On Reading Philosophical Books

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Abstract

The study of philosophy and the production of original philosophical ideas are based in great part on the reading of philosophical books, in which the reader encounters a standard for philosophical thought. This standard is captured in the idea of a canon, through which the reader is directed to those works from which philosophy itself has taken shape and continues to take shape. The existence of this canon entails the question of how these books are to be read. They are not to be first approached in terms of searching out the arguments they may contain, as is so often the form that philosophical education takes. Instead they should be first approached in terms of the images, questions, inner form, and aporiai that generate and inform the arguments they may contain. In this way the reader learns first the ars topica of these works and then the ars critica embodied in their arguments.

Introduction

In the last pages of the preface to the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Hegel writes of the difficulties of reading philosophical books. But besides urging readers to read more than reviews of them or their prefaces and first paragraphs, Hegel offers little guidance except to read the whole of any work. He says there is no "royal road" to *Wissenschaft*, but he does not provide any particular principles by which the way of any work should be traveled.[1] We might add to this view the Vichian observation that a great philosopher, especially one of the ancient world, is a whole university, and hence a method of study of the works of such

[1] G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Vol. 3 of *Werke*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt on Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 65.

a mind is much needed.[2] And to these two views we might add Cassirer's assertion, at the beginning of the third volume of the *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, that to hurl forth one's ideas into empty space without questioning their relation to the whole of the development of philosophy has "never appeared to me effective or fruitful."[3] The one way to avoid thinking and expressing oneself in empty space is to be engaged in the great conversation that exists among the works of the great republic of philosophical letters.

Is there a way to enter into this republic? Are there certain things for which to look that may be keys to comprehending its works? My following remarks are intended only to raise these issues, not to pronounce a final word on them. Any great philosophical book always overtakes the reader's ability to master it. Great books are always about other books. And such books always stand ready to be reread.

Philosophy and Western culture

Philosophy, in its strictest sense, is an invention of Western culture, as this culture arises from the life of the ancient Greek peoples. All cultures contain a system or body of insights, doctrines, and teachings that constitute the wisdom of each, but only Western culture has such wisdom resulting in the invention of philosophy. The original love of wisdom of the *philosophoi* took a particular shape that has remained a distinctive element of Western culture and education for more than twenty-five centuries. The wisdom contained in any culture provides a grasp of human being and the real, but *philia*, the friendly bond and attraction to wisdom, provides a means for this grasp, based in reason.

The individual, using the power of reason, can freely inquire into the nature of the self and the nature of things. Furthermore, this love of

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[2] Giambattista Vico, *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione*, in Vol. 1 of *Opere*, ed. Andrea Battistini (Milan: Mondadori, 1990), sec. 14.

[3] Ernest Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, vol. 3, *Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis*, Vol. 13 of *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Birgit Recki (Hamburg: Meiner, 2002), Vorrede.

wisdom is separate from the love of the *polis* or politics and from the love of *poiēsis* or poetry. The philosopher is in but not of the city. The friendship with reason is separate from and beyond politics. The philosopher is governed by the Muses, by memory and the arts of humanity, but only partially governed, because the music of reason, unlike that of mythopoesis, makes the truth when it can and does not settle for both true and false songs.

Philosophy, no matter what form it takes, is always committed to the spirit of the Socratic *elenchos*, the questioning that is the basis of inquiry. It is also committed to the Western endorsement of the individual and the possibility of self-knowledge this endorsement entails. And it is committed to the fact that knowledge is power, a power separate in kind from political power; philosophy is never properly reducible to politics. The love of wisdom, as an invention of the West, has in common with all other cultures, ancient and modern, the interest in wisdom, and it can profitably learn from them, but it is not them and they are not it. This said, the word "philosophy," in a wide and vaguely conceived sense, can be and is applied to any doctrine of wisdom arrived at by tradition, meditation on life-experience, mythic or religious insights, apart from the practice of the love of wisdom, as cast above. But philosophy proper has its own inner form that cannot rightly be taken from it. This inner form is what is taken up by those who can actually hear the call of philosophy's voice.

Philosophia, the love of wisdom, entails *philomatheia*, the love of learning, as Socrates explains in the *Phaedo*. But learning is not the same as wisdom. Wisdom is a knowledge of things divine and human and the causes of each, that is, the object of wisdom is the whole of things and the whole is the True. *Philosophia* is a different activity of mind than *philologia*, the love of history, literature, and language. If this were not so, issues of philosophical thought would be resolved by the productions of intellectual historians. To understand philosophies or philosophical ideas in terms of the elucidation of their precedents and the consequences of their influence is philology in its widest sense.

But philosophers always think beyond their own time. The True is

not in time, and cannot be. The philosophical interpretation of any original philosophy begins where its historical interpretation ends. Philosophical interpretation seeks the grasp of the True embodied in a philosophy. The motivation of the philosophical interpretation of a philosophy is the same as the motivation underlying the formulation of that philosophy itself. The philosopher and the interpreter have the same aim. The interpretation of philosophies is the basis for the making of original philosophy, but only the few can pass from the activity of philosophical interpretation to the making of an original philosophy.

The purpose of philosophy is made clear by Socrates in the *Phaedo*: *hoi orthos philosophountes apothneskein meletosi*—those who rightly philosophize are practicing to die. Philosophy arises from the fact of human mortality. To philosophize rightly requires a standard of excellence. That standard of excellence begins with the learning of the Western canon of philosophical works. As Xenophon reports, Socrates philosophizes with his friends, and in so doing, they go through the writings of the wise and peruse them for what they may take from them to enhance their own pursuit of wisdom. "And the treasures that the wise men of old have left us in their writings I open and explore with my friends. If we come on any good thing, we extract it, and we set much store on being useful to one another."[4]

The necessity of a canon

The master key to philosophical education has always been the study of the canon, and what is found there is placed against the powers of one's reason, and these powers, so informed and shaped, are placed against those of one's friends—for friendship is the second requirement of philosophizing rightly. Philosophy, like human being itself, is naturally social. There is no one set and precise canon of Western philosophical books. However the canon in particular is taken up, it will not stand far from any other particular way the canon is formulated. The great books of philosophy and their authors are identified in any of the

[4] Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, trans. E. C. Marchant (Cambridge, Mass.: The Loeb Classical Library of Harvard University Press, 2002), 75 (1.6.14).

standard histories of philosophy, from Diogenes Laertius to Windelband, Bréhier, and Copleston.[5]

The idea of a canon is natural to thought. If thinking is not simply politics done in words motivated by an ideological purpose, thinking naturally inclines to a standard of excellence against which to form thoughts. A canon naturally arises in a tradition, a culture, a historical period, a field of knowledge, or in any individual reader's experience. It is those works that count most, that establish judgment, taste, and viewpoint. For example, there is an Eastern canon of works that begins with the *I Ching* or *Book of Change*, the oldest known book in human history, and that continues with such works as the *Analects* of Confucius, the *Tao tê Ching* of Lao Tzu, the *Lankâvatâra Sutra*, and, from India, the *Bhagavad-gita*, *Upanishads*, and so forth. It is not possible to oppose the idea of a canon as such, except by endorsing something else as canonical; even advocating a universal relativism entails some standard that expresses the principles of that relativism.[6]

Logical and ideological reading

Much of Anglo-American philosophical education approaches the interpretation of philosophical writings in logical terms. The reader is led to develop proficiency in locating arguments put forth in such works. Philosophy is thought to be about arguments and the evidence for them; thus one acquires ability in such activity by analyzing works in these terms. Basing philosophy on argument suffers from two problems. First, for any argument invented or found, it is never beyond human wit to devise a counter-argument, given opportunity and time. Philosophy dissolves into debate if some larger perspective is not kept in mind. Second, no argument is *sui generis*. All arguments in order to be of

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[5] For a version of the philosophical canon as such, see Donald Phillip Verene, *The History of Philosophy: A Reader's Guide; Including a List of 100 Great Philosophical Works from the Pre-Socratics to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2008), pt. 1.

[6] See Donald Phillip Verene, *The Art of Humane Education* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002), chap. 4.

value presuppose directly or indirectly an intellectual narrative in which they exist. The narrative is not itself an argument. Any reader of the canon will note that authors of great philosophical works simply begin by making distinctions and telling the reader about the nature of things. Arguments appear along the way but are embedded in the larger speech. These arguments cannot be ignored. And, as Socrates insists, despite the limitations of argumentative thinking, we should not become misologists.[7]

Another approach to interpreting philosophical writings generally associated with philosophy in the continental tradition evaluates texts in ideological terms. Here the emphasis is not on argument but on what is often called the "hermeneutics of suspicion," of which Paul Ricoeur identifies three masters: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud.

On this view, the great narratives of the books of the Western canon can be deconstructed to expose that what appears to be the objective pursuit of truth or moral theory is in fact thought put in the service of gender, race, or class. Ideological interpretation regards the reader as a victim who has been given only an illusion. When we carefully look through the keyhole we see what is really going on behind the so-called truths of the great narratives, and it is simply politics, the wrong politics. Interpretation is exposé. It is exposé on behalf of endorsing what has been excluded. The love of wisdom becomes the love of politics, not politics that governs as a civil wisdom, but politics that governs thought. The ideological interpretation of texts is a kind of historicism. The philosopher is busy within time. Philosophy relinquishes its impetus to master time and think from the *topos* of the whole, the True. The problem of approaching philosophical books with suspicion rather than wonder is that nothing answers suspicion. Suspicion, like Hegel's "bad infinity," is a process that consumes the mind and its critical faculties without end.

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[7] See Donald Phillip Verene, "The Limits of Argument: Argument and Autobiography," chap. 5 of Donald Phillip Verene, *Speculative Philosophy* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 47–54.

The art of jurisprudential reading

In contrast to the logical and ideological approaches to philosophical writings, I advocate a jurisprudential approach to their interpretation. This jurisprudential approach might be associated with hermeneutics, understood in the positive sense as a way of eliciting the meaning of texts themselves, not in the negative sense of the hermeneutics of suspicion, as described above. This jurisprudential reading and interpreting of texts differs in a fundamental way from hermeneutical reading and interpreting. Hermeneutics in its original sense is a way of restating the meaning of sacred or scriptural texts and in this sense the question of the truth of the texts being interpreted is established in advance. The truth of such texts is a matter of revealed truth and faith.

But the problem of the truth of philosophical texts cannot be solved in principle or in fact by hermeneutics. What texts are worth hermeneutical consideration is simply a matter of convention and tradition. Hermeneutics can establish meaning but it cannot establish truth. Jurisprudential interpretation, as will be made clear below, aims at grasping the text as a whole, and, once grasped, its presentation of the True can be apprehended. The wholeness of the text and the True that governs it reaches outside of time. Once the reader is at the limit of the text's coherence, thought is outside of time and the True can be seen with the mind's eye. In this way, jurisprudential interpretation passes beyond hermeneutical interpretation. The philosophical text takes us beyond itself when we learn to read jurisprudentially.

There are four principles to jurisprudential reading: eliciting the image and the question and discovering the inner form and the moments of *aporia*. I will explain each of them in turn. The idea of jurisprudential reading is derived from the conception of *ius gentium* in Roman law as put forth in the *Corpus Juris Civilis* or *Digest* and *Institutes* of Justinian. What the Greeks called *philosophia*, the Romans called *iurisprudentia*. The theoretical wisdom of the Greeks is the civil wisdom of the Romans. The *ius gentium* is the conception of an actual natural law—that part of the system of law of each nation that is held in common with

the systems of law of all other nations, distinguished from *ius civile* or positive law that is peculiar to any nation. *Ius gentium* is law that is in itself right and reasonable and in direct accord with human nature. It is law as a whole and universal, civil wisdom. In analogous fashion, any work that is truly philosophical has part of it that is held in common with any other such work. It is the ground on which any particular work can be identified as philosophy. In this manner, a particular philosophical work is part of *philosophia perennis*, much as it may differ in its content, method, and style from other such works.

Image and question

To become educated in such works, the reader must first look for the images employed in them. At the heart of the image is the metaphor, in which a connection is made through the power of *ingenium*. These are the acts of imagination, the verisimilitudes upon which the philosophy is based. A metaphor is always a *principium*, a beginning. It is how both philosophy and poetry begin, and it is what sustains them. The images are commonly passed over by the philosophical reader on the way to the arguments, but once the image is declared as an aim, the reader will quickly find image after image within any work of great philosophy. The image is the invention, within human culture, of the myth, and it is what philosophy shares with mythology.

If philosophy remained with the image, it would become poetry. What allows philosophy to move from the immediacy of the image toward thought is the question. The question is the invention in Western culture made by Socrates. The meaning of the image is confronted in the formulation of the question. The dialectic inherent in the union of elements in the metaphor becomes, through the introduction of the question, a dialectic of question and answer. In this dialectic, thought doubles up. The love of wisdom requires what James Joyce requires of the reader in *Finnegans Wake*: "two thinks at a time."[8] Nothing can be

[8] James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), 583.07; James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, crit. ed. Danis Rose and John O'Hanlon (Dolphins, The Parade, Mousehole, Cornwall, G.B.: Houyhuhnm Press, 2010), 454.6–7.

thought in and of itself; all things must be thought in terms of their opposites.

For the mythopoeic mind, every metaphor is a fable in brief; the internal bond of the metaphor can be expanded into the fabulous narration. But for the philosophical mind in possession of the power of the question, the metaphor can be expanded into the *elenchos*. Fables or myths occur through a speech of opposites, but the opposites are held together by feelings and the words they engender. In philosophies, opposites are held together by thoughts in a kind of twice-told tale of question and answer. The reader of philosophical writing must look for the images and the questions they engender, whether the questions are explicit or implicit in the work. Arguments are always simply part of the larger questions and answers that course through a philosophical work. The truth emerges through the process of questions and answers, just as it does in a legal proceeding, and a full and rationally comprehensible narration of the matter comes forth.

The Socratic invention of the philosophical question allows for the invention of philosophical irony. Irony, as Quintilian notes, makes something understood by expressing its opposite.[9] In great philosophical works, the reader will find not only metaphors but ironies. Ironies are as easily read past as are metaphors. Logical and ideological interpretations of such works are literal-minded and have no ability to respond to irony. Irony in philosophical works arises from the fact that what is spoken about always outstrips language. Great philosophical speech is never literal; it is always digressive, metaphorical, and ironic. When Plato, in the *Republic*, raises the possibility of philosophers becoming kings in their countries, or kings taking up the study of philosophy, the reader must consider whether this is an ironic assertion pointing to the principle that there can be no union of philosophy and politics.

One might ask, of an ironic statement: if the opposite is meant, why not state the opposite as a literal claim; why take the reader to it

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[9] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, trans. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, Mass.: The Loeb Classical Library of Harvard University Press, 2001), 59 (9.2.44).

indirectly? A philosophical irony forces the reader to apprehend the opposite, and in so doing to have two thinks at a time. It changes the mind's vision and forces it into the formation of a question. All irony is dialectical and all dialectic is ironical. We are brought into the doubleness of philosophical thinking that cannot be achieved by the single-minded pursuit of argument or ideological exposé. Non-ironic philosophizing, like non-metaphorical philosophizing, never has much to say.

Inner form and *aporia*

The process described above leads the reader progressively to discover the inner form of the philosophy of the work. To grasp the work's inner form is to grasp its particular beauty, in the sense that Plotinus describes it in *Enneads*. This *endon eidos* allows us to enter into the whole of a thing. As Plotinus says: "When sense-perception, then, sees the form in bodies binding and mastering the nature opposed to it, which is shapeless, and shape riding gloriously upon other shapes, it gathers into one that which appears dispersed and brings it back and takes it in, now without parts, to the soul's interior and presents it to that which is within as something in tune with it and fitting it and dear to it."[10] The reader must think the philosophical work in its own terms, in the same way that each form of human culture must be grasped through its inner form. We naturally are inclined to make the unfamiliar over into our own terms. But the true comprehension of the work requires that we enter, into our own inner form, the inner form of the work itself. In this way we are educated. Not until this mastery of its inner form is done can we separate ourselves from it to assess where it stands in relation to the True, to the whole of that philosophy that is perennial.

Jurisprudential interpretation regards the reader as a heroic mind, capable of taking on the pursuit of truth in the text by grasping its thought as a whole. The grasp of the whole requires an epiphany, on the part of the reader, that makes thought sublime. The reader then enters

[10] Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, Mass.: The Loeb Classical Library of Harvard University Press, 2000), 241 (1.6.3).

into the world of the author and begins to move forward in the subject of the work. The reader's own thought can become eloquent because eloquence is the ability to speak wholly on a subject, to be "wisdom speaking," as Cicero and the Humanists called it.[11]

The final discovery of jurisprudential reading, and that which is the key to the penetration of the inner form of a work, is the location of those places in the work where there is an *aporia* (*aporos*, impassable, difficult + *poros*, passage). These are points where the author states something that is seemingly out of place, that seems to be a mistake, that is inconsistent, that ought not be said, where the thought developed in the work seems to come apart from itself. But if the meaning of such an *aporia* can be interpreted, the reader can experience the sublimity of which Longinus speaks, the flash of synthetic insight in which the unseen meaning of the text is seen. "The Sublime consists in a consummate excellence and distinction of language, and this alone gave to the greatest poets and prose writers their preeminence and clothed them with immortal fame. For the effect of genius is not to persuade the audience but rather to transport them out of themselves. Invariably what inspires wonder, with its power of amazing us, always prevails over what is merely convincing and pleasing."[12]

This principle of interpretation has an analogue in the law, in the principle that the certain is part of the true—that what is true regarding any particular case (a certain) requires it to be brought under a law that applies to it. The reader, in relation to the certain of an *aporia* in the work, assumes the role of a jurisconsult. Taking on the task of bringing together what is true in the philosophy expressed in the work as a whole can include what otherwise stands as an *aporia*. If this task can be accomplished the work may likely emerge as having a different kind of

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[11] Cicero, *De partitione oratoria*, trans. H.Rackham (Cambridge, Mass.: The Loeb Classical Library of Harvard University Press, 2004), 369 (23.79). The phrase commonly used by the Humanists for "wisdom speaking" was *la sapienza che parla*.

[12] Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. W. H. Fyfe, rev. Donald Russell (Cambridge, Mass.: The Loeb Classical Library of Harvard University Press, 1995), 163 (1.3–4).

wholeness and hence a different grasp of the True than was previously thought by the reader, who was progressively eliciting the inner form of the work.

In Aristotle's *Topics* is stated: "an equality between contrary reasonings would seem to be a cause of perplexity; for it is when we reflect on both sides of a question and find everything alike to be in keeping with either course that we are perplexed which of the two we are to do."[13] An *aporia* is experienced from the encounter of conflicting arguments that create a gap in our thought or in a text. *Aporia* and its cognate verb forms are closely connected to *dialektike*, which suggests that the resolution of such a difficulty requires *diaporia* or the exploration of various routes out of the difficulty.

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle makes his famous claim that philosophy begins in *thauma*, wonder.[14] *Thauma* arises from the encounter with an initial difficulty. Thus in reading a philosophical text and encountering a break in its thought, we are brought back to the very response from which philosophy itself stems. Through *aporiai* we experience the essence of the philosophical mind and temperament. We find ourselves in a state of ignorance in the midst of what we thought was comprehensible.

Examples of *aporiai*

We experience such *aporiai* when reading Plato's *Republic* X, where we encounter his criticism of poetry and then are presented with the myth of Er as the conclusion of the work. How are these to be resolved? In reading Descartes' *Discourse*, he excludes from right reasoning all forms of humanistic knowledge and then immediately informs us we may read his work as an *histoire*, or fable. In Leibniz's *Monadology*, we discover that God, like all monads, is windowless. All monads have only immanent causality; thus how can God be the cause of the world?

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[13] Aristotle, *Topics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1:245 (6.145b).
[14] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *Works*, 2:1554 (1.982b).

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, when we reach the pivotal section of the Schematism, and learn that it is in the schema that concept and sensible intuition are held together, Kant suddenly tells us that: "This schematism of our understanding, in its application to appearances and their mere form, is an art concealed in the depths of the human soul [*ist eine verborgene Kunst in den Tiefen der menschlichen Seele*], whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover, and to have open to our gaze."[15] In the middle of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel launches into an extended criticism of Physiognomy and Phrenology that seems unnecessary to the necessary stages of the self-developing course of *Geist*, so much so that seminars in this work routinely omit reading those pages. Is this section an unnecessary digression, or does it contain a key to Hegel's "science of the experience of consciousness'?

In Husserl's *Ideas*, the stream of phenomenological reality divides into a "material" and a "noetic" stratum, which seems a vestige of that dualism of a cleavage between the physical and the psychic. What seems to justify an abstract separation between the "hyletic" and "noetic" factors which, although never separable in an absolute sense, seem to be independent variables in respect to each other?

In Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, we are unsure whether his "family resemblances" is the solution to a problem, as it purports to be, or is in fact just a name for a problem. Is there no longer a need to presume a common property or attribute among the particular entities that a class concept denotes, and that can be designated, at least in principle, as an objective connotation or intension? Is not there something that is itself unseen, a form, that makes possible a given set of family resemblances that fall under a given concept? The principle of family resemblances is ingenious, and correct to our ordinary experience, but has it solved the problem of class inclusion such that one concept can be clearly separated from another?

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[15] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1958), A141; B180–81.

When we encounter such *aporiai* in the great writings of the Western canon, these are the points at which the reader must commence to philosophize and to come to the level of the mind of the author of the text. It is here that philosophy as such is to be learned, and what is learned will be the result of self-teaching. The reader must be an autodidact, led by the *thauma* the text initiates in the reader. The reader's self-absorption of the text is the basis, as mentioned above, for philosophical thought to be extended into the *elenchos* that exists through philosophical friendship in which the individual's education can be expanded.

Conclusion

The reader may wish to add, to the above tetralogical approach to the reading of philosophical books, the threefold method of reading that Vico presupposes in the *New Science* and describes in his autobiography.[16] Vico describes how he educated himself by reading the ancients against the moderns; in his particular case, reading the Latins against the Tuscans. He read one set of three works of ancient authors against another set of three works of modern authors, reading from these on three different successive days, and reading each work of them three times: first for the whole, second for the transitions of thought within the whole, and third for absorption of their particular turns of phrase.

These three readings are in accord with the three stages of composition for any written work, as discussed in classical rhetoric. To compose a work, the author must first amass the whole of its materials (*inventio*), then these must be arranged in intelligent order (*dispositio*), and finally what is ordered must be formulated and expressed in language (*elocutio*). Applying this method to philosophy, one might read Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero against Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche, or one might read Lucretius, Marcus Aurelius, and Plotinus against Locke, Descartes, and Leibniz, or further, one might read works of the Medievals, such as Boethius's *Consolation*, Augustine's *City of God*,

[16] Giambattista Vico, *Vita di Giambattista Vico scritta da se medesimo*, in Vol. 1 of *Opere*, 13.

and Anselm's *Proslogion* against such Renaissance Humanist works as Pico's *Oration*, Campanella's *City of the Sun*, and Cusanus's *Learned Ignorance*. The dialectical nature of such reading leads to an agility of thought.

We may read the whole history of philosophy as a dialectical progression, one work leading to another in a historicist manner, or we may read one period against another in a cyclic fashion, strophe circulating to antistrophe. We are likely best served by cultivating the pursuit of both these dialectics.

Finally, as described above, all great philosophical works contain out-of-context claims. The reader needs only to begin looking for them, as the reader needs also to begin seeking out the images that guide such works instead of immediately looking for arguments to evaluate. The mind's eye must be retrained to perceive the greatness of the philosophical books of the Western canon. Only then can the reader recover wonder and discover how to philosophize and make the great conversation of this canon the teacher, and be saved from the confines of the present. Otherwise, "Ignari hominumque locorumque erramus" – "We wander ignorant of the peoples and the places."[17]

[17] Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, Mass.: The Loeb Classical Library of Harvard University Press, 1999), 285 (1.332–33). My trans.