

Restoring Our Humanity

Restoring Our Humanity:

Six Essays

By

Sheldon Richmond

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For M.E.L.R.

No less than the continued existence of mankind on earth may depend this time upon man's gift to "perform miracles", that is, to bring about the infinitely improbable and establish it as reality. (p. 46, Arendt, Hannah, "Freedom and Politics", *Chicago Review*, Spring 1960, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 28-46)

The question...is not so much whether we are the masters or the slaves of our machines, but whether machines still serve the world and its things, or if, on the contrary, they and the automatic motion of their processes have begun to rule and even destroy world and things. (p. 151, Arendt, Hannah, 1958, 1998, *The Human Condition*, Introduction by Margaret Canovan, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press)

As long as a man feels healthy and happy he tends to take his condition for granted. It does not occur to him that living is like a tightrope act—that there are infinitely more ways in which one can fail than the one narrow road that leads to success. (p. 385, Tinbergen, Nikolaas, "The Croonian Lecture, 1972, Functional Ethology and the Human Sciences", *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London, Series B, Biological Sciences*, Dec. 5, 1972, Vol. 182, No. 1069, pp. 385-410)

I do not like to experiment when I have no hypothesis to disprove. (p. 15, McCulloch, W. S., "Recollections of the Many Sources of Cybernetics", *ASC Forum*, Volume VI, Number 2, Summer 1974, pp. 4-17)

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PREFACE

I write this preface as an afterthought upon what I have written so far, one of the drafts of my book, as well as what I have written in a previous book (Richmond, Sheldon, 2020, *A Way Through the Global Techno-Scientific Culture*, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing) One might wonder, how it can be otherwise? How can one write a preface to one's thinking before one thinks it? Indeed, in a way, all thinking involves afterthoughts: thinking after one acts and thinking over thoughts after one has thought them. We often hear the advice to stop and think before acting; but, those very thoughts are afterthoughts on our previous actions. Even as children, as part of a family, as part of a culture, our first thinking is an afterthought on the thinking in our families and cultures. As most writers realize, the first draft, though an afterthought on one's thinking and the thinking of others that one finds in one's research, requires revision upon revision, not only of one's style, grammar, wording, but also of one's thinking: afterthoughts that must come to a stop, only for the practical reason of submitting the manuscript. Even then, kind publishers may require revisions; more afterthoughts for one to ponder.

Do we have a chicken or egg problem: which came first the chicken or the egg? Chickens evolved from dinosaurs; chickens and chicken eggs came together in one fell swoop. If thinking is an afterthought, how did thinking get started in the very beginning? I think this: in the very beginning, thinking and speaking evolved together from grunts and gestures; thinking and speaking evolved together into silent, inner speech with one's self; internal dialogue as inner speech with one's self, evolved thinking into thinking afterthoughts. Thinking, speaking, and thinking afterthoughts, came together in evolution from grunting and gesturing in one fell swoop with the development of thinking and thinking afterthoughts as inner speech with one's self. Grunting and gesturing begat speaking and thinking together as intertwined. Speaking begat inner speech and thinking together along with afterthoughts. Afterthoughts begat more thinking, more inner speech and more speaking. Or as Hannah Arendt remarks: "...it is in the very nature of thought to be an afterthought." (p. 485, Arendt, Hannah, 2021, *Thinking Without a Banister: essays in understanding, 1953-1975*, edited and with an introduction by Jerome Kahn, New York: Schocken Books) After-

thought pushes speaking, thinking, and more afterthoughts along all together and intertwined. Afterthought, thinking, and speaking develop together, strengthening and reinforcing each other. Thinking and afterthought is social in speech and discussion and private in inner dialogue.

In my previous book (*A Way Through the Global-Techno Scientific Culture, op. cit.*), I wondered why computers frustrate us, a problem I found during my many years working as a computer systems analyst. I thought that the problem was deep and due to a misfit between digital technology and humans, as analogue creatures. During the pandemic, I was despondent for various reasons, similar to many other people stuck in virtual reality with their main contacts restricted to friends and family through virtual meeting platforms; with very little contact with the natural world outside their homes and outside their neighbourhoods. To take me out of my despondency, I decided to write a follow up book about how to restore humanity in our global techno-scientific culture and global virtual reality. While working on this new book, I began to realize, in part due to being stuck for the most part in virtual reality, that the deep problem I thought I discovered with my work in IT, information technology, was shallow compared to the even deeper problem of the real virtuality in which humans are enmeshed in the global techno-scientific culture, that has so much become part of our inner core during the Pandemic. Actually, our inner core as humans conflicts with the malware that is increasingly taking over our inner core. The entire global digital culture has become a Trojan Horse, luring us with goodies, such as virtual friends, virtual learning, and virtual contact with family members. The Trojan Horse of the entire digital network with its global techno-scientific culture, has sneakily embedded us with malware that has taken over our very being, as in being human. We have turned from being as in being human, to avatars where all humanity, including our world leaders, IT experts, bosses, managers, CEOs, almost everyone in the world, as avatars are at best autonomous robotic agents of the global techno-scientific culture. We have become trapped in the virtual world where there is no easy escape; apparently no escape at all.

If you are reading this book now, you may be reading it online, or on a smart device as a virtual book. Are you reading it in the paper format, on a picnic bench outdoors? If so, you are on the path to the world outside virtual reality. The next steps involve talking with others face to face, observing what is around you, people, grass; hearing live music, looking at art wherever it can be found; also, doing, making, and just being, as in being human. Is there any one central aspect of being human that I think can take

us on the path to restoring humanity? Yes. Talking with people face to face, discussing, thinking over things, asking questions, searching for alternative answers, and critically examining those answers. Dialogue. Now, that is why I see this book as an essay of essays. I think of an essay, even a book length essay of essays, as a conversation with people; not a lecture; not a sermon; just a conversation, where the writer opens the door to thinking over things, engaging not with thought in the abstract, but with the writer in a collaborative discussion with the reader, where we, admittedly, in a remote way, metaphorically talk with each other as individuals in search of how to connect the unnumbered dots of our own stories, or our own thinking about things, or our own questions, each of the unnumbered dots together, to help each of us to form our own manual for real life living.

I decided not to use the dialogue form, but the essay form, because the dialogue form puts words, as in a play, into the mouths of others, that disguise one's own thinking. Rather, I want to use the essay form because in that way I can put my thinking on the table, open to critical discussion; where the reader is invited to think their own thoughts, and put their own thoughts on the table. I remember when in my philosophy teaching days, some students would comment that in the dialogues of Plato that we studied, most of those who the persona of Socrates questioned, were just "yes-men" who caved in too easily to the arguments of Socrates. In any case, during the writing of this book, I thought that if I want to involve the reader as a participant and collaborator in an open discussion, in a venture to create a user's guide to living a real life as a human, I need a form that would work for contemporary readers. The function of the form of the dialogue is to disguise the author's views, and present the views of the protagonists and antagonists; the supporting characters; the characters that provide comic relief; the characters that are part of the chorus. However, the form of the essay has the function of positing one's own views, and leaving the unconnected dots for others to connect, when and if the readers become involved in their reading of the essay. I have found a remark by Hannah Arendt that concisely explains how the form of an essay provides the function of not only provoking nor only stimulating the reader, but also actively engaging the reader with the writing, with the thinking carried out in the pages of the essay: "What Emerson and Montaigne have most obviously in common is that they are both humanists rather than philosophers, and that they therefore wrote essays rather than systems, aphorisms rather than books...Both thought chiefly, exclusively, about human matters, and both lived a life of thought...[Their]...kind of thinking can no more become a profession than living itself, hence, this is not the *vita contemplativa*, the

[academic] philosopher's way of life who has made thinking his profession." (p. 283, Arendt, Hannah, and Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb, 2007, *Reflections on literature and culture*, Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press) Those whose thinking is done through living, rather than as a professional activity separated from everyday life, do not write as lecturers, but as humans involved with humanity; not as teachers but as collaborators in working out difficulties, challenges; in working out thoughts, somewhat incomplete thoughts, on how to approach those difficulties and challenges as collaborators in a common project with others.

How can the writer, once the essay, including the book length essay of essays, hits the press engage a reader? It is the thinking we do in everyday living that opens itself to collaborative engagement with a reader. I turn again to Hannah Arendt for some thoughts about the kind of thinking of one who does the thinking not in the study hall, not even in an isolated laboratory, but thinking as in living one's everyday life; not even in a lecture hall, nor in social media, but in everyday living that engages a reader as a collaborator: Hannah Arendt thought that the writer of essays could be like a "... Socrates...[who was] no professional philosopher, who loved to raise questions without answering them, who had no doctrine to teach, and who believed that to investigate matters by sheer thinking in the silent dialogue with himself or in the marketplace with others was not just a "way of life" but the only way of being or feeling alive." (p. 487, Arendt, Hannah, 2021, *Thinking Without a Banister: essays in understanding, 1953-1975*, edited and with an introduction by Jerome Kahn, New York: Schocken Books)

In the IT world where I once worked, if we had an idea for a computer project, we would be challenged to develop a "proof of concept", a trial version that we could test in practice, in use. Similarly, I see this book as a proof of concept for my thinking on how an essay can engage the reader whenever and wherever, in the collaborative enterprise of figuring out ways for restoring our humanity, so that we are no longer in exile from ourselves.

But really, why did I write this book, aside from my main motive for starting to write the book in order to get me out of the despondency shared by so many during the Pandemic? I request George Orwell, who had and still has many readers, to answer on my behalf: "Looking back through the last page or two, I see that I have made it appear as though my motives in writing were wholly public-spirited. I don't want to leave that as the final impression. All writers are vain, selfish, and lazy, and at the very bottom of

their motives there lies a mystery. Writing a book is a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness. One would never undertake such a thing if one were not driven on by some demon whom one can neither resist or understand. For all one knows that demon is simply the same instinct that makes a baby squall for attention. And yet it is also true that one can write nothing readable unless one constantly struggles to efface one's own personality. Good prose is like a windowpane. I cannot say with certainty which of my motives are the strongest, but I know which of them deserve to be followed. And looking back through my work, I see that it is invariably where I lacked a *political* purpose that I wrote lifeless books and was betrayed into purple passages, sentences without meaning, decorative adjectives and humbug generally." (Orwell, George, "Why I Write", *Gangrel*, No. 4, Summer 1946)

I don't have a political purpose, at least not in the narrow sense of promoting a political programme or promoting a political philosophy. I have a real life practical and social purpose for seeking the development of a collaborative effort on restoring our own humanity to ourselves.

Some people complain about the young generation, and not only the young generation, but complain about how people these days are tied to their smartphones, messaging, tweeting, and constantly staring at one screen or another. However, I think we have learned in the Pandemic that people need people, face-to-face, not people only on screens in virtual reality. We need to be part of a group sitting in concert halls, and we need to join other people in going out to restaurants; we need to engage in social groups with each other in the real world, face-to-face. The short of it is that we miss the bodily presence of others, talking, sharing experiences, in person, in physical space and time; we miss being in the presence of others. This absence of the presence of others, this exile from the world of human presence, has given us a wake-up call, has helped us to realize that the substitution of virtual presence for real presence, does not achieve the sense of our own humanity that we achieve in and with the physical presence of others, in the here and now. I think we now clearly see that the virtual world of the network of computer technology, in which we have become immersed, cannot give us the sense of humanity that we have when we are in the physical presence of others in the real world. Let me just say it now: the real life purpose, the practical and social purpose of this book is to put a question I have on the public agenda for discussion while living in real life. The question I have is: how can we develop social groups, societies, institutions, and cultures that will return our humanity from exile to ourselves? I ask: once we have the opportunity to become

physically present with others, how can we develop and implement a general social architecture that fosters open discussion and collaboration? My question sounds paradoxical: don't we need a social architecture that promotes discussion and collaboration for meeting together face-to-face to develop and use collaboratively a social architecture that allows for discussion and collaboration? My answer is that we already know how to develop and use the architecture for discussion and collaboration. In a world where virtual presence dominates, we have largely forgotten, and the purpose of this book is to prod our memories, so that we recollect what we already know and put our knowledge into use of how to discuss and collaborate.

Let's talk and work together.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I submit papers for publication in academic journals and for presentation at academic conferences, my affiliation is listed as “Independent Scholar”. I receive no financial aid from research institutions nor do I have an automatic network of colleagues. I have friends, family members, teachers, and an informal network of other researchers, all of whom have helped me in various ways throughout my life, and some of whom discuss issues of common interest with me. I am quite fortunate for and grateful to the people I have encountered in my life, who have in different ways helped me make my way through life, and have contributed to my learning efforts. Ronald Swartz (May 28, 1945-May 25, 2022) some years ago invited me to work with him editing a selection of educational essays by our mentor Joseph Agassi. Every time Ron conversed with me, he uplifted my spirits. Even during Ron’s terminal illness, he demonstrated to me, in his own living, how to ceaselessly carry on tasks that one will be unable to finish during one’s lifetime. Indeed, as Ron demonstrated in his own life: life is a lab for learning. At one time, when I was teaching, one of my students asked me near the end of the academic year in class: “All teachers say they also learn from their students. Is that true for you?” I quickly answered: “Yes, but indirectly, for me to observe how well or not, I am teaching the material of this course, and how well or not the teaching methods I am trying out in this course are working.” The student replied, “You mean we are your guinea pigs!”. We all laughed, and now I think I have come to realize what I could have said to the student better when the student posed the original question about whether I as a teacher learn from my students. I could have responded: “We all learn from each other, each in our own way, as fallible human beings; we all teach and learn together.” Indeed, living is a lab for learning.

Essay One: Talking: a revised and expanded version of: Richmond, S., “An Architecture for Criticism or a Critical Discussion of David Olson’s Theory of the Origin of Criticism”. *Interchange*, 51, 79-87 (2020), <https://DOI.org/10.1007/s10780-020-09398-x>

Essay Two: Observing: a revised and expanded version of: Richmond, S., “Observing in Physics and in the Arts”, *Revista Outras Fronteiras*, Vol. 9, n. 1, 2021, pp. 129-150

ONE

TALKING

What I discuss in this essay, the importance of talking for humanity, for the birth of philosophy, for the birth of critical thinking, and how critical thinking as Socratic dialectics and dialogue, goes, is suggestively stated in kernel form in the following quote from the author, essayist and literary scholar, Lin Yutang. “The rise of Greek prose took place clearly in a leisurely social background. The lucidity of Greek thought and clearness of the Greek prose style clearly owe their existence to the art of leisurely conversation, as is so clearly revealed in the title of Plato’s Dialogues. In the “Banquet” [*Symposium*] we see a group of Greek scholars inclining on the ground and chatting merrily along...There was an atmosphere of mixed seriousness and gaiety and friendly repartee. People were making fun of Socrates’ drinking capacity, but there he sat, drinking or stopping as he liked, pouring a cup for himself when he felt like it, without bothering about others. And thus he talked the whole night out until everybody in the company fell asleep except Aristophanes and Agathon. When he had thus talked everybody to sleep and was thus the only one awake, he left the banquet and went to Lyceum to have a morning bath, and passed the day as fresh as ever. It was in this atmosphere of friendly discourse that Greek philosophy was born.” (pp. 217-218, Yutang, Lin, 1920, 1937, 1996, *The Importance of Living*, London: William Heinemann Ltd.; New York: Harper)

In this essay we are going to engage in a writing experiment that attempts to simulate the process of friendly “repartee” or Socratic dialogue without actually using the format of Plato’s dialogues. We will have, I hope, a friendly, and relaxed conversation in writing form, though one-sided, because I carry out the conversation in prose, about criticism, talking, writing, and Socratic dialogue. The core of Socratic dialogue is criticism, friendly criticism, and indeed, the core of talking as engaging in Socratic dialogue is friendly criticism. How can that be? Criticism is usually negative, and therefore, hostile or at the least, unfriendly. This view of criticism, even when interpreted in euphemistic terms as so-called constructive criticism, though widely held, is wrong.

I. Talking critically or giving and receiving criticism

Criticism is easy to give, hard to receive. Why don't we welcome criticism with open arms and gratitude? Rather, we treat criticism not as a gift horse, but as a Trojan horse—examining its teeth, and ever eager if not quite ready, to return criticism, not merely in kind, but with nuclear force, or in a twitter that delivers the knock-out thermal bomb; an everyday phenomenon. Why is it so hard and even rare for many to accept criticism gracefully and with gratitude?

Why do many people like to give, but do not like to receive criticism? Why do those in educational institutions laud the importance of teaching critical thinking, but many shudder at receiving criticism; especially in a conference session during the comment and question period of a paper presentation? The legendary example of a critical arrow that punctured a philosophical balloon thought to be an obvious truism, was the “yeah, yeah” critical remark shot by Sidney Morgenbesser. Sidney Morgenbesser became famous for shooting many witty and pointed remarks that punctured many a philosophical profundity. It would be remiss of me not to note the inverse question about those who sincerely seek criticism: Why are some, very few thinkers, grateful to receive sharp criticism?

Is it because when one gets criticism, one is put on the defensive and risks losing the argument? That may be true, but it is true for those who tacitly hold the very common and rarely questioned assumption about the purpose of arguments and critical discussion. Many think that the purpose of critical discussion is to win or at least persuade the others in the argument that you are correct. However, I suggest that this view of the purpose of critical discussion merges critical discussion with debates where the purpose is winning. That is the sort of debate that happens in politics where seeking truth is not the goal, but seeking to win is the goal. I propose that critical discussion is not a debate, and critical discussion is least of all a political debate.

Joseph Agassi and Abraham Meidan discuss first, how to avoid merging critical discussion with debates; and second, how to avoid the frustrations of critical discussion, in general. Joseph Agassi and Abraham Meidan propose that we use the long-known rules or logic and strategies of critical discussion. The key is how to use the rules or logic of critical discussion and how to implement the correct purpose of critical discussion, in our various critical discussions. Once we understand and employ those rules for critical discussion in the proper manner and for the proper purpose,

Joseph Agassi and Abraham Meidan say, we will short-circuit the frustrations of having critical discussions. (Agassi, Joseph, and Abraham Meidan, 2016, *Beg to Differ: The Logic of Disputes and Argumentation*, Cham: Springer International Publishing) Moreover, they argue that when we use the well-known and ancient rules for the logic of dialogue or dialectic, we can have rewarding critical discussions. Unfortunately, so they say, there has been much confusion about the purpose of dialogue/argument/dialectic. Joseph Agassi and Abraham Meidan propose that we have to be clear that the goal is truth, rather than defeating the other person, or even persuading the other person. Once we are clear about having arguments that are for the sake of truth, we can have fruitful discussions where those persons in the discussion can learn, can improve their understanding, and can improve their own viewpoints. From the perspective of thinking of critical discussion as a “game” where the goal is truth, the game of critical discussion is a collaborative game where no one loses and everyone collectively gains. However, there is another difficulty with critical discussion. The difficulty of frustration can be avoided by adopting the attitude of entering a collaborative game as opposed to a winner-take-all game. This other difficulty has to do with the social nature of criticism. Criticism is a learned social activity that requires deciding to adopt specific social practices, and that requires the development of specific social conditions as part of the various institutions and social circumstances surrounding critical discussion. The short and sum of critical discussion is that critical discussion requires a special social ecology or a social architecture.

Let’s rethink critical discussion.

II. Rethinking critical discussion

I’ve been talking about, thinking about, writing about Socratic dialogue as a model for critical discussion for a long time. Many years ago in my teaching days, I used the Socratic method of teaching, which is basically critical discussion, and part of my use of the Socratic method of critical discussion involved teaching the Socratic dialogue or Socratic method of critical discussion through using Socratic dialogue. Socratic teaching involves the process of trials, errors, and new trials. (I will discuss an improved version of the model later.) In short, I have been pursuing the project for developing and implementing Socratic teaching and criticism for a long time over many years, and had many failed attempts.

I have not been much interested in the origin of critical discussion—just in the theory of how to do critical discussion and practice critical discussion

in teaching, thinking, writing and talking. Lately, I have become interested in the origin of critical discussion in societies, and in social institutions. David Olson's book stimulated that interest. (Olson, David R., 2016, *The mind on paper: reading, consciousness, and rationality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) David Olson adopts a normative approach to criticism, as he does for the development of language that originated with writing. Writing allowed us to correct the oral vernacular in our attempt to represent speech. Corrections of the oral vernacular in written language created implicit norms that eventually became explicit in dictionaries and grammars. Dictionaries, lexicons, and grammars formed a meta-representational language that in turn formed cognitive self-awareness of one's speech and writing. The development of meta-languages came later with the development of artificial systems or languages. Furthermore, David Olson argues that criticism developed in parallel with the development of meta-representational cognition for written languages. Along with the development of criticism, came the development of norms for conducting criticism; norms for prose writing; norms for exegetical writing. In general, norms for talking, writing, and thinking or cognition, developed with the self-awareness of one's thoughts when written in prose.

To reveal my argument and disagreement with David Olson's implicit view of criticism occurring in normative contexts, as the giving of reasons, and making of inferences, within the context of norms and rules, I propose a different theory of criticism, of how criticism is done.

How is criticism done? How did criticism arise? Criticism, I think, originated with a specific dynamic within the self-critical tradition, under specific social conditions. Criticism boot-strapped itself by creating its own institutions and traditions for criticism that use criticism recursively or reflexively. This self-critical tradition of criticism originated in a predominantly oral culture. Oral speech avoids the meta-realm in its self-reflective or recursive discussions that are embedded within the discussions. Ironically, the recursive nature of criticism as embedded in orality is, I think, shown in Lewis Carroll's famous paradox of the infinite number of premises required for the simplest syllogism, when one attempts to make explicit all the rules of inference; rather than merely allowing inference to occur where most of the rules for inference are tacit. (Lewis Carroll, "What the Tortoise said to Achilles", *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 4, No. 14, 1895, pp. 278-280) Rules of inference are made explicit piecemeal as required in self-reflexive and recursive contexts. Lewis Carroll, in other words, was the precursor to Douglas Hofstadter's argument that recursive functions in symbols systems can be used to capture the self-reflexive na-

ture of consciousness, and the “I” (Hofstadter, Douglas R., “Who Shoves Whom around inside the Carenum? Or What Is the Meaning of the Word “I”? The Achilles Symbol and the Tortoise Symbol Encounter Each Other inside the Author’s Cranium”. *Synthese*, Nov. 1982, Vol. 53, No. 2, “Matters of the Mind”, pp. 189-218) Implicit, flexible, quasi-norms evolve in oral dominated cultures and are intertwined with the evolving streams of discussion or speech. In open-ended, taboo-free discussions, where no barriers occur for whatever topic, norms are disregarded, just as are subjects that are taboo for closed discussion. Unfortunately, those free-flowing, taboo-free conditions have proven to be fleeting and fragile; and, have been under fire since their beginning; but fortunately, those conditions pop up again here and there in intellectual oases.

The crux of my criticism of David Olson’s focus on writing as the core for both determining how criticism originated and how it is done, conducted, in literate societies, is that it is biased against oral societies. David Olson does not deny that rationality and criticism can occur in preliterate societies, but that the evolution of norms and the improvement of norms for rationality and criticism, require and involve literacy. The key point of disagreement that I have with David Olson’s theory is the requirement for norms. I ask, can we avoid having norms in the area of rationality and criticism? Also, I ask, can we avoid having norms as a presupposition of the question of the origin of criticism? This is where things become tricky. Socratic criticism is a specific form of criticism, and so the question about the origin of criticism in general needs to be distinguished from the question of the origin of Socratic criticism. But I am going to suppose for the sake of argument, that Socratic criticism is just criticism in general, that the Socratic theory of criticism is just criticism in general as practised by the predecessors of Socrates. I am postulating that the Socratic theory of how criticism is done, is just criticism that was discovered or invented and practised by the predecessors of Socrates, and it was that very practice of criticism and rationality that was articulated by Socrates and Plato. Socrates and Plato, I am supposing for the sake of argument, did not create a new form of criticism, but rather articulated criticism as it already occurred in ancient Greece. Socrates and Plato did not criticize their predecessors for how they conducted discussion, nor for how they argued, nor for how they criticized alternative views, but criticized the viewpoints of their predecessors. However, Socrates and Plato objected to the sophistry of the Sophists. The Sophists used whatever arguments they could, regardless of validity and truth, to win; to defeat their opponents; to persuade their audience. In contrast to the Sophists, who actually invented a new form of argumentation as the art of persuasion and the art of carrying on a

debate so as to win regardless of truth, Socrates and Plato used and articulated, I am postulating for the sake of argument, argumentation and criticism as it occurred among their predecessors.

One way to test or do a proof of concept of the theory of Socratic criticism that I am advancing is to implement the theory of Socratic criticism in how I write. In showing that I can write in a way that incorporates the theory of Socratic criticism, I am doing a proof of concept of the theory of Socratic criticism. The new design for an airplane is tested, is put through a proof of concept, with a mock-up model, first in a wind tunnel, and eventually in a prototype functioning flying plane; to find and iron out the defects. The design for self-learning devices can be put through a proof of concept by building model airplanes that use self-learning or deep learning algorithms to maneuver turbulence. The way I am writing using the form of a literary essay on writing according to the Socratic theory of criticism, is as if I were developing a prototype to be tested in the wind-tunnel of critical discussion; a prototype for exposing and ironing out defects. I am attempting to write according to the form of the literary essays, as if I were engaging in an open-ended discussion; not an expository one-way lecture from lecturer to listener. Rather, I am writing as if I were talking with you, and as if you could interrupt my talk with questions and criticisms. I am imagining that I am exchanging thoughts with you. Also, apart from the literary essay, I suggest that a fictional epistolary exchange, is another way, to imitate or simulate the interrupt-driven face-to-face exchange of thoughts, as a proof of concept of the theory that criticism is an open-ended discussion that involves afterthoughts, or self-reflection, or recursion.

Now I return to David Olson's book on reading, writing, consciousness and criticism (Olson, David, 2016, *The Mind on Paper: Reading, Consciousness and Rationality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); but, with my narrow focus on the question of the origin of criticism, and as part of the critical discussion of David Olson's theory of the origin of criticism. I also discuss the theory of how to practise criticism. My thought about how to critically discuss an expository book about the origin of criticism, consciousness, and rationality with writing, is to use a form of writing that embodies the critical to and fro of thoughts. Forms of writing that embody the critical to and fro of thoughts are the dialogue, the literary essay, and epistolary exchange. The dialogue form of writing often disguises the view of the author; also, the views of the protagonists and antagonists are often bare bones and stereotypical, without depth. The form of the literary essay that is both expository and critical, has greater depth, and also allows the author to propose their own viewpoints, as well as to carry out extended

critiques of alternative views. The fictional epistolary exchange is midway between the dialogue and the essay. The fictional epistolary exchange is closer to the dialogue than is the essay with respect to the dramatic effect of the to and fro of discussion in the dialogue. The fictional epistolary exchange is closer to the essay than the dialogue with respect and the more extended presentation of alternative viewpoints in the essay. I am going to use a fictional epistolary exchange for both discussing critically David Olson's theory of the origin of criticism, and also as a proof of concept of the theory of critical discussion that I am developing in this essay, and using in this book.

III. Fictional epistolary exchange as a model for critical discussion

Dear David,

Your book argues that *meta-representation* or consciousness of language developed through the gradual recognition that written language implicitly stabilizes and standardizes spoken language. The development of written language and the learning of how to write and read, articulates the logical, grammatical, and rational components in our natural use of language. Your cognitive science theory of the meta-representational function of written language, deepens the linguistic theory of meta-language.

However, Karl Popper had his own cultural theory of the origin of rationality and criticism. According to Karl Popper, the origin of rationality and criticism occurred with the pre-Socratics. The pre-Socratics, in Karl Popper's view, developed the tradition of rationality as criticism.

Sheldon

>>>>>>

Dear Sheldon,

Thank you for your comments. Popper's theory was incomplete. Writing was necessary for the development of rationality as criticism. How was writing necessary? Writing introduces the laboratory effect into consciousness. The laboratory effect of writing creates a consciousness that attempts to be impersonal, and context-free. Writing permits the scope for conducting arguments that are social situation and person neutral. For instance, in the laboratory of objective consciousness and context-free argumentation,

personal attacks and authority are ruled out.

Writing and literacy were required for the development of rationality, and created the laboratory effect where a culture and tradition of criticism could develop.

David

>>>>>>

Dear David,

I have a different picture. I don't mean it to be the exclusive way, just another way rationality as criticism could have developed, even before the invention of writing, and/or alongside the invention of writing. Here is my picture.

Suppose there was a group of people migrating from one climate and geography to a totally different climate and geography. Let's say from out of the plains into an area with forests. They kept getting lost, and wandered in circles. They tried one method for finding their way. Then they still got lost and kept wandering in circles. Then eventually, some of them came up with the bright idea of cutting notches in the trees, and by that way they did not backtrack; and, when they did, they could correct their path. Or it could have been another way—looking for a local friendly, at least not hostile, group who lived there and asking for directions or guidance. In either case, that would have been the beginning of critical rationality: trial and error, all based in physical movement, and signalling, without the intervention of literacy.

Another theory, though again not exclusive, and again, not dependent on literacy, could involve inter-generational disputes. The children disagree with their cave parents about whether to continue depending on hunting and gathering, and decide to look for other ways of getting food. How about planting seeds of fruit, and growing fruit trees, the children propose to their elders. Of course, the elders are a conservative bunch and mock their children. But the children eventually leave the cave and find a field where they plant various fruit trees. After about three years of tree growth, the children were able to harvest the fruit; and, refute the hypothesis of their parents that the only way to get food was through hunting and gathering.

Sheldon

that keeps it strong. Thirdly, a written text is basically unresponsive. If you ask a person to explain his or her statement, you can get an explanation; if you ask a text, you get back nothing except the same, often stupid, words which called for your question in the first place. In the modern critique of the computer, the same objection is put, 'Garbage in, garbage out'. Fourthly, in keeping with the agonistic mentality of oral cultures, Plato's Socrates also holds it against writing that the written word cannot defend itself as the natural spoken word can: real speech and thought always exist essentially in a context of give-and-take between real persons. Writing is passive, out of it, in an unreal, unnatural world...One weakness in Plato's position was that, to make his objections effective, he put them into writing, just as one weakness in anti-print positions is that their proponents, to make their objections more effective, put the objections into print...Plato of course was not at all fully aware of the unconscious forces at work in his psyche to produce this reaction, or overreaction, of the literate person to lingering, retardant orality. Such considerations alert us to the paradoxes that beset the relationships between the original spoken word and all its technological transformations. The reason for the tantalizing involutions here is obviously that intelligence is relentlessly reflexive, so that even the external tools that it uses to implement its workings become 'internalized', that is, part of its own reflexive process." (pp. 78-80)

Walter

>>>>>

Gentlemen, I am the very soul of Eric Havelock. Walter must know, as our Platonic Souls often discuss, in Plato's Heaven of Souls and Ideas, the Greek classics and the invention of writing, that I would have something to say. Actually, I would like to set the record straight. I think that there is more to dialectics than verbal wrestling or repudiation, or answering a question with another question, as Walter suggests perhaps in a somewhat derisive and sarcastic manner. I agree with Walter in general that the early Greeks were in a transitional stage between orality and writing, in that the pre-Socratics did write but their writing incorporated the features of oral poetry and the devices of speech used by the wandering minstrels in their lengthy orations. Moreover, dialectics originated with the pre-Socratics, and further developed by Socrates and Plato, had a form that followed the patterns of speech. Here is what I said in my book (Havelock, Eric A., 1963, *Preface to Plato*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press): "One is entitled to ask...given the immemorial grip of the oral method of preserving group tradition, how a self-consciousness could ever have been creat-

time in Platonic Heaven: "...it is an exaggeration to assert, as has still been done recently, that Greco-Roman civilization early on became a civilization of writing and that one can thus treat, methodologically, the philosophical works of antiquity like any other written work. For the written works of this period remain closely tied to oral conduct. Often they were dictated to a scribe. And they were intended to be read aloud, either by a slave reading to his master or by the reader himself, since in antiquity reading customarily meant reading aloud, emphasizing the rhythm of the phrase and the sounds of the words, which the author himself had already experienced when he dictated his work. The ancients were extremely sensitive to these effects of sound. Few philosophers of the period we study resisted this magic of the spoken word, not even the Stoics, not even Plotinus...More than other literature, philosophical works are linked to oral transmission because ancient philosophy itself is above all oral in character. Doubtless there are occasions when someone was converted by reading a book, but one would then hasten to the philosopher to hear him speak, question him, and carry on discussions with him and other disciples in a community that always serves as a place of discussion. In matters of philosophical teaching, writing is only an aid to memory, a last resort that will never replace the living word. True education is always oral because only the spoken word makes dialogue possible, that is, it makes it possible for the disciple to discover the truth himself amid the interplay of questions and answers and also for the master to adapt his teaching to the needs of the disciple. A number of philosophers, and not the least among them, did not wish to write, thinking, as did Plato and without doubt correctly, that what is inscribed in the soul by the spoken word is more real and lasting than letters drawn on papyrus or parchment." (pp. 61-62, Hadot, Pierre and Arnold I. Davidson, 1995, *Philosophy as a way of life*, Oxford: Blackwell)

I end the fictional email exchange. At the minimum, the technology of writing afforded a new model of the impersonal and detached thinker. The impersonal and detached thinker focuses on an impersonal object of knowledge, including self-knowledge. This form of impersonal consciousness moves away from the concrete and specific, to the abstract and universal. The detached thinker detaches from self-immersion in the lived world, real life living. The detached thinker moves away from knowledge as a form of identifying with the known, as a closed circle of subject and object, to a separation of self from one's lived world, and to an identification of the self with abstractions.

Suppose that the technology of writing with literacy has transformed consciousness and has created a world of autonomous texts, books, for one to inhabit as one's milieu. Suppose the world of books and text has become a milieu where one can dwell apart from the everyday world of ordinary problems, and concrete realities. Suppose that it is true that books and text form an autonomous ecology for humanity: Is there still a link to the origin of dialectics and critical thinking among the pre-Socratics and with Socrates and Plato? Is there still a link of literacy to the orality of asking questions, finding answers that differ both with traditional answers and even other novel answers? Is there still a link of literacy to the orality of attempting to discover which among those answers are most adequate to the concrete problems and issues that arise not only from considering texts, but from and within our concrete daily situations?

In order to consider in more detail, the question of the link of literacy with the orality of critical discussion, apart from the question of the origin of critical discussion or critical rationality, the question that now requires answering opens to us: how do we carry on critical discussion?

IV. The why and how of talking and critical discussion

Before going forward, I need to interrupt myself with a prior question that so far has been lurking in the background that I have not as of yet considered: why talking? Why do I talk about talking? What's so important about talking? Furthermore, I am only talking about dialogical talking, and even only about a subset of dialogical talking, dialectics or critical discussion. Why is dialectics or critical discussion so important, if it is?

Talking is important for communication. But is it all that important? Apart from writing, we have dancing, instrumental music, bodily movements such as pointing, facial expressions, and we have the visual and graphic arts. Communication: the bees do it, the birds do it, the whales and dolphins do it, and even plants do it. Let us admit firstly, that communication is important for humans as well as for all life. (Karban, Richard, Kaori Shiojiri, Satomi Ishizaki, William C. Wetzel, and Richard Y. Evans, "Kin Recognition Affects Plant Communication and Defence", *Proceedings: Biological Sciences* 280, no. 1756, 2013) However, talking seems primarily a human activity including for those who talk with the use of sign-language as opposed to speech. Moreover, talking has many other important functions other than communication: such as bonding, self-talking, or thinking out loud, ritualistic activities; social action or pragmatics as in the performance of various social functions such as oath-taking in courts,

political agitation, verbal contractual agreements or the formation of covenants.

Given all that, I have decided to focus on one aspect of talking concerning the cognitive aspect of speech; and even, one strand of cognitive speech, not lecturing, but dialectical or critical discussion, as an important form of learning, intellectual discovery, and teaching. Indeed, I think that critical discussion, though not the exclusive nor always the best form of learning or intellectual discovery and growth, is the best form under certain circumstances. Moreover, critical discussion is a good model. The model of critical discussion can be used as an architecture for other forms of learning, lectures, essays and books, and social institutions in our so-called information society and so-called knowledge companies. As one of the early founders of the sociological study of talking, of conversations, Harvey Sacks said in one of his lectures: "...“Why?” is a way of asking for an account. Accounts are most extraordinary...The fact that you could use questions—like “Why?”—to generate accounts, and then use accounts to control activities, can be marked down as, I think, one of the greatest discoveries in Western civilization. It may well be that that is what Socrates discovered. With his Dialectic he found a set of procedures by which this thing, which was not used systematically, could become a systematic device. Socrates will constantly ask “Why?”, there will be an answer, and he’ll go on to show that that can’t be the answer. And that persons were terribly pained to go through this whole business is clear enough from the Dialogues.” (pp. 219-220, Sacks, Harvey, “Rules of Conversational Sequence”, *Human Studies*, Dec. 1989, Vol. 12, No. 3-4, “Harvey Sacks Lectures 1964-1965”, pp. 217-227, 229-231, 233) Parallel to Harvey Sacks, though earlier, Karl Popper, also had the same idea that dialectics or critical discussion was one of the great discoveries for Western civilization and for humanity, in general: “there is the historical fact that the Ionian school was the first in which pupils criticized their masters, in one generation after the other. There can be little doubt that the Greek tradition of philosophical criticism had its main source in Ionia. It was a momentous innovation. It meant a break with the dogmatic tradition which permits only one school doctrine, and the introduction in its place of a tradition that admits a plurality of doctrines which all try to approach the truth by means of critical discussion. It thus leads, almost by necessity, to the realization that our attempts to see, and to find, the truth, are not final, but open to improvement; that our knowledge, our doctrine, is conjectural; that it consists of guesses, of hypotheses, rather than of final and certain truths; and, that criticism and critical discussion are our only means of getting nearer to the truth. It thus leads to the tradition of bold conjectures and of free

criticism, the tradition which created the rational or scientific attitude, and with it our Western civilization, the only civilization which is based upon science.” (p. 21, Popper, Karl, “Back to the Pre-Socratics: The Presidential Address”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, Vol. 59, 1958-1959, pp. 1-24)

I agree, as a tentative hypothesis, that dialectics, or critical discussion, was one of the top inventions for humanity. However, even though I have concentrated on the pre-Socratics and Socrates as the inventors, or discoverers, of dialectics, critical discussion; critical discussion was also independently discovered among ancient Indian philosophers (Sen, Amartya Kumar, 2006, *The argumentative Indian: writings on Indian history, culture, and identity*, New York: Penguin Group), and in ancient Chinese philosophers (Fung, Yu-lan, 1948, 1967, *A short history of Chinese philosophy: A systematic history of Chinese philosophy*, ed. Derk Bodde, New York: Macmillan Co.) Furthermore, according to Erving Goffman, we can't use the dialogic form exclusively for “the basic model for talk”, because “...this formulation leaves no way open for disproof, for how could one show that what followed a particular question was in no way an answer to it?” (p. 293, Goffman, Erving, “Replies and Responses”, *Language in Society*, Dec. 1976, Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 257-313) Actually, Erving Goffman argues talking is a series of interactions, initiations and responses in a flowing, often unpredictable conversation that cannot be put into a “box”: “What, then, is talk viewed interactionally? It is an example of that by which individuals come together and sustain matters having a ratified, joint, current, and running claim upon attention, a claim which lodges them together in some sort of intersubjective, mental world.” (p. 308, *idem*) Or not, if the conversation turns into the more narrow path of a Socratic process of critical discussion, the “intersubjective, mental world” can be burst, and the common social world can be disrupted; and, this is what I find important in dialectics: not the achievement of a form of commonality whether in a “intersubjective, mental world” or whether in a common social world. Rather, in the discovery of difference, with the aim of improving one's thinking, as part of the overall goal of knowledge-seeking, truth-seeking. This, then, brings us back to the key question of this essay: how does talking as critical or Socratic discussion go?

I think people see two out of three aspects of Socratic discussion. First, many people see Socrates as proposing refutations: showing contradictions, and counter-examples. Second, many people see Socrates as proposing what has been called, “internal criticism”, or “immanent criticism”, or “constructive criticism”. When Socrates helps the student, or interlocutor,

develop their ideas, Socrates shows them how they can better articulate their views, and then shows them that according to their own goals, the improved version of their ideas fails. Socrates is engaging in constructive, immanent, internal, criticism. Harvey Sacks, whom I discussed previously for his development of the sociology of talk, has a very user-friendly phrase, a welcoming phrase, for immanent or constructive criticism, “inviting a correction” that basically involves paraphrasing: “...so far I’ve talked about the construction of these correction invitation devices, and said that it’s based on the fact that, using a range of classes, you can refer to one member to get another member. We might also be able to say something about the basis for their being used in the first place. And at least one basis for that is perhaps something like the following. If you say to somebody “Why did you do this?” then what they are being asked to present is something they may well know they have to defend. And you set up a different situation when what they have to present is something they know they have to defend, as compared to setting it up such that you’re not asking for an account they have to defend, but you’re ‘inviting a correction’.” (pp. 248-249, Sacks, Harvey, “Lecture Three: The Correction-Invitation Device”, *Human Studies*, Dec. 1989, Vol. 12, No. 3, 4, “Harvey Sacks Lectures 1964-1965”, pp. 247-252)

Third, there is a less popular form of criticism that Socrates uses, that is similar to constructive criticism, but that involves helping the student to remember or make discoveries that are on the tip of the student’s tongue, implicit in their current knowledge, or in front of their nose, requiring a gestalt type switch in focus. A change in perspective may be all that is needed to bring to mind something we already know but need to stretch or modify in order to fit or cohere with new situations. Michael Polanyi built a whole philosophical outlook based on “personal knowledge” as he called it, that stems from the Socratic process of discovery-learning. Here is the core of Michael Polanyi’s version of the Socratic process of discovery-learning that begins with guesswork: “...the process of guessing starts when the novice feels first attracted to science and is then attracted further towards a certain field of problems. This guesswork involves the assessment in many particulars of the young person’s own yet largely undisclosed abilities and of a scientific material, yet uncollected or even unobserved, to which he may later successfully apply his abilities. It involves the sensing of hidden gifts in himself and of hidden facts in nature, from which two, in combination, will spring one day his ideas that are to guide him to discovery. It is characteristic of the process of scientific conjecture that it can guess, as in this case, the several consecutive elements of a coherent sequence—even though each step guessed at a time can be justified