, but it cannot be interpreted; for interpretation presupposes a common ground, a

opposition to being a mortal human being.⁸ The notion of human friendship, precisely like that of philosophy, shows that, as desire or lack, it is ignorant of that which is good in itself, which is immortal, divine, and opposed to that which, being mortal and human, is opposed to that which is immortal. Friends cannot be united in knowledge of the good, for the good is precisely that which opposes them. On the other hand, if friends are united in ignorance of the good, then they are opposed to (by) the good. The logic of contradiction is fatally inexorable.

We should keep in mind that, just as Aristotle shows us that friendship between equals is contradicted by the law of contradiction, for the human being's good is always that which is either (immortally) identical with or (mortally) opposed to himself, so he also discusses friendship as existing between unequals, both in the family, where the adult male citizen rules over his wife, children, and slaves, and in the *polis*, where (the monarchical) one, (the aristocratic) some, or (the democratic) many rule over others. By the law of contradiction, however, it is inconceivable that there could be the rule of all over all, that which Spinoza calls the sovereignty of democracy: the cause of itself. As Hegel astutely points out, the Greeks, in conceiving of rule in terms of one, some, or many ruling over others, always preserve the blind opposition between ruler and ruled. They never conceive of politics as the democratic rule of all over all, where each person as sovereign (as the unity of paradox, as distinct from the opposition of contradiction) is both ruler and ruled, both citizen and subject.

common perspective, which unites both sides of the opposition. But that which cannot be known in the Greek opposition, following the law of contradiction, is precisely what the perspective is—which side of the divided line it is—from which the claim that the good is divided into the two opposing sides is made. Whether the claim is made from the side of the good relative to us or from the side of the good relative to itself—for it cannot be made from both sides simultaneously (as it is according to the golden rule)—it shows itself to be contradictory, both blind to and ignorant of what it says: either the ignorance of good or the good of ignorance.

⁸ This conclusion is consistent with Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (where the essence of man, his *nous*, is shown to have its end in the finite, immortal, and unchanging substance of the divine); Book III of *On the Soul* (where immortal *nous* is shown to be separate from and oblivious to the mortal part of the soul); and Book XII of the *Metaphysics* (where the unmoved mover is shown to be immortal thought thinking itself).

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Citizens, as subjects ruling over themselves, as interpreting life from themselves alone, revolt against subjection to the law of contradiction, which fatally reduces to ignorance, blindness, and death all appearances of the happy man. Citizens will to live by the golden rule, which embodies the commandment of God in Deuteronomy 30 to the chosen people: choose life, not death! Life in the covenant is chosen from itself alone. Unlike generation, which reflects the destruction (death) of opposites, creation is from nothing, from nothing which is not creative of life.

In the Greek world one is always ignorant of or blind to that which is one's opposite. The opposite reflects ignorance or blindness. Opposition is always ignorant or blind. The fatal opposition between the one and the many, between reality and appearance, between soul and body, between ruler and ruled reflects the law of contradiction which fatally condemns life as mere appearance to flux whose unity or ground is always other than itself. The doctrine of opposites, of blind opposition, is reflected in philosophical discourse as the law of contradiction and in literary discourse as fate, each but the mirror opposite of the other. The doctrine of opposites—the ruler blind to the appearances of the slave and the slave ignorant of the reality of the master—is always fatally contradictory, for it denies that of two opposites both can be true. If the one is to be certain reality, then the other must be reduced to uncertain appearance. It inexorably follows that, for me to be right, my opposite must be wrong. My rightness, therefore, is blindly dependent on the wrongness of my opponent.

Perhaps the most poignant representation of the fatal doctrine of opposites in the Greek world is the Socratic dictum, as expressed in the *Gorgias*, that it is better to suffer evil than to do evil. Socrates demonstrates brilliantly the fatal logic of this position throughout Platonic dialogue, but it is especially pathetic in the *Apology* where he shows his opposite, the Athenian rulers gathered to judge the ruled, that, in order for him to be right, they must be wrong, that is, they must demonstrate their wrongness by killing him. Socrates can be right only by being killed. In order for his claim that it is better to suffer evil (from others) than to do evil (to others) to be right, then there must be others who do evil to him (and who from their point of view must be right). The

Athenian *polis*, in finding Socrates guilty of impiety and in condemning him to death, demonstrates no less inexorably than Socrates the fatal certainty of the Greek logic of contradiction. Socrates can be shown to suffer evil rather than to do evil only if evil is done to him, only if he is made to suffer evil, if, in other words, he is killed. If it is better for Socrates to suffer evil (from others) than to do evil (to others), then it is better for others to do evil (to Socrates) than to suffer evil (from him). Socratic good blindly depends on its opposite; indeed, it unleashes its opposite as its own fatal nemesis, shatteringly demonstrating, as always, that the only happy man is a dead man. What is striking, however, to us moderns, the heirs of the Bible, is the fact—although it is a fact still largely ignored due to blind adherence to the law of contradiction as the certain law of truth—that Socrates never contends that it is better to will the good common to all, as distinct from the opposites of suffering or doing evil. To suffer evil rather than actively will the good is to reflect fatal otherness as ignorance of the good.

The (dialectical but not dualistic) opposite of the law of contradiction is the golden rule, that which declares that there is nothing opposed to love of neighbor. The golden rule knows no opposite which is not contained within the very identity of its differences, of those who constitute the kingdom of ends, life within the covenant. Opposition within the golden rule of covenantal life is not fatally ignorant or blind but the revelation of truth as metaphor. Hegel remarks that what distinguishes the God of the biblical covenant from all other gods—thus acknowledging his own faithful adherence to the first commandment—is that he is known (revealed) to all. Absolute knowledge—knowledge of truth as spirit (metaphor), not as the certainty of immediacy—is absolutism from the blind law of contradiction. Revelation of the truth is the metaphor absolutely binding on all—on all who have ears to hear and eyes to see, on all who will to abide by the golden rule as the law of life. The covenant recognizes nothing opposed to itself, for creation of life is from nothing. Those who are outside the covenant cannot be interpreted, until and unless they recognize that it is not better to suffer evil than to do evil (or that the alternative to suffering evil is not doing evil) but that there is only one thing to do—consistently: to will the good common to all.

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Opposition or difference—the opposition of truth and metaphor and the difference between them—is the very life—giving energy of our common life. This opposition is not to be relegated to blindness or ignorance but to be comprehended as knowledge and love, as the creation of life. Jesus' searing command that we love our enemy (as ourselves) means simply that there is no opposition to love, whatever the appearances. Kierkegaard captures the significance of the golden rule when, in *Works of Love*, he shows that love believes all things, yet is never deceived, not even by the deceptive appearances of love's opposition. To believe all things is not to be blindly or ignorantly credulous. To believe all things is to believe that even your opposite, the one who is different from you, dwells in the truth and that, whatever the differences between you, opposition will not reduce you to opposing your opposite as merely blind or ignorant. Not to be deceived is to will never to reduce your opposition to mere ignorance and blindness, although it is equally never to deny either their or your own (capacity for) ignorance and blindness. To believe all things is to will the truth, as Nietzsche says in *Joyful Wisdom*: to will never to deceive, not even in opposition to yourself.

It is important to recognize that, just as truth is the standard of both itself and the false, as Spinoza says, so the will to truth incorporates its opposite, self-deception. Socrates, along with his fellow Greeks, knows neither truth nor deception, for both truth and deception adhere to willing the good as the category universally true for all. The Greek world oscillates between certainty and uncertainty, between Platonic Form as the certain reflection of ignorance and Socratic ignorance as the uncertain reflection of the Form of the good. The universally indeterminate (fate) is certain and blind. The individually determinate (the individual human being) is uncertain and ignorant. Socrates, as Kierkegaard points out in *The Concept of Irony*, knows that he is ignorant, but he does not know of what he is ignorant. Socrates thus is incapable of deception, for to know the good is to be the certain good, while ignorance is to be uncertainly opposed to the good. It inevitably follows, therefore, that in the myths of judgment after life, with which both the *Gorgias* and the *Republic* conclude, the ignorant are punished for doing evil, that is, for doing that of which they are ignorant, while the good are rewarded for being

what they are from the beginning, their immortal souls unchanged by the vicissitudes of life. Punishment after life reflects the contradictory opposites of Greek life. The only happy man is a dead man, but it is the living chorus which sings this refrain, while the dead man's punishment, like Sisyphus' immortal ordeal, continues without end. Everyone is destined to find, with Socrates at the conclusion of the *Republic*, that the end of the upward journey of a thousand years is the downward plunge into life as the stream of Lethe where the individual forgets not only that he cannot step into the same stream twice but that he cannot even take one step in the stream of life without contradicting the law of contradiction for which all steps are fatally contradictory. To seek to step even once into the stream of life is to forget what the disciple of Heraclitus, as depicted in the final paragraph of *Fear and Trembling*, fails to comprehend: that you cannot go further than Abraham, further than faith, further than the golden rule, further than the metaphoric expression of truth without forgetting that Heraclitean flux is indistinguishable from, yet blind to and thus ignorantly dependent on, its opposite—the unchanging one of Parmenides.

SOCRATIC IGNORANCE, SATANIC DECEPTION, AND THE DIALECTIC OF INTERPRETATION

Because Socrates does not know what he is ignorant of he deceives neither himself nor us. He is but the midwife who, sterile himself, as he explains in the *Theatetus*, ensures that all the ideas born of the beautiful youths he attends are stillborn. All birth, all life, all movement, every step we take is but apparent, reflecting the deadly fatality of contradictory reality. But if you do not merely know *that* you are ignorant but rather will to know of *what* you are ignorant, then your every move, your step into the stream of life, is accompanied by the shadow of Satan. There is nothing by which Socrates either can be deceived or can deceive, for he has no idea of what he is ignorant: his ignorance is complete forgetfulness or emptiness, and nature abhors a vacuum, as Aristotle does not fail to remind us. But if we have the responsibility of knowing what we are ignorant of, of relating to our opposite such that what

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constitutes its difference from us illuminates our life, then deception as willful deception of self and others enters the world. The moment that our lives have a “whatness” to them, an object, truth as its own standard, then we can deceive both ourselves and others about this object, about what constitutes its truth. The fact that truth is knowable not in itself but only in its expressions, its fictions or metaphors, means that there is constantly the risk, on the one hand, of reducing truth to its sensible or empirical images and, on the other, of abstracting truth by purging it of its images. In either onesided empiricism or onesided rationalism—the so-called correspondence and coherence conceptions of truth—deception is generated by the failure to recognize that truth categorically involves interpretation and that interpretation expresses truth as metaphor. Whereas for Socrates sin is ignorance, ignorance of what constitutes both self and others, for Satan sin is knowledge, knowledge which reduces the constitution of self and other to ignorance of the golden rule. Satanic deception has two modes of discourse: that of Socratic ignorance and that of Platonic knowledge. In either mode its nihilism reflects the fusion of ignorance and knowledge such that the paradoxical union of truth and metaphor is surreptitiously reduced to the law of contradiction. Whereas Socrates ignorantly adheres to the law of contradiction which blinds him and his fellow Greeks to the contradictions of life—the contradictions of life reflect their very blindness—Satan and his legions knowingly adhere to the law of contradiction, thus blinding their fellow humans to the paradox of life as centered on the dialectic of truth and metaphor.

That the Greeks can only be analyzed and not interpreted and that Satanic deception reduces interpretation, grounded in the golden rule of the dialectic of truth and metaphor, to analysis as the contradictory reflection of life is the revelation of the choice of life which is central to the Bible and of the philosophic and literary choices made in the image of biblical interpretation. To be is to be interpreted—from oneself alone, but there is no self except as it is the neighbor constituted in and through the golden rule. Interpretation is the choice with which one begins, for one cannot begin to choose without that beginning already having been chosen. One cannot choose not to choose, for not to choose belongs to choice as its own standard, just as the one thing that one is not

free to be is not to be free. Freedom's choice is not between interpreting and not interpreting, for we duly recognize that any claim not to interpret involves interpretation (although this recognition may be evaded by the individual in question). Either to interpret or not to interpret is not the question, as Hamlet recognizes; for, although one will die in one's choice of life, death itself is never an authentic choice. One never chooses not to be. The question is not either to interpret or not to interpret but how we interpret, whether or not we recognize, in full consciousness, that interpretation involves and expresses a conception of life which, embodying the golden rule, recapitulates the biblical story of fall and redemption. But the religious life, as Kierkegaard shows us in *Fear and Trembling*, involves the regaining of the finite. The choice of eternal life is expressed by Abraham in and through his love of Isaac unto death. Our love of life is constantly tested to see if we are deceived about either its aesthetic (metaphoric) and/or its ethical (truthful) dimensions. To live the aesthetic and the ethical, what Kant and Hegel call sensibility (the immediacy of abstraction) and understanding (the abstraction of immediacy), such that each is true only if both are true is to be alive to the dialectic of life. "The Dialectical" is the very term which, at the culmination of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard, through his pseudonym, employs for the category of the religious as the priority of life binding in synthesis the aesthetic and the ethical. The golden rule as the dialectic of life is in the world, although it is not of the world. The golden rule knows the world as its own creation, although the world in its opposition knows it not. The golden rule shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

TRUTH AND METAPHOR AS THE INTERPRETATIVE PRACTICE OF PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE

The enormous prejudice opposing philosophy and literature can be overcome only if we recognize their adherence to the dialectical law of life such that each is true only insofar as both are true. Their true model is not the Platonically blind opposition between philosophy and poetry, between love of wisdom as utter lack of wisdom and a poetizing, a making, whose fictions of the *polis* are

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mere likenesses fatally doomed to destruction by their opposite, whose ignorance they reflect. The true model of both philosophy and literature is the golden rule of interpretation whose truth is to be found in the standard of metaphor and whose metaphors are to be interpreted from their truth alone. Interpretation enters into the world as the difference which accounts for the difference which difference makes with the dialectical demand that there is no difference which cannot be interpreted, except that difference which does not, in good faith, submit to being interpreted from itself alone. Interpretation is its own metaphoric standard both of truth and of that which does not recognize itself as truth, the truth blind to its own metaphors as found in both its ignorant Socratic and its deceptive Satanic guises. Truth is known only in its metaphors—the common fictions of our life. Metaphor is expressed only in its commitment to truth—the common cause of our life.

There is an infinite amount of writing, both philosophical and literary, which, because of its blind opposition, fails to comprehend the dialectic of truth and metaphor. It is neither philosophy nor literature. What distinguishes philosophy and literature from one another is of small moment. (In most cases we have no difficulty in calling one work philosophy and another literature, although we may add that both are ultimately impossible to distinguish from religious discourse, and properly so). The crucial thing is that philosophy and literature be united in their commitment to being interpreted from themselves alone, demanding readers for whom truth is its own metaphoric standard. Both philosophy and literature must recognize what is not philosophic truth and literary metaphor—above all, for our times, Greek philosophy and literature and their blind adherents—in order to overcome the ignorant opposition between truth and metaphor. The dialectic of truth and metaphor articulates the structure of interpretation common to both philosophy and literature. The law of dialectic—that for one position to be true its opposite must equally be true in its metaphoric identity—embraces the golden rule that for truth to be interpreted from itself alone we know only its metaphors and that for metaphor to be interpreted from itself alone we will only its truth. Interpretation as the dialectic of life demands both philosophic involvement and literary expression.

Truth and metaphor constitute the interpretative practice of philosophy and literature.

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