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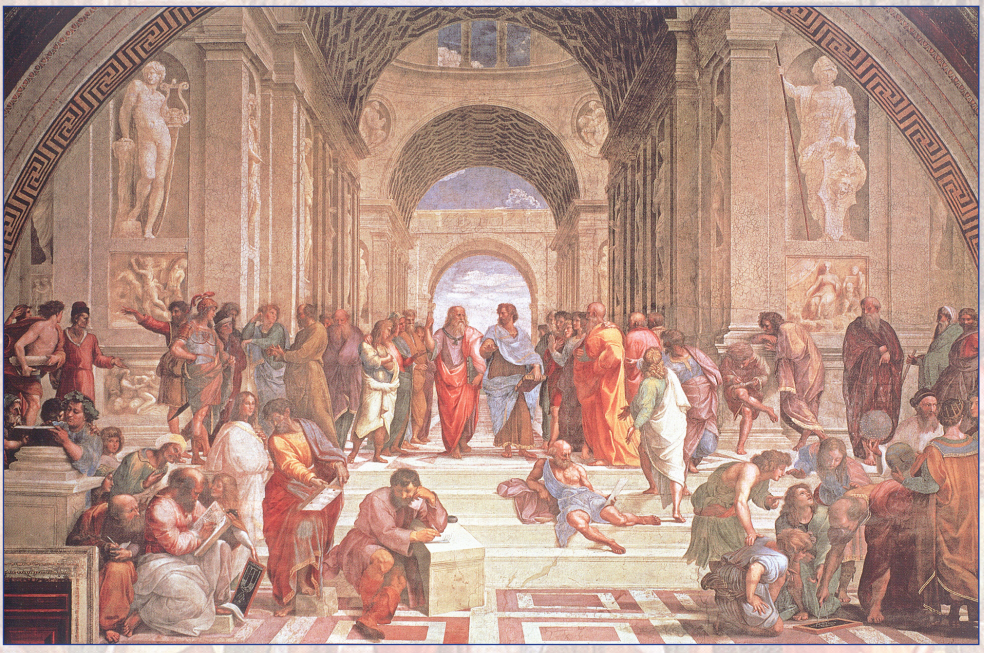

A PHILOSOPHICAL MURDER MYSTERY

LUKE HAUSER

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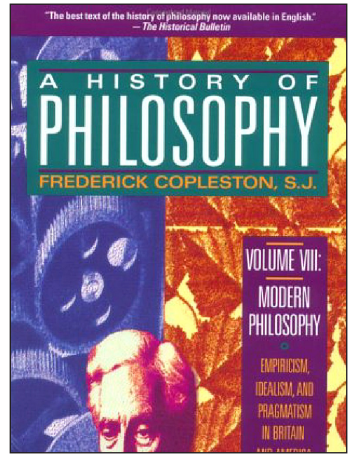

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For duty and humanity!

– Luke Hauser

THEREFORE I AM

A PHILOSOPHICAL MURDER MYSTERY

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A PHILOSOPHICAL MURDER MYSTERY

BY LUKE HAUSER

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Hauser, Luke
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This is a work of historical fiction. While the historical philosophers are based on actual human beings, their words and behavior are the interpretation of the author. Except for the narrator, no Institute professor or staff member, nor any of the auxilliary characters, is based on anyone living or dead.

The author researched many sources in an effort to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this book. Responsibility for errors, inaccuracies, omissions, inconsistencies, or regrettable puns lies entirely with the author, not the original thinkers, the publisher, or the readers.

This is Draft03. Draft01 appeared in 2005, Draft02 about 2008. Will this be the final version? It depends on how long I live and how much feedback I get. Send thoughts, concerns, and/or chocolate to: <directactionnovel@gmail.com>

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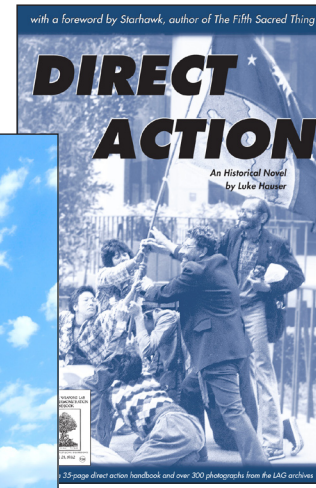

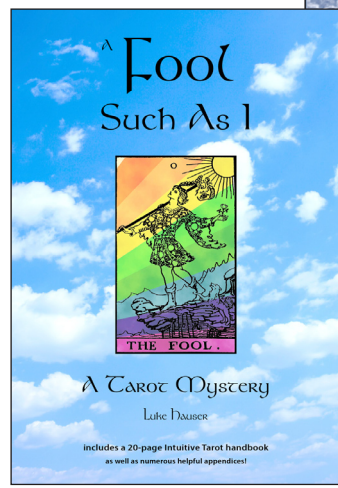

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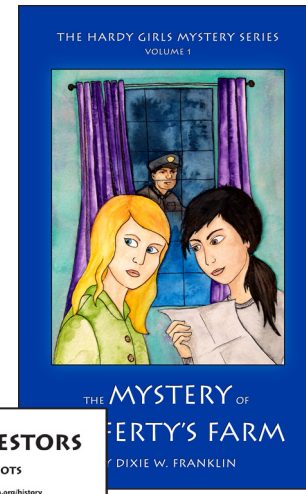

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Imad Shouery
Indiana State University / Terre Haute (phenomenology & history)

Gary Foulk
Indiana State University / Terre Haute (logic)

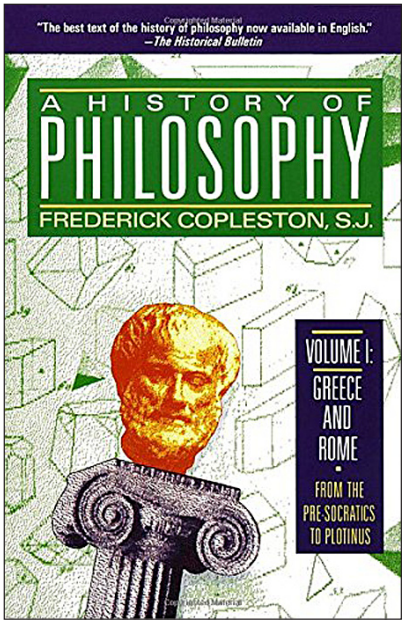
William Ruddy
Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology & Graduate Theological Union / Berkeley-Oakland (phenomenology)

Frederick Copleston, S. J.
A History of Philosophy

Special apologies to any thinker whose ideas I have misconstrued – I hereby authorize you or your descendents to return the favor.

Que sais-je?

– Michel de Montaigne



Dramatis Situationis

***Opening Date**: Sunday September 15 – Fall Orientation Day*

***Location**: Terre Haute, Indiana – epicenter of Western philosophy*

***Narrator**: Jeff Harrison, humble yet perspicacious grad student recently moved from Berkeley to Terre Haute to study epistemology*

***Epistemology**: from Greek episteme = knowledge, from epistanai = to understand, know (epi- + histanai to cause to stand) – the study of the nature and grounds of knowledge, especially with reference to its limits and validity.*

***In colloquial terms**: How can I be sure I really know what I think I know? Assuming I know something, how can I know what it is that I know? Even if I figure that out, how do I know that I have successfully communicated said knowledge to another person, and that the other person indeed knows the same knowledge that I know? And so on and so forth.*

Appendices

Several appendices such as a glossary of terms and a key to the identity of the philosophers in Raphael's painting follow the final scene of the book.

Prologue

Solve the mystery before Jeff! Here are the key clues.

We begin with a body.

A corpse, one might be tempted to say, given the ashen complexion and inanimate contortions of the limbs.

However, such an assertion would go beyond strictly empirical evidence into the realm of conjecture.

True, all signs pointed to the body being a corpse, and pragmatic semiotics might find such a reading inescapable.

But perhaps this interpretation is circular, with the conclusion implicit in the premises – a dilemma all too common in the Western tradition.

Such conundrums and problematics make up the subject matter of our tale, in which our intrepid detective undertakes not only to bring a desperate manuscript thief to justice, but along the way to unravel a few of the mysteries of Western philosophy.

* * *

To call the body a corpse carries more than a hint of murder. And murder implies a murderer, a logical inference the authorities were doing their best to deny.

Campus police declared the case a tragic accident: a matter of a large and poorly-shelved book succumbing to the iron law of gravitational attraction at a most inopportune moment.

The instrument of death?

The *Cambridge Compleat Dictionary of Philosophy (Unabridged)*. The mighty compendium of knowledge had left its all-too-obvious imprint on the fallen professor's skull.

The victim?

The leading light of Western philosophy – Phineas Q. Testascrittore, Regius Professor of Recombinative Sartrics, who was about to leave his office to deliver the orientation lecture at the West Central Indiana Institute for the Hermeneutical Phenomenology of Interdisciplinary Post-Relativism.

Only grudgingly did the august professor fulfill the onerous annual obligation. The necessity of interacting with students was a burden on his brilliant mind, a distraction from his true calling: to provide an airtight proof of his own existence.

* * *

The task of proving one's existence stood as the Holy Grail of Western philosophy, an historically-inflected riposte to the debilitating nihilism of the Postmodern era.

Mr. Testascrittore was known to be on the verge of supplying the long-sought proof, which would crown his magnum opus: *The Being of Nothingness and the Nothingness of Being (Part II)*.

He had been reviewing his most recent formulations, poring over a handwritten manuscript (Mr. Testascrittore being notorious for his refusal to use a typewriter, let alone a computer) in which he had sketched the latest draft of the proof of his own existence.

He had just tucked away the manuscript for safe-keeping when a familiar visitor entered the office.

Without a word the guest lifted the massive philosophical dictionary from the bookshelf and walked over behind Mr. Testascrittore.

* * *

How many times in history has a brilliant discovery, an epoch-making deduction, or an incredibly fortuitous hunch been snuffed by the cold hand of icy-fingered death?

Too late Mr. Testascrittore realized his visitor's maleficent intent. As the full weight of Cambridgian scholarship slammed into his skull, the doyen of contemporary Sartrics was overwhelmed by the ultimate existential irony – he had succeeded in proving his own existence at the very moment that he ceased to exist.

Darkness curling around his consciousness, he summoned his last reserve of strength. Dimly he recalled a popular novel read in some distant airport where the victim contorted his expiring body to leave a string of clues.

Professor Testascrittore staggered to his desk and grabbed a copy of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* in his right hand. As blood dripped from his head onto the book, he flung out his left hand toward a classical marble bust.

Facing the largest bookcase, Mr. Testascrittore made a final heroic effort to tuck his right foot behind his left knee.

Then he leaned back and with a deep groan crashed lifeless to the floor.

And now – on with the novel!

Chapter One

1.

I shifted restlessly in my back-row seat. When was the orientation going to start?

According to the graduate assistant, Mr. Testascrittore would arrive momentarily. However many times he had delivered his annual orientation lecture, the distinguished professor was said to be as punctual as the celebrated Mr. Kant, by whose comings and goings neighbors set their watches.

Who set their watch by hand any longer? Still, the graduate assistant (one Perkins) assured us that it was a most extraordinary occasion that Mr. Testascrittore, whom all of us were on the edge of our chair-desks to meet, was running late for his first lecture of the year.

But was it so unusual after all? The only evidence we had was Perkins' word. On what basis was he asserting this state of affairs? His memory?

How could he assert that his memory was an adequate gauge of the entirety of reality?

In fact, on what grounds did this Perkins fellow even assert that Mr. Testascrittore existed? His own experience? How reliable was experience, after all?

For most of recorded history, it was an indisputable fact of direct

experience that the Earth was flat.

And for even longer than that, experience showed beyond any plausible doubt that our planet stood still while the Sun revolved around it.

So much for experience. What we needed was proof.

And proof was why I had come here. Proof was why I had given up my leisurely life in the cultural prairielands of Berkeley to come to the booming metropolis of Terre Haute.

Mr. Testascrittore's quest for a proof of his own existence – as yet only an epistemological rumor – had captured my fancy during my undergrad studies at the University of Southeastern Berkeley – USB, or "Dear Old Youzbie," as the locals were wont to say.

The Testascrittoreian proof – so I gathered – dared to address one of my most vexing concerns: namely, my own existence.

I mean, if I spend my entire life working like a fool, paying rent and taxes and keeping up on credit card bills and flossing daily and so forth and so on – and then it turns out I don't even exist! – I am going to feel like I wasted my life.

True, by strict Aristotelean syllogic, this does not imply that if I succeed in proving that I exist, my life *would* have meaning. Yet it seemed like a solid step in the right direction, and for that reason Mr. Testascrittore's proof struck me as the noblest of philosophical quests.

I'd heard Mr. Testascrittore perform twice when he came through Berkeley headlining the Philosophalooza Tour, and I always had a fantasy that he'd spend a semester in residence at USB so I could study with him.

Not that a provincial town like Berkeley could expect to snare such an eminent epistemologist, even for a semester. Whatever my dreams, I knew the reality was much more pedestrian – an annual glimpse of my idol from the nosebleed seats at the Wavy Gravy Memorial Auditorium and Ice Rink.

So imagine my surprise and delight when, toward the end of another lazy California summer (one that had seen me drop all my classes and spend my days at the beach basking in Mr. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*), the eminent Mr. Testascrittore himself invited me to study at the Institute – all because of a shared taste for pizza.

As part of a class called Phenomenological Analysis of the Italian Culinary Inheritance (Phenomenology being a buzzword for carefully describing

something), I wrote an in-depth account of USB's annual Prima Pizzavera Pig-Out contest that was published in the campus daily, offering blow by blow coverage of the omnivore round along with its somewhat less savory aftermath in the campus washhouse.

Waiting backstage before the Philosophalooza show, Mr. Testascrittore happened to see my article and publicly hailed it as a masterpiece of gastro-intestinal Phenomenology. A roadie contacted me with an invitation to submit the piece to the renowned *West Central Indiana Journal of Applied Descriptology*, of which Mr. Testascrittore was a consulting editor.

My amazement was compounded when a day later I was notified that the famed professor had wired the Rector of the Institute and (in what I was subsequently informed was one of his periodic bursts of fancy) practically demanded that I be offered a graduate fellowship, complete with housing and meal plan.

Further, I was to serve as a departmental aide – an entre to the highest ranks of graduate assistantship in the Western world.

The invitation arrived a scant week before the start of the term. Despite the fact that I was already registered for Fall semester at USB and had planned out my complete schedule of skipping classes, the temptation was irresistible.

Not that I was unhappy with my life in Berkeley. I worked a few hours a day as a campus custodian, went to a class here or there, and spent the rest of my time playing music, going to protests, and reading the books I really felt like reading.

Not a bad life for an aspiring philosophe. But not quite the challenge my budding intellect required.

Given that Berkeley was named for a famous philosopher, it was a bit ironic that the town was an intellectual backwater while Terre Haute (Demotic French for High Land, so dubbed in honor of the local cannabis strain) was an international cultural capitol.

Berkeley was named for George Berkeley (pronounced "Bark-lee"), early eighteenth-century Bishop of Cloyne in Ireland, who in his spare time after visiting the poor and tending the sick and clothing the naked and hosting official banquets and that sort of episcopally thing found the opportunity to immerse himself in Mr. Locke's notion that all of our ideas derive from sense data.

Mr. Berkeley, imaginative spirit that he was, carried the idea to the next level by noting that if all knowledge was based on sense-data, and all we had to double-check it was more sense-data, we'd soon find ourselves wondering whether there was any material substrate at all behind the endless parade of sense-data appearances.

His questions have troubled generations of inquisitive spirits. But like Mr. Hume after him, who questioned the existence of causes on similar Lockean grounds, Mr. Berkeley seems not to have allowed his radical views to disrupt an otherwise pleasant existence.

Indeed it was probably this enjoyable lifestyle rather than his philosophical gambit which led the quiet little Northern California burg to christen itself in his honor.

I felt a pang of homesickness for the slower ways of California. When I left – was it only days earlier? – my friends pleaded with me to be rational and hang onto my custodial position at USB.

"Janitorial Science is a field with a future," they said. "Philosophy will get you nowhere."

But I was out to prove them wrong. In my heart of hearts, I knew that philosophy had the power to change the world.

And I had concrete historical evidence from the earliest days of the craft.

2.

The tale is told of Mr. Diogenes, a Cynic of classical Greece, who held that happiness and truth were attainable only by a life of utter simplicity and self-denial.

Mr. Diogenes wore a coarse cloak, neglected his hygiene, and lolled around town all day refusing to work.

Once when he saw a girl drinking from her hands he reached into his scanty pack and threw away his own battered cup, saying dejectedly, "a child has beaten me in plainness of living."

When anyone complained or criticized, his stock response was, "Diogenes is a dog."

As might be expected in a society so enlightened as Ancient Greece, Mr. Diogenes' fame spread far and wide. Apprentice Cynics traveled great distances to study at the dirty feet of the master and imbibe his canile

approach to the cycle of futility known as life.

Word of the great Cynic reached Alexander of Macedon, then preparing to embark on his expedition against the mighty Persian empire. Alexander was no intellectual slouch, having been schooled in his youth by Mr. Aristotle.

Upon learning that his army was passing near Mr. Diogenes' abode, Alexander ordered a detour. Presently he and his generals came upon the philosopher sprawled in a sunny patch of dirt alongside the main road.

Alexander dismounted and approached Mr. Diogenes respectfully. At first the Cynic ignored the youthful general. But Alexander was not to be put off. With a sweeping bow he introduced himself and his entourage. "What service may I, Prince of Macedon, render to you, the prince of philosophers? Say but a word, and I shall command that it be done instantly!"

Mr. Diogenes inclined his head slightly toward the young warlord. He was silent a moment, as if contemplating the magnanimous offer. At last he looked directly at Alexander and said: "Could you move over a bit? You're blocking my sunlight."

Alexander's reply ("Were I not Alexander, I would wish to be Diogenes,") is surely apocryphal, and I prefer not to repeat it here.

But we must note in conclusion that Alexander went on from this encounter to conquer much of the known world.

Who dares to say philosophy has no practical value?

Still, it could have practical value only if the philosophizing actually happened. All we'd done so far in this orientation was sit and wait.

Which some would declare is excellent training for philosophy.

But I could have sat and waited in Berkeley. I'd come all the way to Indiana to study in the presence of the great Mr. Testascrittore.

3.

A flickering fluorescent light drew my attention back to the classroom. The space was long and narrow, with mullioned windows along the left side. Like the entire building, it was a well-tended relic of an older time. Green chalkboards covered the front wall. Rows of wooden chair-desks faced the lectern. A black and white schoolroom clock kept strict time. All called

forth an aura of unchanging values and eternal truths.

I looked around at my fellow students. There were a hundred of us in the large room, eagerly awaiting the celebrated professor. A good ninety were white men. Not surprising, given that practically every thinker we would be grappling with was a European male.

Not every. I always wondered how Mr. Augustine – a North African – felt about being lumped into the opening chapters of "European" philosophy. Or what about the Egyptian Neo-Platonist Mr. Plotinus, who lived and taught in Alexandria but was co-opted by the Greeks when his writings gained fame?

Where did you place Mr. Ibn Sina aka Mr. Avicenna of Persia, pivotal interpreter of Mr. Aristotle and one of the most influential thinkers in the entire tradition?

What about an Argentine like Mr. Borges or Mr. Garcia Marquez of Colombia – writers paving new directions in our tradition of thought?

Given the breadth of our lineage – from capitols as far-flung as Istanbul and Terre Haute to outposts like Copenhagen and Berkeley – the word "Western" seemed to make more sense than "European." After all, everyone we studied *was* from west of India and China.

But here at the Institute things were pretty lopsided. I noticed five people of color in the classroom, and several had accents that suggested they might be from Europe or Africa.

Little market for epistemology among American people of color, I figured. Not surprising, considering that until the later 1900s, racial separatism was considered "logical."

My dear old grandfather used to tell stories of the days when logical theorems for people of color were "separate but equal." Although induction by all races was tacitly tolerated, conclusions reached by people of color were not entered into the Universal Compendium of Human Inference.

While the situation had improved somewhat since then, it was no great shock that people of color were not lining up to study the tools of their ancestors' oppression.

Women counted for a slightly higher percentage – seven, to be exact. I wondered what it was like for a woman to spend the best years of her life poring over the works of dead men.

Women of course had been using logic since 1920, when the Nineteenth Amendment guaranteed women the right to deduce. Social habits die hard, though, and until the feminist revolution of the 1970s women were prohibited from engaging in sustained rational thought in public.

Occasionally during my undergrad years I heard rumblings of something called "feminist epistemology." I tried to imagine what the phrase could mean. Was someone suggesting that a "fact" for one gender was not a fact for the others? That the laws of logic applied differently for women? I didn't see how that could be.

But then, I'd come to Terre Haute in search of new knowledge. Maybe this was part of it.

Perkins distracted me. He was pacing across the front of the room, his head jerking fore and aft like a hyper-caffeinated chicken.

Coffee. I'd had little experience of this highly-addictive drug in Berkeley, where caffeine was shunned as a tool of capitalist exploitation. I was accustomed to people passing a joint around the classroom to get in the proper mood for philosophizing.

But that was the old days, the quiet days. Much as I loved Berkeley, I knew the cosmopolitan environs of Terre Haute were where I needed to be.

A sharp crack yanked my attention back to the lecture hall.

4.

At the front of the lecture hall, Perkins – apparently unnerved at Mr. Testascrittore's ongoing failure to appear – had snapped the stick of chalk he was clutching.

A little knot of students near the front whispered and laughed nervously. Perkins strode stiffly to the door and looked out into the hall. His tight countenance when he turned back told me he'd seen no sign of the professor.

Perkins himself, one had to admit, was not such as to inspire the greatest confidence in the Institute. A more self-assured assistant might lean against the desk and casually toss the stick of chalk into the air. An ambitious sort might undertake to begin the orientation, regaling us with a few jests and convivial anecdotes to loosen up the audience for Mr. Testascrittore's imminent arrival.

Perkins, on the other hand, was wound like an over-primed cuckoo clock.

Still, who could doubt that the facade of mediocrity must surely conceal the makings of philosophical brilliance?

Perkins had, after all, been entrusted by Mr. Testascrittore himself with preparing our class for the great man's arrival. He was a senior graduate assistant, whereas I was but a novice grad student, fresh off the bus. An immeasurable gulf must separate me from true Terre Hautians like Perkins.

I'd been put in my place on my second day in town, when, having arrived as Mr. Testascrittore's latest protégé, I crashed back to Earth with a slipshod performance in the Amorphic Structuralism placement exams, followed by a barely adequate showing in Quotidian Hermeneutics and slow response times in the behavioral tests.

Mr. Testascrittore had been on the road, so I was spared his reaction. The Rector, Mr. Grosskase, who paid me the compliment of appointing himself my faculty advisor, showed only slight concern when we met to review my course load.

As a beginning student, my classes focused mainly on Sartrics: Sartrean Motifs in the Later Wittgenstein, Foundations of Latter-Day Sartrics, Analytical Sartrean Techniques, Marxian Dialectics in the Later Sartre, Existentialist Descriptics, and a seminar with Mr. Testascrittore himself on The Being of Sartre's Concept of Nothingness.

Add to that a required history class and an Experimental Metaphysics Lab, and I felt like I was carrying a full load.

As if this wasn't enough, Mr. Grosskase pushed me to pick up an elective course on G. E. Moore's Theory of the Reason That Up is Up. Much as I wanted to please my new advisor, I politely but firmly declined.

It wasn't just that I trusted my intuition on things like Up-ness. I knew that keeping pace with my classes was going to challenge my academic habits. I simply didn't have the background that folks from a cultural capitol like Terre Haute took for granted.

Sure, I got my bachelor's degree in Philosophy, which means, if I may show off my pidgin Greek, the love (philo) of wisdom (sophia).

But a bachelor's degree from the University of Southeastern Berkeley basically meant that you'd memorized *Phlegman's Comparative Table of Philosophical Tendencies*, read a few pages of this or that writer, and written a final paper explaining the meaning of life, which we were talking about all the time anyway, so it was a cinch.

USB didn't offer a graduate degree in Philosophy per se. Instead, you did masters-level work in a program called Philosophilia – the love of philosophy.

If you made the grade, you moved on to the doctoral program in Philosophiliasophy – the love of the wisdom of philosophy.

A friend of mine in the Ph.D. program had a lover who called himself a "philiaphilosophiliasophist."

That we use the word "philosophy" is due, if legends can be credited, to the charming modesty of the great Mr. Pythagorus, he for whom the famous geometric theorem is named.

Before his time, learned people such as Mr. Thales or Mr. Solon were known as "sages." Mr. Pythagorus demurred that he was in point of fact not wise, but merely a lover of wisdom. Hence philo-sophia.

These extraordinary factoids notwithstanding, even a few days in West Central Indiana had shown me how woefully inadequate my philosophical background was. I was surrounded by people who were steeped in the great books – works like Mr. Aristotle's *Metaphysics* or Mr. Rabelais's *Pantagruel* that I had barely skimmed.

My only hope was to make up by diligent study what I lacked in undergraduate preparation. I had to buckle down and hit the books hard.

The one area in which I figured I could hold my own was history. One semester at Berkeley, I read Frederick Copleston's *A History of Philosophy* cover to cover.

I stumbled onto the series at a most impressionable moment, shortly after changing my major from Post-Pragmatic Metaphysics to Non-Empirical Phenomenology. Cutting class one gorgeous September afternoon, I wandered up the bohemian sidewalks of Telegraph Avenue and for one dollar scored a used copy of Volume One.

By the end of the term I'd skipped a lot more classes and read Mr. Copleston's entire nine-volume series, which covered Western philosophy from the Ancient Greeks to the mid-1900s. My life would never be the same again.

Of course, how could it have been? Unless you're in a coma, how could your life not change? It would "never be the same again" no matter what you did.

Perkins' incessant pacing was beginning to get annoying. Directing

my attention to a midpoint between him and the schoolroom clock, I ascertained that he took slightly fewer than two steps per second. Between counting his steps, applying the multiplier to determine the exact amount of time that had elapsed, and correlating that figure with the clock on the wall, it was hard to stay focused on my own thoughts.

Suddenly I realized – what if it were a trick, and Mr. Testascrittore was actually taking the opportunity to be present in the mode of an absence which is nonetheless haunted by the ghost of a desired presence?

Perhaps his *not* being here was the ultimate Postmodern statement on presence, reality, and the future of Western philosophy.

Or maybe he was about to emerge and order us all to write a detailed description of our experience of waiting for him. I better pay closer attention.

The first thing I noticed was that waiting for him was not like waiting for just anyone. The great Phineas Q. Testascrittore, Professor of Recombinative Sartrics, was the leading light of the West Central Indiana Institute for the Hermeneutical Phenomenology of Interdisciplinary Post-Relativism – the most important philosophical academy in the Western world.

In his seminal work, *The Being of Nothingness and the Nothingness of Being (Part I)*, he scrutinized Mr. Descartes' famous "I think therefore I am" dictum as well as its ensuing critique by Mr. Sartre, who claimed that Mr. Descartes had gone too far in claiming to have proven his own existence.

After 847 pages of painstaking meta-historical discourse, Mr. Testascrittore concluded that the most urgent task facing contemporary philosophy was to develop a new proof of existence – a task to which he devoted the forthcoming Part II of his magnum opus.

A worthy mission, I thought, But easier said than done. How exactly did one *prove* existence?

Supposing Mr. Testascrittore himself were to walk through the door. Late, admittedly. But indubitably present to our senses. Would that prove his existence?

We've already seen that we can't trust "experience." So why should we trust even the direct evidence of our senses? Have they never been wrong? Doesn't the straight stick look bent if stuck into a glass of water?

Is it possible that water temporarily bends sticks? Or is light being bent by

some combination of wood, glass, and water? Or maybe looking at sticks in water bends our eyes?

But wait. What does all this bending prove about the reliability of our senses? How do we recognize that the water-inflected stick is bent, unless we compare it to our "normal," trustworthy perception of an unbent stick?

If we doubt the reliability of our sense-impressions, what can we compare them with to disprove them? More unreliable sense-impressions? That won't get us far.

There must be a foundation somewhere.

Where to start? That would be easier if Mr. Testascrittore would show up and begin his lecture. But he persisted in not being present.

I wrote on my paper: "Mr. Testascrittore not present," along with the date and time. That way, if necessary, I could refer back to it at a later moment and assure myself that he had not been here.

Assuming I could trust my memory of having written it.

Fifteen past the hour. Never in all of Perkins' experience, he assured us, had Mr. Testascrittore been fifteen minutes late. Even if he arrived now, I realized, his orientation lecture would have to be abridged to fit into the remaining time.

Perkins scrutinized his watch as if assuring himself of the objectivity of Time. "I'll return in a minute," he said, apparently expecting us to place a faith in his punctiliousness that we had already found misplaced when it came to his master.

As Perkins left the room, my tension lowered a notch. What an irritating character!

I wondered how much longer I should wait. My time was valuable, after all. Then again, assuming the great professor showed up, I'd still receive the blessings of his wisdom, albeit in a truncated version.

Which might not be a problem. Did Truth suffer from abridgement? Wasn't it simply The Truth?

Was 30 minutes of Truth worth less than 50? And if so, was it a simple linear reduction, or a hyperbolic curve in which some but not all of the lost time could be made up?

Was it possible that by arriving late Mr. Testascrittore might be so committed to making up the lost time that he would omit pleasantries,

digressions, and humorous asides and cut straight to the unadulterated epistemological truth? In which case we might get *more* truth despite the shorter time allotted to its propagation.

A commotion erupted in the hallway. Heads jerked toward the door. Perkins burst back into the room. "He's dead! Mr. Testascrittore is dead!"

5.

Perkins dashed back out of the room. As if summoned by Mr. Testascrittore himself, the entire class leapt up as one – minus me – and stampeded after Perkins.

I rose slowly and in a daze followed the pack down the wide hallway to Mr. Testascrittore's office. The students were jammed around the doorway, but I never doubted my right to be in the front ranks.

"Excuse me," I said, jabbing a few people with my elbows. Recalling Mr Testascrittore's likely devotion to the Italian tongue, I added, "Mi scusi," along with another jab.

The words and elbows worked like a charm. A narrow path opened, and I snaked my way through the gawking throng to the doorway.

Inside I saw Perkins on bended knee, hands gripping his head. Next to him, sprawled like a broken marionette, lay the foremost philosopher of the Western world, his skull crushed beyond all hope of survival. A few feet away lay the bloody instrument of destruction – a huge hardbound philosophical tome.

"No!" I cried, not merely for the incalculable loss of one of the great minds of all time, but also for the quite calculable loss of my sponsor at the Institute. "No, it can't be!"

Perkins, still kneeling, looked up at me. His hands dropped slowly from his head. "Yes," he intoned. "He's dead!"

His words stunned me into silence. Other students responded with everything from retching sounds to expressions of frustration at the likely change to their class schedule. All pushed closer, forcing me into the office.

I started toward Perkins and the dearly departed Mr. Testascrittore. But at that moment a squad of campus police came hacking their way through the throng.

"Stand back!" the commandant ordered.

The squad of police jumped back.

"No, not you!" the commandant cried. "All these other people – get them out of here!"

The police waved their billy clubs. Everyone except Perkins and I seemed to interpret this as a sign that they were to exit the office but remain clustered around the doorway.

Perkins still knelt next to Mr Testascrittore's corpse, apparently exempt from the order. I cast a sharp look at him, trying to convey nonverbally that it would quite possibly be to his inestimable advantage to suggest to the police that I also remain, both as a devoted student-to-be of the deceased professor, and as a possible material witness to Perkins' actions and whereabouts at the time of the alleged crime.

But Perkins, in whom my confidence was steadily waning, seemed incapable of grasping even the most blatant signals, and I allowed myself to be escorted out the doorway.

Inside, the police took measurements and photographs and discussed theories of the death in hushed yet urgent voices. Around me the other students had fallen to debating the relative merits of requesting a refund versus taking the class with a substitute professor.

Important as that decision would ultimately become, I had no heart for it at the moment. Suddenly I wanted to wash my hands of the entire business.

It wasn't just the students and the police that irritated me. If Mr. Testascrittore couldn't be bothered living long enough to teach me philosophy, I didn't see why I should remain enrolled in his class.

I pushed my way to the edge of the crowd and started for the exit.

But as I reached the top of the stairs, I could proceed no further. An imposing eminence blocked my way.

6.

Mr. Grosskase, Rector of the Institute and my faculty advisor, was breathing hard as he climbed the last stair. He was a hulk of a man, to be sure, but advanced in years and probably never much of a tiger to begin with.

Even though we'd met a couple of times, I didn't know Mr. Grosskase well. He had the wispy white hair and buttoned-sweater look of an ageing professor, and although his labored breathing betrayed the effects of too many years spent in smoke-filled cafés, the eyes behind the wire-frame glasses could still flash with philosophical fire.

While it was the impetuous Mr. Testascrittore who initially contacted me, Mr. Grosskase signed off on my last-minute invitation to Terre Haute, arranging a full scholarship to the Institute and appointing himself my advisor.

As he reached the top of the stairs, I held out my hand to welcome him. He shook it absently. A police officer emerged from the office. "Mr. Grosskase – come in. We've concluded our preliminary investigation."

They stepped into the office. I squeezed back through the throng of students to get closer to the door. From this vantage point I could hear the officer explain how the immense volume – the mighty *Cambridge Compleat Dictionary of Philosophy (Unabridged)* – had apparently tumbled from a high shelf to claim its unwitting victim.

"An accident? Really?" Mr. Grosskase stepped around the policeman and gazed across the office at Mr. Testascrittore's corpse, around which had been drawn a crude chalk outline. The sprawling body, arms akimbo and one leg clumsily buckled under the other, looked more like a klutzy dancer than a world-renowned philosophy professor.

"There's no evidence of robbery," the police official said, "or of any struggle. We have to conclude that it was a tragic accident."

How horrible, I thought. And yet one had to admit the sublime poetics of it all. In a world where people routinely die in utterly meaningless ways, for a Phenomenologist to be killed by an errant philosophical dictionary seemed the height of irony.

Or perhaps the depth. In either case, Mr. Testascrittore's eerily significant mode of departure seemed destined to augment his already-considerable legend.

I poked my head through the doorway. Mr. Testascrittore's office was large and sparsely furnished except for the overstuffed bookshelves. A large wooden desk to the left defined the room, opposite a bookcase covering the entire righthand wall.

The corpse was sprawled next to the desk. The philosophical dictionary, blood smeared over its deep blue cover, lay several feet away.

Something wasn't right about the picture. From the shelf to Mr. Testascrittore's worldly remains was a good fifteen feet. The dictionary lay even further from the shelf. Unless the book had become embedded in Mr. Testascrittore's skull and was thus transported as he staggered across the room, it was difficult to explain the distance.

So far as I could tell, the spilled blood was to be seen only around the body and book, not near the shelves.

Was it murder?

My mind leapt involuntarily to the conclusion. I tried to push it away, accusing myself of sensationalizing a fluke tragedy. But I couldn't deny what my heart suspected – that my sponsor, the great Mr. Testascrittore, had been killed as he prepared to deliver his orientation lecture.

The paramedics arrived, stuffed the body into a canvas sack, and with the help of the police forced their way back through the crowd. A few people followed them, but most pressed in behind me, trying to hear what was going on in the office.

The police investigator repeated his evaluation of accidental death. Mr. Grosskase seemed not to be listening. He gazed down at the chalk outline, his big shoulders sagging.

Did he share my suspicions? Even if he did, the Rector obviously couldn't voice his thoughts. Any hint of wrong-doing would bring scandal upon the Institute.

As the commandant concluded the report, Perkins stepped forward. He pushed officiously past the police and took Mr. Grosskase by the elbow. I stepped aside as they came toward the door, Perkins supporting the older man.

Mr. Grosskase's face was almost as white as his hair, and his breath came in short gasps. He nodded vaguely in my direction and continued on down the hall with Perkins, his head drooping onto his chest.

As I watched the Rector trudge away, I realized that I was in danger of losing both of my sponsors in one blow. If adjusting to the Institute had been difficult so far, imagine it with no faculty support.

In that instant, I heard my calling. I couldn't bring Mr. Testascrittore back from the dead. But I could honor his memory – and relieve Mr. Grosskase of a great burden – by ascertaining whether a murder had taken place.

I cautioned myself not to leap to conclusions. But I couldn't quell my

doubts. The police's conclusion of accidental death seemed premature, if not downright absurd.

Suppose it was a murder. What better way to thank my late academic sponsor than to bring the culprit to the bitter bar of unrelenting justice?

But where to start? It could have been anyone. For any motive.

No, wait. The police said his wallet wasn't missing. That ruled out robbery and suggested a personal motive. Someone with a grudge. Or a professional jealousy. Or a lousy grade on a term paper.

It didn't exactly give me a list of suspects. But it narrowed the field down to the Institute.

A glimmer to the left caught my eye. Behind Mr. Testascrittore's desk stood a stout wooden plinth topped by a large trophy.

Flanking the oversized golden chalice was a silver figure of Minerva, an owl resting on her shoulder. The patroness of wisdom pointed with languid arm toward the engraved cup, while a brooding, striving figure evidently synthesized from Myron's Discobulos, Rodin's Thinker, and a crucified Christ from Duocento Tuscany cast a longing glance at the buxom goddess.

I squinted and read the inscription on the gaudy cup: "To Phineas Q. Testascrittore – the Greatest Living American Philosopher!"

A gasp escaped me. Apart from the less than entirely flattering ambiguity in the use of the qualifier "American," I immediately saw the trophy's relevance to the situation at hand.

Did someone at the Institute want Mr. Testascrittore dead so *they* could be the Greatest Living American Philosopher?

7.

My head reeling with the possibilities, I headed back to my room. Or my garret, to be more precise.

My fellowship included full room and board, and I thought I'd really scored when I heard I'd be living in a garret. What better home for an aspiring philosopher?

My new abode was on the top floor of a building known locally as the Jammie. According to the sign out front, the faux-classical edifice was officially called the J.M.E. McTaggart Memorial Philosophy Dormitory.

Mr. McTaggart was a circa 1900 British Idealist who followed the Ancient Greek cynic Mr. Zeno in declaring time to be but an illusion, thus making him the patron saint of all who sleep late and/or arrive late to class.

A little-known fact about this once-famed but latterly little-known sage is that the middle initial "M" in his name actually stood for McTaggart. The guy's full name was John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart.

No wonder he was confused about time!

Imagine if you had the same middle and last name, and you went to one of those fancy-pants British prep schools you see in the movies – every time the headmaster pronounced your name, you'd hear "McTaggart," and then a moment later hear the same name again.

Not surprisingly, you might be tempted to believe that the passage of time was an illusion.

Although Mr. McTaggart had nothing whatsoever to do with the Institute, the building was christened in his honor when a poll of philosophy undergrads determined that Mr. McTaggart was on the verge of being utterly forgotten unless something was quickly named for him.

The ploy worked – his legacy lived on, so long as the McTaggart clan didn't mind their esteemed forebear being known as Jammie.

A few days earlier when I arrived in Terre Haute, I'd registered with the Institute, giving samples of my blood, earwax, chest hair, and DNA, all of which were required for that most coveted of all academic privileges – a library card with stack access.

Then the resident assistant at the Jammie showed me to my room. "Our assignments were already complete when Mr. Grosskase insisted that we find you housing," he said over his shoulder, ushering me brusquely up several flights of stairs.

He wasn't exactly the friendliest of sorts, although perhaps his spirits were weighed down by his immense responsibilities managing the philosophy dorm.

His sullenness reminded me of a really cranky grad assistant I knew back at USB. He was just about the meanest and snidest person you'd ever hope to meet. But you had to give him credit, he always made perfect sense – a true logical negativist.

After the third floor, the stairway narrowed sharply and began spiraling upward at a dizzying angle. I held tight to the thin bannister, testing the

old wooden railing periodically to assure myself that it would hold me if I slipped.

At the top the resident assistant and I stepped into a curving hallway about eight feet wide, punctuated by a wooden window on the righthand side. An old mattress blocked the floor, forcing me to turn sideways to get past. "Is the room at the end of the hall?"

"No – this is the room." He swept his arm around the space. "It comes with the mattress. The window is stuck, but we've placed a work order, and a repairperson will attend to it in due course."

I looked around the dismal space. "Is there a chance another room will become available?"

"Not this year," the resident assistant said bluntly. "You can request a transfer to another room next year. However, if your request is construed as a complaint about this room, the housing department will brand you as a trouble-maker and be utterly implacable."

"Thanks for the warning."

"That's what I'm here for. Enjoy your stay." He left by the spiral stairs.

I looked around at my new abode. The window faced the concrete wall of the building next door. Overhead, a single bare lightbulb cast a glare on the once-white walls. The paint was peeling in a few places, and was streaked here and there with graffitti.

The space was a bit of a shock, coming from a Berkeley collective house where I had my own room with its own door. But the garret wasn't so bad. Although the hallway wasn't private, I guessed that few people came up this far.

I found a metal bowl for a washbasin so I could keep my Easy Rider moustache and requisite three-day stubble properly maintained, and some milk crates to make a bookshelf. Once the window was fixed, I'd be fine for a semester or two.

On the evening of Mr. Testascrittore's demise, I returned to my garret, washed up, then turned on the hotplate. As I stirred my Greek Alphabet Soup and watched the concepts form and reform, I heard footsteps coming up the spiral stairs.

I turned to see a man of a wiry, athletic build. His weathered face was unshaven for the better part of a week, and his beard showed a hint of grey.

He stood in front of me with hands on hips. "Building maintenance," he said in a husky voice. "Got a complaint about a stuck window."

"Yeah, great," I said. "That's it, right there." I pointed, in case he missed my reference, although strictly speaking the gestural indication was superfluous, given that there was but a single window in the space.

Probably it didn't matter, but with my poor showing on the placement exams I figured I better watch my logic, even with the custodian.

He seemed not to notice, focusing instead on setting up an acetylene torch. He pulled on a welder's visor and amid a torrent of foul language went at the old wooden frame with the blowtorch and a blacksmith's hammer. It made an awful racket, and I stood by with a pitcher of water, fearing lest he catch the mattress on fire with all the sparks.

My experience working in the USB dorms would have suggested a different approach to a wood casement window, but being new here I felt it best not to interfere.

As he worked, I tried to build a little camaraderie, telling him that I'd worked my way through the University of Southeastern Berkeley as a custodian.

Whether because he was naturally reticent and insular, or because he saw a place like Berkeley as beneath his custodial dignity, he just mumbled something, then went back to cursing the window, the hammer, and the blowtorch, alternately and simultaneously.

When he finished his last curse, the window opened and closed at the touch of a finger.

"Thanks," I said. "Great job. Say, do you think there's any chance of getting a lightshade for the overhead bulb?"

He drew a deep breath and crossed his arms over his chest.

"Is there no end to your demands? Who do you think I am, Mr. Nietzsche's Ubermensch? I am but one solitary human being. There is only so much I can accomplish in a single day, despite your expectations to the contrary!"

I tried to assure him that I meant no offense, but he talked over me. "The Institute at which you are the most fledgling of students," he said, "is home to the finest minds in Western philosophy. The maintenance of this facility requires my undivided attention, lest an insight or deduction be lost to humanity on account of faulty plumbing or a flickering lightbulb."

"Sorry," I said, thrusting out my empty hands in an elaborate gesture to

indicate that I bore no ill will. "Really, I'm sorry."

"I should hope so. Your selfish demands may have already cost us a glimpse of a new truth. If you are finished, I would like to get on with my business of insuring that no further inferences are lost."

Not knowing what to say that wouldn't be offensive, I bowed slightly. He left without another word.

The encounter left me drained. Earlier, I'd resolved to get to the bottom of Mr. Testascrittore's sudden death. By the time I finished my soup and flossed my teeth, though, my ardor was fading.

Who was I, trying to solve a mystery that the police denied even existed?

Oh, sure, I could raise the usual philosophical concerns about the reliability of their knowledge of reality, and assert my own epistemic rights. But finally, did it matter that I believed Mr. Testascrittore was murdered?

With no pressure from the authorities, the killer could just sit back and laugh at my puny efforts. I'd watched enough episodes of The Untouchables to know that you didn't discover the truth without a little muscle.

If I couldn't extort a confession or even force a suspect to submit to questioning, how could I be expected to solve the case? If someone gets away with murdering a professor, it's on the authorities' conscience, not mine. I should focus on my studies and leave crime-busting to the police.

But as I pulled back my sheets and crawled into bed, Mr. Grosskase's weary face came before my mind. I pictured him as he stared down at Mr. Testascrittore's lifeless body, his sagging shoulders reflecting his despair at losing a pillar of the Institute.

Unless something turned the situation around, I was in danger of losing my sole surviving mentor to melancholia. To do nothing seemed the ultimate act of moral nihilism.

While I was prepared for the occasional excursion into random pointlessness or hopeless futility, I wasn't ready to make a methodical practice of nihilism quite yet.

But suppose I did? Maybe there was a career in it.

I could lead self-negation workshops, or teach a course at the local university extension: Nihilism 101. No text, no lectures, and no written exam. Your final grade is based on planning and executing an act of

calculated nihilism. Grade also takes into account costumes, program, and soundtrack.

8. Pop Quiz

If you offer a seminar on Nihilism and no one attends, do you:

A. Kill yourself in the most dramatic fashion possible

B. Kill yourself with quiet nobility

C. Skulk away and secretly kill yourself

D. Declare it a grand success and celebrate

(Let's give our readers a moment to contemplate this question. Should you elect to take the introductory course in Nihilism which I plan one day to offer, this question might be of more than academic concern to you. In others words – this is one quiz you do not want to fail. Don't even take it if you can possibly help it. Unfortunately, it's too late now, and you have to make up your mind.)

Answer: A plurality of our panel of nihilistic experts preferred choice D, on the grounds that your teaching goal has been met even before the class begins. However, amid bitter dissension, the judges relented and agreed to accept any of the answers as an acceptable nihilistic response.

9.

I was exhausted. The mattress, or more precisely the lumpy futon, presented a challenge even to so skilled a sleeper as I. To fit the curved hallway, it had been compressed on one side, making it even lumpier.

I slept on the longer side with my back to the wall, first lying on my right side facing north, then rotating south to lie on my left side. It made tossing and turning a bit of a chore, but I used some of my textbook allowance to buy a pillow for each end, so it wasn't too bad.

As I struggled to get comfortable, I discerned an ethereal cloud drifting along the graffittied wall. My eyes opened wide as it floated toward me, and I clutched the blankets to my throat.

The apparition coalesced into the shape of a man. Its face shone with an inner glow, while its eyes were like two points of fire. The figure wore a robe woven of gold and purple. In his right hand he carried a large, ivory-

bound volume, in his left he brandished a ruby-studded scepter.

He approached nearer and hovered over the end of my bed, looking at me with a face heavy with grief. At last he uttered a piteous groan.

"Ah me!" the specter cried. "How blunted grows the mind when sunk below the o'erwhelming flood! This man has searched into the springs of nature, whence came the roaring blasts that ruffle the ocean's calm, and studied to know the spirit that makes the firmament to move.

"Yet now he lies dead. Extinct is his reason's light, his neck thrust down in heavy chains, his countenance with grievous weight downcast. Ah! The brute Earth is all he can behold!"

I braced myself for another wail, but none came.

Slowly, wary lest my movement disturb the spirit, I sat up in bed. Before I could muster the courage to query my guest, he spoke in a low, airy voice.

"My name is Boethius."

Although I was a bit taken aback, it wasn't my first visit from a spirit. They'd started a week ago in Berkeley, right after I decided to relocate to Terre Haute and dedicate my life to drinking deeply at the sacred wellspring of Western wisdom.

The first visitor was a German scholastic from the 13th century who asked a few probing questions regarding whether the rational or intellectual soul (he seemed to use the terms interchangeably) could be viewed as numerically one in all humans, so that we could be said to share in a common rational faculty ultimately based in the divine intellect, or whether each soul ought rather to be seen as a mere potentiality of intellectual activity, much as the eye is a potency to receive colors.

Before I could adequately weigh the propositions, the spirit vanished. I chalked it up to my triple pastrami nightcap and went back to sleep.

Subsequent nights brought an impoverished Greek hedonist who sang to me of the merits of enjoying small pleasures, a Late Antique Stoic who mistook my bedroom for a prison cell, and a minor Idealist who matriculated under Schelling and kept insisting that reflection only knows the universal and particular as two negations, the universal being the relative negation of the particular, while the particular, on the other hand, is the relative negation of the universal.

I did my best to pay heed to their words without engaging in dialog. I already talked to myself enough as it was. I didn't need to start conversing

with the spirit realm.

On the final night before I left Berkeley, however, an apparition settled into my desk chair so comfortably that it demanded a response.

The spirit, a clean-shaven man of fastidious grooming and a somewhat languid air, introduced himself as Frederick Copleston.

"Mr. Copleston the historian?"

"The same," he said, sipping from a cup of tea he seemed to have brought along.

I sat up fully amid my crumpled blankets. "I've read your books with great care, sir. They've shaped my understanding of the Western philosophical tradition."

"Glad to hear it," he replied. "I might change a few details here and there, but by and large I'm satisfied with my efforts."

The ghost hovered just above the chair. Feeling better acquainted with Mr. Copleston than with my previous visitors, I ventured a question.

"Why, sir, if I may be so bold – why exactly am I seeing you? I mean why now, and not back when I read your books?"

He took a sip of tea and gazed beyond me. "You weren't ready to hear me yet. I was there, speaking. But you were distracted by the words on the page."

"I see. And now?"

"Apparently your ears and eyes have opened since you made the decision to transfer to Terre Haute. Such momentous decisions often serve to open our awareness."

As he spoke, a long marbled hallway opened behind him. Between Ionic columns hung a series of somewhat amateurish yet lovingly-rendered portraits of men from past epochs.

I walked up to a picture of a man in a beaver-skin hat and gazed into his small, penetrating brown eyes. The plaque next to the painting read "Jean-Jacques Rousseau." A few feet beyond hung Mr. Condorcet and Mr. Diderot.

In the next bay hung likenesses of Mr. Vico, Mr. Montesquieu and Mr. Shaftsbury.

A little further was a bay dedicated to Medieval Islamic thinkers: Mr. Al-Farabi, Mr. Ibn Sina, and Mr. Al-Ghazali.

"It's a gallery of philosophers," I said.

"They were painted by Mr. Hegel," Mr. Copleston said.

"I guess we all need a hobby," I said. "Why not painting?"

"They're not just paintings," said Mr. Copleston. "You're looking at the history of Western philosophy. You'll find the Ancients down that way, the Medievals to our left, the Moderns in this gallery, and more recent thinkers at the far end."

"Cool," I said.

His eyes narrowed. "More than cool," he said. "Mr. Hegel's gallery is a record of the unity-in-development of the Western tradition, from Mr. Parmenides and Mr. Heraclitus to Mr. Derrida and Ms. Beauvoir."

I gazed down the gallery and nodded.

"Western philosophy is one long dialog," Mr. Copleston continued. "Each generation – if it be truly of a philosophical bent – takes up the challenges of past times and forges its own response to the questions of the ages. To understand Western philosophy is to understand its history."

I wandered among the portraits, mentally correlating the names with the various volumes of Mr. Copleston's history: Ancients and Hellenists, Early, High, and Late Medievals, Renaissance Humanists, Early Modern Empiricists, Cartesian Dualists, Post-Kantian Idealists, Comtean Positivists...

As I circled back to him, Mr Copleston turned his head toward the door. "I believe I am needed elsewhere," he said. "We'll chat another time. Call on me as you will.

"And you'll appear?"

"I didn't say that. I do have other pursuits, you know. I am simply giving you leave to call on me. I'll respond when my schedule permits."

In the days since I'd had no further visitors. But now as Mr. Boethius's spirit hovered at my bedside, I made bold to reply.

"Just to be clear, sir," I said with a healthy dose of Midwestern politeness, "Would you by chance be the Mr. Boethius who was arrested on false charges and executed by the Roman Emperor Theodoric?"

"Tis I."

"Who wrote *The Consolation of Philosophy* during the last days of your life to explain suffering and the existence of evil?"

"The same."

"Wow, that would be amazing, except honestly, sir, I've barely skimmed your book. I think maybe you're appearing to the wrong person."

"Ahhh!" The spirit wailed again. "He is dead! By what law doth God allow that the good shall suffer and evil shall prosper?

"Who are you talking about? Mr. Testascrittore?"

"By his untimely death hath he earned the laurel wreath of undying fame."

I loosened my hold on the blankets. "Mr. Boethius," I said in a shaky voice, "what exactly do you want from me?"

"The Truth."

I squinted at the hazy figure. "But what is Truth?"

"Ahhhh!" The wailing sent a chill up my spine. "Ahhhh! The Truth!"

"The truth?" I said carefully. "That's gotten rather complicated in recent years."

"Aaaaah!" the spirit moaned.

Given its apparently limited vocabulary, I tried offering some options. "Do you mean the absolute truth of the Idealists?" I asked. "Or a collection of factual truths in the Positivist sense? Or perhaps the situationally-inscribed truth of the Existentialists?"

Mr. Boethius gazed with blazing eyes that seemed to see right through me. "The Truth," he said sternly. "Seek the Truth."

With a final wail, the ghost faded into the mist.

10.

I woke up the next morning in a haze. It wasn't until I had splashed some cold water on my face and paced around the garret a bit that I could focus on the events of the previous day – Mr. Testascrittore's death, the likelihood of murder – and the troubling visitation of the spirit of Mr. Boethius that evening.

But was it really Mr. Boethius? That was granting it quite a bit of credibility. I mean, any old spirit could wrap itself up in a bedsheet and run around claiming it's an Ancient philosopher. Might even be a party joke among certain crowds of the dead.

I went to my makeshift bookshelf and pulled the appropriate paperback

volume of Mr. Copleston's *History*. The binding had long since broken, and the yellowed pages were cluttered with microscopic annotations by me and several previous owners.

I'd bought the various volumes serially at Moe's bookstore in Berkeley, where I'd take long breaks from my USB custodial job.

This taught me a valuable life lesson – the philosophy section of a bookstore is about the last place on Earth you are ever going to run into your boss.

I flipped through the book and located the section on Mr. Boethius. It gave a synopsis of the Roman sage's thought, but no physical description that might identify the ghost as friend or fraud. I'd have to take the apparition at its word.

The appearance of the spirit, however much it disturbed my sense of order, confirmed me in my determination to investigate Mr. Testascrittore's death. The first step was to re-visit the scene of the crime. Maybe I'd see something that the police had overlooked.

What if the office was locked? No, based on my custodial experience, they'd probably leave it open for the carpet cleaners.

I pulled on my favorite Berkeley sweatshirt, a grey extra-large with royal blue lettering. The gold highlights had long since faded, but that didn't prevent a twinge of nostalgia.

I headed across campus to the Albertus Magnus Empirical Metaphysics Building. It was only seven o'clock, and no one was around when I made my way up the stairs to the second floor.

As I expected, the door to Mr. Testascrittore's office was unlocked. I slipped inside and closed the door behind me.

11.

Other than a missing cadaver, everything in Mr. Testascrittore's office seemed just as I saw it the day before.

I'd come on my dawn mission in search of possible clues that campus police, convinced the famed professor's death was an accident, may have overlooked. So far nothing stood out.

Cluttered desk still faced overstuffed bookshelf. Venus de Sappho, classical bust, and gold-plated Greatest Living American Philosopher

trophy all stood as I'd left them.

The chalk outline was smudged but intact, showing the discombobulated position of the corpse. The right arm was hooked overhead, the left pointed sideways. The right leg was tucked under the left knee, with the left foot stretched toward the main bookcase.

My eyes followed the line of the foot toward the bookcase and came to rest on, of all things, the volumes of Mr. Copleston's *History*, which filled a lower shelf.

Was it coincidence that Mr. Testascrittore's foot pointed directly at them? I got down on hands and knees and tried to follow the trajectory of the foot-outline. It seemed to point to the later volumes.

Did it intend to indicate a particular volume? The chalk-drawing was indeterminate. Even if the foot had originally been more specific, sloppy police work obliterated the clue.

An open book was situated above the upwardly-stretched right hand: Mr. Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, opened to the chapter on "Time." A streak of blood marred the page. No resale value there, I thought, even if it was an inadvertent slip.

Or was it inadvertent? Had Mr. Testascrittore simply knocked the book over as he fell?

Or was it a last, desperate attempt to identify his attacker by highlighting a passage in the most important philosophical work of the past two thousand years? I'd seen a victim leave a clue like that in a movie once, so it quite well could be true.

A chill ran through me – how strongly I suspected that Mr. Testascrittore's death was a result of foul play! And I was standing right where he had been killed.

I wanted to flee, but I was determined to learn something more during my visit.

I returned to the chalk outline. Three of the limbs splayed dramatically outwards. Only the tucked-under leg defied the pattern, to my great annoyance. Wouldn't it have been more significant to have pointed with all four limbs? It certainly would have been more consistent.

Yet the epistemological rigor that one can reasonably expect from a corpse is probably less than one can demand from a living professor. Surely a bit of ambiguity could be tolerated in the recently deceased.

Suppose the splayed appendages were in fact clues, but as Mr. Testascrittore died he'd only had time to arrange three limbs before he lost consciousness. That would explain the tucked leg.

I studied the outline. The left hand pointed tantalizingly at a Roman bust perched on a classical pedestal. The polished marble head combined the broad forehead of Plato, the eagle-eyes of Aquinas, the aquiline nose of Augustine, the wispy hair of Voltaire, and the double-chin of Hume – all in all, a rather tastelessly wrought, generic sage far less attractive than the flawlessly-rendered Venus de Sappho across the room.

Why had Mr. Testascrittore pointed to the bust? Did it represent a particular philosopher? Or was it meant to indicate Ancient Philosophy in general?

But that seemed to contradict the foot that pointed to later volumes of Mr. Copleston's *History*. Was the killer a modern thinker who grappled with the Ancients?

Or was the marble bust an allusion to the nobility of the philosophical quest initiated by the Ancients?

Maybe it referred to someone who belonged on a pedestal. Or someone with a hard head?

Perhaps it indicated a philosopher who wrote about sculpture or art, with the bust an easily-read signifier for the field.

I made a mental note of the various ideas for future reference, then quickly surveyed the rest of the office. On Mr. Testascrittore's desk was a stack of dog-eared, handwritten papers scribbled over with edits. I turned over the pages, but the scrawled text was almost impossible to decipher. Single words stood out – epiphenomenon, autoassimilation, empiricotranscendence – but I couldn't follow the train of thought.

Suddenly I realized what I was reading – these must be Mr. Testascrittore's final reflections on the most puzzling issues of all time!

The pages might even contain the long-anticipated proof of his own existence. He must have been working on the proof right up to the moment he died. What a tragic loss to philosophy that this long-awaited work would never be completed.

Unless of course a worthy and dedicated graduate student were to undertake the thankless task.

Perkins? I hated to malign the doubtless-dedicated senior graduate

assistant. But if he couldn't handle the pressure of Mr. Testascrittore being late for a lecture, I wasn't optimistic about his carrying the weight of the entire Western philosophical tradition on his shoulders.

I, on the other hand, had often demonstrated my steel-tipped nerves by such expedients as bluffing my way through a Systematic Pragmatology exam, or convincing a dubious Behavioral Poetics professor that my thesis – a Neo-Skinnerian analysis of Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* – had some remote connection with what she'd been lecturing about all year.

But how could I secure the right to edit Mr. Testascrittore's final work? Probably the manuscript would be sold.

Or auctioned off. How high would the bidding go? What if they auctioned separate chapters, the way they used to break apart Medieval altarpieces and sell them one panel at a time? Clearly I needed to work out a bidding strategy.

The manuscript, the classical bust, the Sartre book, the foot pointing at Copleston – if my theories were correct, somehow all of these clues must work together to finger the killer.

But what was the linchpin? Did the ultimate clue lay lost in the twisted leg?

A rustling in the hallway startled me, and I was keenly aware that I had no alibi for my presence in the office. The sound faded, but I'd pressed my luck far enough.

Setting the manuscript back on the desk, I opened the door a crack. Seeing no one in the hallway I slipped out and closed the door behind me.

12.

Back outside on the Quad, I weighed my next move. Getting to class would be the wise idea. Skipping on the very first day always looks bad.

On the other hand, if I showed up fresh next time, maybe the professor would assume I'd changed my schedule so I could add the class, which might quite likely win more favor than showing up the first day.

The natural appeal of the argument was strong, but I faced the matter with hard logic. After a strenuous Hermeneutico-Analytic process, I concluded that the best course would be to skip class in order to subject my new theory to the cold bar of empirical experiment.

If it proved true I could publish a short essay on the matter, which I am naming "Harrison's Class-Additive Theorem," just to be sure that I get proper credit in the event things work out.

Of course, this raises the troubling question of "intellectual property rights." Can one "own" a theorem? Can you copyright a theory of history, or trademark a philosophy of literature? Are ideas not the common treasury of humankind, to be shared openly in the never-ceasing quest for Truth?

What is Truth, anyway, that we have to go looking for it? And how do we recognize it when we meet it?

Seriously – if I hoped to get to the bottom of this whole murder-mystery business, I better be clear on what Truth was and how to recognize it.

"Truth?" came a voice as I crossed the Quad. "Is truth not within us all along?"

To my left, a vaporous form coalesced. I took a step back and fixed my eyes on the emergent figure – a tall African man in a dusty toga. A pendant on his chest bore the word "Hippo."

At first I thought the hippopotamus was his school's mascot. Then I recognized my visitor – the illustrious Mr. Augustine, itinerant spiritual seeker from the decadent Roman empire who ended his days as the Christian bishop of Hippo in his home province of North Africa.

"When we speak of truth," he continued, "can we ever do more than recall what we always knew?" he asked pleasantly.

I was starting to grow accustomed to conversing with the spirits of deceased philosophers. It wasn't that different from talking to myself, at which I had plenty of practice.

But I wasn't in the habit of doing it in public. Before I responded, I looked around – was I the only person on the crowded Quad who recognized the renowned saint?

"Uh, sir," I whispered, "don't the others see you?"

"I doubt it," he said.

"How can that be? You're right here."

"Not exactly. In case you haven't noticed, I've been dead for lo these many centuries."

"That's right," I said, shaking my head sharply to clear it. "Of course. So why am I seeing and hearing you?"

"Because I'm speaking to you."

"Only to me?"

"At this moment, yes. Others might hear me as well, if they stopped to listen. But I'm not holding my breath."

"What about the professors?"

"Oh, they'll perk up their ears now and then. But it seems like once someone gets tenured, they pretty much stop listening."

"So you and I talk, and the rest of the world just goes on?"

He gave me a steady look. "At this moment, we are outside of time – beyond the realm of shadows, we might say. Our communication is taking place in the blink of an eye, although as in a dream you experience it drawn out in time."

"I see. Well, welcome, sir," I said humbly, wishing I'd more carefully read his *Confessions*, the West's oldest autobiography.

He bowed slightly in acknowledgment, his crisp tan toga setting off his dark skin.

"Sorry I don't have any wine to offer," I said, recalling a few anecdotes from his student days.

"That's okay," he said with a smile. "I already took communion this week. Mr. Copleston suggested I stop by and see you."

"Oh, right," I said, realizing what a rare opportunity this was. If I was grappling with the most perplexing mysteries of the Western tradition, what a boon it might be to enlist the aid of one whose thought lay at the very heart of our culture.

"You see, sir," I said, formulating my ideas as I spoke, "I'm trying to clarify the question of the murder, or perhaps I should more accurately say 'possible murder,' of my academic advisor – that is to say, I'm conducting an enquiry as to whether a murder took place, and if so by whom and for what motives. That sort of thing."

"And your question is?"

"Well, how exactly do I know where to start looking? And even if I discover a clue, how can I know for sure what it means?"

Mr. Augustine nodded and leaned forward as if steadying himself against a gale. "Ah yes, knowledge and meaning – the search for Truth. I've wondered about that myself."

He seemed to drift into his own thoughts. Finally I prompted him to continue. "And?"

His dark brow furrowed. "Who can comprehend the Truth in thought, or put the answer into words? How does human consciousness even know where to seek Truth? More fundamentally, how does the finite mind know how and where to look for God, the source of all Truth? How can a finite, created being have the slightest idea where to begin the search for Truth that is rooted in its infinite Creator?"

He gazed at me for a long moment, then continued. "It seems to me that for this to be possible, deep in my creaturely spirit there must be a spark of connection to the Creator. Deep down, we must 'know' God and Truth and Goodness and so on. We must somehow 'remember' our origin and long to return."

"Sounds kind of Gnostic to me," I said. "Escape from the material world and all that."

Mr. Augustine bristled at the word Gnostic. "I didn't mean it that way," he said sharply, then drew a slow breath. "In fact, the world is the fullness of God's glory – it's the place where we come to remember and in our limited way to 'know' God. The beauty and majesty of God's creation awakens in us the memory of our divine Creator."

I cleared my throat. "You know, sir, I hate to sound rude, but if you ask me, the world is kind of a messy place. No offense to God or anything, but it's not exactly a well-oiled machine. Some might say that the sorry state of the world doesn't reflect well on its supposed Creator."

He smiled as if he'd had the same thought himself. "Ah, my young friend! When God created the world, it was perfect in every way – a veritable Garden of Eden. God created the world, 'and He saw that it was good.' Death, decay, and destruction came into the world not through any agency of God, but because our first ancestors sinned."

"Really?" I said as politely as I could. "There was no death before the Fall? So all the animals were vegetarians before Adam ate the apple?"

"I think we're getting lost in details," Mr. Augustine said. "The question is, how does a finite human being 'know' anything at all?

I felt embarrassed. "Yes, yes, right – that's the question. How can I, with my finite, limited perspective, have any idea whether I'm seeing the truth, or whether I'm even looking in the right direction?"

"Memory," he said, letting the word hang in the air. "Somehow we 'remember' the source of all Truth and knowledge – we remember our Creator, and recall at least the vague outlines of Truth and Goodness and Beauty. I think this is what Mr. Plato means when he says that our material world is but the shadows of the Divine Ideas. Here in the shadowy cave of the fallen world, we must cling to this epistemological grounding – that deep in our spirit we *do* know where to look for Truth."

I closed my eyes and concentrated, but drew a blank. "I'm not getting anything," I said.

He laughed dryly. "It's not about a flash of mystical insight. It's about knowing 'where' to look. And you do know – you know that the culprit must have some connection to Mr. Testascrittore and to the Institute. You're not casting about blindly. You may be in the dark of the cave – but you know which direction to shine your light."

"Okay, I can grant you that much, although it doesn't exactly solve the mystery. So you think I'll come to 'know' the facts of this mystery because I *remember* them?"

"You'll know because you remember, deep in your soul, how to seek Justice. You do remember how to recognize Truth. This stems from your soul's deep connection to the source of all Justice and Truth and Goodness."

"God, I suppose you mean?"

"Right, God," Mr. Augustine said. "All finite knowledge is grounded in our originary knowledge of God." He looked at me with a tired smile. "Anyway, that's how it seems to me."

I started to object to grounding knowledge in a belief in God, but the spirit began to dissolve.

I called after him, wanting to query him specifically about the death of Mr. Testascrittore. The opinion of so seminal a thinker as Mr. Augustine would surely bolster my confidence as I tried to find my bearings.

To no avail – the spirit disappeared.

13.

Mr. Augustine's ghost faded. At that instant, regardless of my lack of faith in spirits or God, my deepest instinct was clear: Mr. Testascrittore's death was a murder. Of that I was certain. Or as certain as my shaky

epistemological foundations would presently allow.

I looked around the Quad. No one else seemed to have noticed a thing – even that I had been speaking aloud, which often drew curious glances. Had Mr. Augustine been right – no time had passed while we spoke?

I pondered his idea that 'knowing' meant rediscovering something we already had inside of us. So *that's* why we study philosophy, I thought. If I could "remember" the score of the Superbowl before it happened, I could make a killing.

But if this were the case, why weren't philosophy professors rich? It didn't seem to reflect well on their profession. Was it a case of "those who can't do, teach"?

It wasn't like philosophy professors were the most self-confident people in the world. In fact, I sensed that most of the professors at the Institute felt insecure about their epistemological prowess.

All the more likely, then, that the impending publication of Mr. Testascrittore's proof had triggered the repressed animosity of his colleagues.

For most, envy would take the form of biting references in the footnotes of their next tome. A few might go so far as to publish moderately critical and subtly self-promoting reviews in journals of note.

For one tormented soul, though, the sense of intellectual devastation cut more deeply. The complete elimination of Mr. Testascrittore must have seemed the only solace.

That gave me a general motive. But what specifically had provoked the killer? However rife the Institute was with professional jealousies and petty grudges, what had triggered one person to commit murder?

I thought of the shiny trophy for the Greatest Living American Philosopher and how it must have galled his colleagues. A rival researcher must have feared that their entire oeuvre was about to be annihilated, and felt their only hope lay in killing Mr. Testascrittore before he could complete his magnum opus.

Maybe it was an Analytical Positivist. Imagine someone weaned on Mr. Russell's pointillistic reconstructions of time and space. How deeply offensive must Mr. Testascrittore's Sartre-tinged researches have seemed. Certainly the choice of weapon – the *Cambridge Dictionary* – pointed towards Analytics.

Might it have been a Neo-Scholastic? I pictured a Metaphysical Realist, certain that consciousness, time, and truth are moments of "real" Being. Who would be more scandalized by Mr. Sartre's relegation of present-consciousness to the realm of "nothingness" than an Aquinist?

Or a Cartesian, vexed that Mr. Descartes' proof of the existence of the Self had been systematically undermined by the Existentialists' ruthless employment of the Phenomenological reductions?

A Hegelian? A Heideggerian? A Kantian? Wherever I turned, suspects cropped up.

I pictured again Mr. Testascrittore's foot, pointing at Mr. Copleston's *History*. Obviously a clue! But which volume did he intend? The inept police outline made the foot look like a dolphin-fin pointing generally at all nine volumes. Any attempt to deduce a more specific indication foundered on the shoddiness of the drawing itself.

Maybe I could get hold of the police photos of the crime scene. However badly the authorities botched the chalk outline, their photographs should make the angle of the foot clearer.

A quick visit to the campus police might provide exactly the proof I needed!

14.

I started for the campus police station. If I could get hold of their crime-scene photos I might be able to wrap up this mystery by dinnertime.

But was I putting too much stock in a single clue? What exactly could a photo prove?

Why do we accept photographs as evidence? After all, a photo doesn't even exist until after the moment it supposedly portrays has passed. How can I look at a photo today and know it is a record of yesterday? Might this simply be a popular prejudice?

Mr. Russell strolled up and joined me as I crossed the Quad, looking dapper in a long grey coat and rounded top hat. "Take a photo of a landscape or a room," he suggested. "Set it next to the scene of which it is taken, compare them one detail at a time, and see how perfectly they match up. Thus you know you can trust the photo as a faithful reproduction."

"But the event depicted in this particular photo no longer exists. I can't compare them.

"Yes, but from a detailed study of photos that *can* be compared, you surmise that any photograph is an exact replica of the play of light at a given instant. It captures the colors and shapes exactly as our eyes would see them. We know this is true from photos we *can* verify. So we can conclude that it almost certainly holds true of those we cannot compare. The 'truth' of a photo is a simple matter of correspondence."

"I see what you mean by the point-to-point correspondence of the image. But how do we know this is reliable in cases we cannot double-check? It finally comes back to induction, doesn't it? We assume that whatever has worked in the past is likely to work in the future."

"Essentially, yes," said Mr. Russell.

As we reached the middle of the Quad, I let a slight smile play over my lips. "So if a camel can hold one million straws on its back, we assume that it can hold a million and one. But what if this is the proverbial straw?"

"It's possible," he said. "But statistically unlikely."

I shook my head. "Take your example of a photo. Suppose I get my hands on a police photo of the crime scene. How can I consider it reliable? After all, computers can make people disappear from photos. What if the one photo that matters is the one that the police faked? Improbable? Perhaps – but entirely possible, particularly if it's the police themselves who have something to hide."

He nodded. "That certainly complicates the situation. Skulduggery is always possible. And what is philosophy if not the analysis of the possible?"

"I guess that's what I need to find out," I said. "In any case, even if I am skeptical about the absolute veracity of photographic evidence, I need to get my hands on the police photos and see what I could make of them."

Not wanting to seem rude, I asked Mr. Russell if he wanted to accompany me, but he cited a pressing need to work the Sunday Times crossword puzzle while it was still fresh. We bid one another fare-thee-well, and he faded away.

I looked around the Quad lest yet another philosophical progenitor arrive and shed some light on the matter of Mr. Testascrittore's death. But all I saw were students rushing hither and yon as if they had somewhere important to be.

Maybe they did. Maybe their classes were that valuable. Mine probably

were, and I resolved that as soon as I wrapped up my current investigation, I would redouble my commitment.

But now I had more immediate concerns. I had a mystery to solve. It was time to pay a visit to the police photographer.

15.

The Saint Thomas Aquinas Police Substation was a cathedral-shaped building bordering Terre Haute's Historic Latin Quarter Preservation District.

My footsteps echoed as I made my way into the colonnaded lobby. In front of each column was a small altar bearing a carved marble scroll, each scroll inscribed with one of the Fundamental Laws of Logic. Some had votive candles burning, or bouquets of flowers strewn on the floor.

I bought a Boethius votive and found the scroll that contained the Law of the Excluded Middle – every proposition that can be clearly and unequivocally stated must be either true of false. There is no middle ground.

I lit the Boethius candle. "For every suspect I encounter, either they killed Mr. Testascrittore, or they did not. There is no middle ground." I stood silently before the scroll for a moment, then stepped into the nave.

The Substation's ornate, skylit central nave was flanked by baroque chapels. Ecstatic angels soared overhead, light from the clerestory glinting off their golden swords and crowns. Each held an open text bearing words such as Law, Order, Reverence, Obedience, and Duty.

Gorgeous as the building was, it also housed the campus jail, which reportedly occupied the entire basement level, directly beneath the floor of the main hall.

On my first night in Terre Haute, I ventured forth and visited several of the legendary Thousand Taverns of Terre Haute. Besides endless chatter about the prospects of the local gridiron eleven and beer-soaked tributes to the hoary traditions of Western culture I heard occasional references and innuendoes concerning the Institute's criminal justice system, which included the local police, academic enforcement units, and ancillary protective services.

The jail itself was apparently an awesome and much-feared place, spoken of in nervous and hurried tones. Although I gathered that most people

had never actually set foot inside the building, their horror and aversion seeped through.

Amid the gossip were whispered tales of a further level below the jail, a stone-lined dungeon where the Inquisition imprisoned and tortured uncooperative students.

Intrigued though I was, I realized it was probably just an urban myth. It struck me as anomalous that an institution devoted to the unbridled pursuit of knowledge would condone the existence of subterranean torture chambers.

Then again, the Thomistic Dominicans of the Inquisition – sticklers for logic if ever there were – had seen no contradiction.

I made my way down the nave. Some of the chapels were subdivided by moveable beige partitions, which somewhat diminished the grandeur. There were no doors, only narrow openings between some of the dividers.

By some openings, employees had taped hand-lettered signs giving the title or function of the office. On others, people had posted fragments of poetry, fashion advertisements, or press releases from foreign embassies.

I would have headed straight for the office, but I wasn't sure which office I was looking for. The Department of Crime Photography? The Office of Useful Clues? The Secretariat of Circumstantial Evidence? I figured I'd know what I was looking for when I saw it.

Ten minutes later, I reached the far end of the nave without finding anything resembling the office I was seeking.

But little did that matter, as I stood transfixed before a huge mural entitled The Perils of Illogia.

A vivid panorama in the style of Late Medieval Florentine master Andrea Orcagna depicted men and women suffering the grotesque torments of the damned for their inferential failures.

Those who erred through haste and inattention were buried alive in the detritus of their faulty calculations.

Snakes and demons burst from the bellies of those who deduced correctly from principles they knew to be corrupt.

Those who taught incorrect logical procedures were slowly roasted over a fire made of their own useless books.

The deepest circle of Illogia was reserved for those former adherents of logic who had lost their faith, whose eyes flickered with the harrowing dementia of relativism. Here they were condemned to annotate the prefaces to Mr. Foucault's later works for all eternity.

Although the painting was incomplete, a more gut-churning argument for logic could scarcely be imagined. I fell to my knees, prepared to vow that no matter how absurd the world appeared, I would cling to logic as my true anchor.

But the fact that the masterpiece remained unfinished in certain details – regardless of whether these omissions came about through the artist's death, career-threatening illness, contractual disputes, absent-mindedness, or moral deficiency – this lack of completion undermined the effectiveness of the painting, much as Mr. Godel's demonstration of the incompleteness of Mr. Russell's heralded logical system deflated its value despite the immense power of its mathematics.

I rose from my knees somewhat less awed.

Exploring one of the transepts I came to a partition marked, "Pub. Aff." The sign, which had been repeatedly crossed out and re-lettered, announced office hours from 8:00 to 8:05 every third morning except weeks before or after a bank holiday.

It was already 8:04, and I realized that the staff might be wrapping up their working day. But I needed to find the photographs of Mr. Testascrittore. I wasn't going to stand on ceremony. I rapped a greeting on the partition and stepped around the left side.

I found myself in a small cubicle lined with metal folding chairs. Several people whom I took to be undergraduates avoided my eyes.

Written instructions taped to a partition directed me to fill out a lengthy and rather intrusive form in triplicate, then deposit all three copies into a pneumatic tube which whisked them away to points unknown.

A bubbling water cooler looked inviting, but there were no cups. I considered getting down on my knees and trying to imbibe that way. If my name were called at that moment, though, it might be an awkward beginning to my interview.

I took a seat and focused on not fidgeting. I knew it was important to look calm and collected when I was summoned.

Other students wandered in and out of the cubicle, looking pre-occupied

or harried. No one spoke. Every minute or two an official would peer around the back partition and call a name, but none of those called ever seemed to be present.

Interesting, I thought as yet another name elicited no response from anyone present. Administrative policy probably required them to call so many names per hour. But no one ever said they had to be real names.

A crew-cut head popped out and called a name: "Olivier J. McGormandy?"

On impulse, I jumped up. "Yes?"

The crew-cut did a double take. Then a hand appeared and impatiently beckoned me to follow.

As I rounded the corner, I bumped the edge of the partition. The entire panel wobbled, and I grabbed it with both hands to steady it.

"Don't touch the partitions!" my guide said sharply. "You could set off a chain reaction."

Chastened, I scrunched in my shoulders lest I initiate a catastrophe. I followed my guide down a winding passageway between partitions, from behind which I could hear anxious but indistinct voices.

After innumerable twists and turns I was ushered through a narrow opening. "An administrator will be with you shortly," my guide said, then vanished.

A large, immaculate desk filled most of the space. The partition walls were bare save for a framed photo of a stocky, crop-haired woman sharing a rather stilted laugh with several of the Institute's celebrity philosophers – including, I noted with interest, the late Mr. Testascrittore.

I took a seat in a low green and yellow lawn chair facing the desk. The chair was a bit off-balance to the right, and I leaned to the left to compensate.

I was just getting adjusted when a police official entered. She was a stocky, crop-haired woman who looked like she moonlighted as a middle linebacker for the Chicago Bears. She walked with a quick, shuffling gait, as if she were polishing the floor with each step.

"Your case has been referred to me for adjudication," she said without looking at me.

"I've come to enquire about a photograph," I said. "If I could just speak with the officers who handled Mr. Testascrittore's body, I'm sure this would

only take a few minutes – "

"Impossible."

I started to reply, but she held up a hand. "Enough. You will be told when to speak." She pulled out a thick manila folder and began leafing through it. One document fell on the floor, and I thought I recognized my name at the top. With a chill, I wondered what else was in the folder.

At last she plopped down in her chair, laying the folder in front of her. "Let's review the facts of your case," she said in a flat voice. She eyed me and smacked her lips.

"It is evident that you have no right to be here. In the first place, you are wearing no badge, nor did our scanners detect an identification implant.

"Secondly, you were not summoned.

"Thirdly, you are not an official of the ministry.

"And finally, you do not represent any known corporate interest."

She clasped her hands in front of her belly and rocked back in her chair as if daring me to speak. Her supercilious manner irked me, but I knew it was better to let her play all her cards before responding. I took a breath and exhaled audibly.

Her eyes narrowed. "Now as to the first point. Supposing that you did have the right to be here," she resumed. "The first objection is, it's not visiting hours for the general public.

"The second objection is, we have no documentation of any application for an appointment."

"Thirdly, we show no record of any gratuities or contributions which might ameliorate some of the more unpleasant aspects of the application process."

She stared at me over the top of her desk. "A final objection – your appearance."

16.

"Your appearance raises a most serious objection," the administrator said flatly. "We do not allow visitors without proper attire to proceed beyond this point."

"My appearance?" I staggered up from my wobbly chair. "What has my

appearance got to do with the obvious justice of my case?"

She looked at me incredulously. "Are you asserting that there is no connection between Justice and Beauty? Have not artists always rendered Justice as a beautiful woman?"

I tried to reply that even the terminally scruffy were worthy of the benefits of logic and law, but she talked over me: "Did not Aristotle teach that 'just proportion' is the measure of true Beauty? Would you have Beauty aligned with ill proportion, or Justice travel in slovenly company?" She stared at me as if expecting me to throw myself on her mercy.

In a flash of inspiration, I saw a way to circumvent her entire argument. I pointed to the folder on her desk. "What's in my file?"

Her face tightened. "You will find out at the designated moment, and not a moment before. There are certain matters that it may not be appropriate for you to know at this point in time."

"But if it's a file about me," I said with a sly smile, "then presumably I already know everything in it."

"Not necessarily. You've surely had experiences which *we* might record, but of which you were not conscious."

I was taken aback. Was that possible? Could I experience something, yet have no consciousness of that experience? Even if my mind missed it, wouldn't my body and emotions still undergo the experience?

I struggled to bring my thoughts to words. A taut smile began to stretch across the administrator's face. I needed assistance fast.

"Help me, Mr. Copleston! Help!"

With a puff of red smoke Mr. Copleston appeared. My eyes opened wide. It worked!

Apparently sensing my predicament, Mr. Copleston summoned the French Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, taking him by the elbow and ushering him into our presence.

Mr. Merleau-Ponty moved with the grace of a dancer. His brown hair was combed straight back above a thin face and penetrating eyes. Introductions were made all round.

Mr. Merleau-Ponty turned to the police administrator. "Let me speak to your point," he said. "There is, quite simply, no 'unconscious' experience. To have an experience is to be conscious, and vice versa. There is

no consciousness which is not consciousness of something, and no experience of which we are not conscious. If we were not conscious of it, it wouldn't be an experience in the first place."

The police administrator tilted her head warily. "What about those times when we absent-mindedly walk down the street, and cars or people go by that we don't pay any attention to? If someone asked you to describe the people that you saw on the street today, you couldn't do it, although you did pass many, with your eyes wide open. We're only conscious of a small portion of what we encounter."

"Quite the contrary," Mr. Merleau-Ponty answered. "We experience it all, and are quite certain of what we see. Suppose I asked you whether you passed a pink elephant on the way to work today. You would say 'no,' without a moment's hesitation, true?"

The administrator eyed him suspiciously. "That is correct."

Mr. Merleau-Ponty brightened. "So you admit that regardless of what you explicitly noted, you were conscious of *everything* that passed, since you can so confidently rule out pink elephants."

"Bravo!" I cried. "That's the way to tell her!"

Mr. Merleau-Ponty shot me an annoyed glance. I piped down as he continued addressing the administrator. "As for 'noticing' or 'not noticing' things, ma'am, it's a pragmatic question concerning the object to which we direct our attention within the total field of experience. Most of the time I don't explicitly notice every person or car that I experience. But if I were, for example, a police official" – Mr. Merleau-Ponty winked slyly at Mr. Copleston – "I might want to pay a little closer attention."

The police administrator's head was shaking nervously from side to side. She stood up. "I will need to consult the authorities on this point." Excusing herself, she stepped through a gap in the partitions.

Mr. Merleau-Ponty noted another obligation.

"Sir," I said quickly, "might I pose a question before you go?"

He glanced at his watch and nodded.

"Well," I said, "It doesn't surprise me that I can see you, since I summoned you, or at least I called for Mr. Copleston and he brought you along. But how is it that the police administrator, who clearly has no sympathy with your views, can still see and hear you?"

I hooked my thumb toward where the administrator had disappeared.

Mr. Merleau-Ponty shrugged. "Don't sell our Thomistic friend short. For all her dogmatism, she was listening to my objections and responding directly. She seemed genuinely troubled. You must admit, that's more than many people can claim."

He and Mr. Copleston bade me adieu. I looked around the cubicle. An imposing bank of file cabinets lined one wall. A worktable and xerox machine stood opposite.

I went to the cabinets and read the file-labels. One was titled, "Co to Da," the next: "Da to Du."

It hit me in a flash – try Testascrittore! Q. R. S. T – Testascrittore. Yes! I pulled out the file, and hit the jackpot – six color glossies of the crime scene. The only problem was, the photographer was apparently an amateur, because the photos were badly out of focus.

Never mind. I stuck them under my sweatshirt. But no. If the photos disappeared, they'd immediately guess who took them. I ran over to the copy machine and started running color copies.

It was one of those old machines where the lens has to reset between every shot, as if the gears couldn't quite convince themselves that you were using the same setting for two pages in a row. I grabbed it with both hands, exhorting it to copy faster.

I had barely finished the final copy when the administrator abruptly stepped back between the partitions.

17.

The police administrator came into the room bearing a huge, much-handled volume with its title in gold leaf: Mr. Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*.

Her head was buried in the big book, and she seemed not to notice what I was doing. I scooped up my copies and slid them under my sweatshirt, stuck the photos back in their folder, and edged toward the file cabinet, which was still open.

The administrator shuffled across the room toward her desk, eyes still focused on the book. I jammed the file randomly into the drawer and eased it shut just as she plopped the immense book down on her desk.

She looked up and peered around the room, smugly satisfied that our visitors had departed. She poked her finger at the Latin text. The veins on her neck protruded as she spoke.

"I see your Mr. Merleau-Ponty has departed the field. And little wonder. Mr. Aquinas is clear – to speak of the agent intellect means that in truly knowing an object, the mind is not merely passive. It must work to produce a conception of its object. So it is quite impossible that we could actively experience everything that we encounter."

I recalled an evangelical tract I'd found one time on the train, trying to convert people to Medieval Scholasticism via a little cartoon booklet about the amazing adventures of Mr. Aquinas as he debated the minutiae of God's Mind with various heretics and free-thinkers. Some of the cartoon captions came back to me.

"Doesn't Mr. Aquinas also speak of the passive, receptive part of the mind?" I asked in a rhetorical tone. "Isn't that passive part what we call 'experience,' which then is given a 'form' by the active intellect? Knowing Mr. Aquinas's affinity for the matter-and-form metaphysics of Mr. Aristotle, this seems to be a plausible interpretation, don't you agree?"

"No, you're quite mistaken." She hunched over her desk, frantically flipping through the *Summa*. "It's right here, right at the tip of my fingers..."

I had the photos I'd come for. I eyed the gap between the partitions where she'd gone to get the *Summa*. I didn't see what I had to lose by going through it.

Without looking up the administrator began reading a lengthy quotation which she seemed confident would refute a broader conception of conscious experience.

I was tempted to stick around and defend the Merleau-Pontian viewpoint. But I had a mystery to solve. The French Phenomenologist would have to fend for himself.

I inched across the room. The police administrator's eyes were still absorbed in the book. I poked my head around the partition, but couldn't see anything definite. I cast one more look back, then took the leap.

Passing through a dark vestibule, I found myself in a janitor's closet that also doubled as a library. Aged volumes of Dominican theology and Scholastic philosophy shared shelf space with antiquated bottles of ammonia and cans of cleanser.

For a moment I thought I was trapped, then spied a small opening behind the water heater. I peered into the space, but saw nothing. As I leaned my head forward, though, I could hear the faint strains of a monkish choir.

I hesitated. Behind me, the police administrator called.

With a breath, I stepped into the darkness.

As my eyes adjusted, I saw I was moving along a dimly lit corridor between two rows of partitions. The music was louder, a hybrid of Gregorian Chant and synth-pop that regrettably had not yet been outlawed. I was so absorbed in trying not to listen to the music that I almost fell down a flight of cast-metal stairs.

Reaching the floor below, I made my way along an unlit concrete passageway. The music was now directly overhead. Lacking a handrail, I ran my hand along the curving concrete wall, which gave way to large, rough-hewn stones.

The drip of water grew louder than the fading music. With a chill I remembered the rumors of underground prisons and torture chambers.

Was I straying into the realm of the Inquisition, chief executive arm and final arbiter of all Truth?

The unlit stone passageway narrowed, and I could now touch both walls at the same time. The stones felt distinctly damp.

Should I go further? Behind me lay another encounter with the administrator, who had probably alerted building security. With the crucial photocopies hidden under my sweatshirt, I wasn't eager for a run-in with authorities.

After what seemed like a football field's length of groping, I spied a shaft of venetian-blinded light coming from far above. Finally I recognized it as a sewer grate. I must be under the plaza outside the police station.

I climbed up U-rings bolted into the wall and shoved the grate, which gave way. Taking care not to bend the photocopies I clambered out of the sewer.

A few people hurrying to morning classes gave me odd stares, but most were more concerned with ingesting their requisite caffeine dosage. I brushed myself off. What time was it? Was I late for my Marxism class?

No time to get my books. I'd have to wing it. I speed-walked across the Quad to Dialectics Hall, a sprawling interplay of flowing post-Corbusian design mingled with a starkly functionalist steel-beam delineation of the building's structure.

My class was on level three of the building, which was several floors above level two, the intervening floors being given letters instead of numbers

for obscure reasons beyond the ken of first-year students.

Practically speaking, though, it was simple: you climbed seven flights of stairs to get to the third floor.

I was panting when I burst through the door and grabbed a seat in the back row.

18.

My seat, located in the middle of my customary back row, was perfect. And the class – the opening session of Marxian Dialectics in the Later Sartre, taught by Mr. Dascapitali, represented exactly the reason I had traveled to Terre Haute in the first place.

Although I'd never met the professor and in fact had found no time to look at the text list, I figured that the class must be a cutting-edge Existentio-Materialist reworking of the great nineteenth century Socialist master in light of Mr. Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.

But Mr. Testascrittore's murder cast a pall over even the finest course. Nothing Mr. Dascapitali could offer could outweigh my commitment to pursuing a clue to Mr. Testascrittore's demise.

As the professor's prefatory remarks got underway, I saw an opportunity to study the photos of Mr. Testascrittore's body. This sort of thing was always a lot easier in the back of class, with no one looking over my shoulder.

My back-row mates were a slight problem. The ones on either side, even though there were seats between us, might see what I was doing. I turned my head slightly and snuck a glance to the left. The guy was absorbed in designing what looked like a post-nihilist tattoo. I glanced the other way, where a few seats away a woman was either taking exhaustive and very ardent notes even before the lecture commenced, or writing a lengthy letter to an ex-lover.

Satisfied I was safe from scrutiny, I slipped the photocopies from under my sweatshirt. They were curled to the shape of my chest, but otherwise undamaged. The first was taken from above. While it did an admirable job of capturing the rakish angle of the tucked-under right foot, it completely cut off Mr. Testascrittore's extended left foot.

The blurriness continued to annoy me. Was it the work of a novice? Or an inebriated veteran of the police force, once a gutsy young crime

photographer determined to wreak justice through his wide-angle lens, now a jaded time-server with the tremens from too many nights drowning his ambitions in the Thousand Taverns of Terre Haute?

Although the second and third photographs showed the entire body, neither the bookshelf nor the desk was visible.

On the fourth, I hit paydirt. The photographer must have gotten down on his knees, and this apparently steadied his hand. He caught the entire body, with the Copleston shelf visible in the background. The titles were blurred, but a rough glance suggested that the extended foot pointed to volumes eight or nine, covering 1850 to the present, or what passed as the present when Mr. Copleston penned his magnum opus in the mid-twentieth century.

This could well be the clue I'd sought, narrowing my search to a single century. But who exactly might it indicate? More than a few philosophical tendencies had flowed under the metaphysical bridge since 1850. Could it indicate a nihilistic anti-Hegelian? A decentered Structuralist? A cold-blooded Existentialist?

Or perhaps a resentful Marxian such as Mr. Dascapitali?

As an undergrad, I caught wind of the long-simmering feud between the eminent Marxist dialectician, Mr. Althusser, and the humanist-oriented Mr. Sartre. Whatever the judgment of scholars, in the popular mind Mr. Sartre's humanistic exposition of Mr. Marx carried the day over the icy structuralist reading propounded by Mr. Althusser.

Was Mr. Testascrittore's murder the work of a deranged Althusserian – someone who had brooded over this injustice for years and finally lashed out at Sartreanism's most visible target?

I studied Mr. Dascapitali, who was going on about something or other to do with the various ways the evolving material relations of the forces of post-industrial production have a tendency to express themselves as socio-political conflicts in the ideological sphere – exactly the sort of topic that might appeal to an angry Althusserian!

Who more likely than a Marxian such as Mr. Dascapitali to encapsulate long-simmering academic contradictions and epitomize the antagonism toward Existentialism and Phenomenology, of which Mr. Testascrittore was the foremost exponent?

If so, was it a personal grudge against Mr. Testascrittore, or a general vendetta against all Sartreans?

No wonder Mr. Grosskase was so distracted. He'd seen the corpse with its grotesque pointing limbs, and must have immediately grasped the possible Marx-Althusser-Sartre connection.

If Marxian vengeance were the motive, this was no mere academic realization. Mr. Grosskase, as Professor Emeritus of Descriptive Sartrics, might be next in line for murder.

I shoved the photocopies back under my sweatshirt. No time could be lost. I didn't want to seem rude, and I certainly regretted missing the balance of Mr. Dascapitali's opening lecture, which I feared would probably in all likelihood set the tone for the rest of the term, leaving me permanently at an academic disadvantage vis-a-vis my fellow students.

But if I cared at all for the Institute and for the future of Western philosophy, I had no choice. I stood and made my way across the back row. "Excuse me, gotta go," I said, hoping they'd infer that I meant to the restroom. "Excusez moi."

I made it out the door with a minimum of disruption, considering the importance of my task. Once outside, I pulled the photocopies out again and studied number four.

An intriguing detail caught my eye – a tiny white spot on the shelf just to the left of where the foot seemed to point.

If the spot was actually on the shelf and not just a blotch on the photocopy, it might narrow down the search to a single volume, and corroborate my suspicion about Mr. Dascapitali.

There was only one way to find out.

19.

I headed outside and started across campus toward Mr. Testascrittore's office. I felt qualms about cutting out of my Dialectics class, especially so early in the term. That sort of thing might leave a bad impression.

I'd have to sit up front next time and be sure to ask a few probing yet respectful questions which might either compel the professor to confess his sordid role in the murder, or alternately get me back on Mr. Dascapitali's good side.

After all, if by chance he wasn't the killer, I needed to impress him with my academic diligence in order to get a good grade, or at least a solid Incomplete.

On top of all that, I realized that in the chaos of the past twenty-four hours I'd forgotten to do my assignment for my Sartrics class that afternoon.

It wasn't that difficult an assignment. We were to write a thousand words on being or nothingness.

Being. Nothingness. Which one should I write about?

The latest tracking poll showed that 57 percent of likely voters in swing states preferred Being, compared to just 29 percent favoring Nothingness. Eight percent were undecided, and the remaining six percent declined to state a preference.

This decisive lead for Being over Nothingness, which pundits believe reflects the deep Manichean roots of European culture, doubtless accounts for Mr. Sartre's monumental decision to write *Being and Nothingness*, rather than *Nothingness and Being*.

Maybe I should go against the grain and write about Nothingness. Although I didn't see how you could do that without mentioning Being, since I'd have to say that Nothingness 'was' such-and-such.

Then again, if I wrote about Being I had to beware saying what it was *not*, such as in-finite or un-fathomable, or I'd likewise be guilty of ontological mis-equivocation, a charge I most certainly did not want on my permanent record.

I considered writing about both, but the assignment was a clear disjunction. Being or nothingness. Probably an attempt to foil neo-Hegelian Structuralists from slipping in their one-implies-the-other dialectic and thinking they'd solved something.

As I reached the edge of the Quad, Mr. Hegel stepped out of the shadows, fastidiously grooming a tame owl. His wispy white hair fluttered in the breeze. At close range, his eyes seemed sunken and suspicious.

"Nice owl," I said. "I'm surprised it lets you hold it."

Mr. Hegel looked coldly into my eyes. "The owl of Minerva takes wing only at dusk."

"Of course. Well, sir, good to see you, but I'm really busy right now."

"Is that right? I could have sworn you were just speaking my language."

"I was?"

"Yes. You were pondering being and nothingness."

"Oh, that," I said, sensing an opportunity to get some help on my

homework. "Yes, I have to write about being or nothingness. But honestly, I'm more concerned at the moment with getting to the truth regarding Mr. Testascrittore's death."

The owl ruffled its wings. Mr. Hegel nodded. "It's all connected, of course," he said in a slow, sedate voice. "Truth. Being. Nothingness. Yet the Truth is neither Being nor Nothingness, but the fact that Being passes over into Nothingness, and Nothingness into Being. They are absolutely distinct, and yet they are inseparable, and each immediately vanishes into its opposite. The Truth is this vanishing of the one into the other, which we call 'Becoming.'"

"Really?" I said. "If Truth is found in 'Becoming,' doesn't that suggest that it is not yet Truth, but only part of the way there? What good will that do me?"

The owl turned its head sharply and glared at me. Mr. Hegel's despondent eyes met mine. "Philosophy requires that Truth should be won by the labor of the Notion developing itself in its own unfolding. The concept of 'Becoming' addresses the dialectical unity-in-distinction of Being and Nothingness."

He brushed some lint off the owl's feathers, and seemed on the verge of departing.

"Sir," I said, "if you have just a moment – I'm trying to figure out who may possibly – assuming that the matter at hand is a murder – who may possibly have killed Mr. Testascrittore. Your point about 'Becoming' is interesting and all, but I still find it difficult to ascertain wherein the truth of this matter lies, and how exactly I am supposed to recognize it when I find it."

Mr. Hegel stopped and looked thoughtful. "How does one 'know' Truth? Consciousness, which is the immediate existence of Spirit, always embraces two opposed factors: knowledge and its object. However, Spirit itself underlies the objectivity which at first confronts consciousness as alienated."

"So you're saying the object is really part of my consciousness, only in an alienated way that makes it seem outside and other?"

"Yes," he said, "it is present in the form of a negation. The disparity between the self and the object is the void which inspires their movement towards one another. Each is inadequate without the other. When the object is fully itself, when it stands fully revealed, the subject-object

distinction vanishes. Consciousness recognizes itself in its knowledge of the object. They no longer fall into the antithesis of knowing and being, but are synthesized into the simple oneness which is the True in the form of the True."

The owl levelled a sullenly triumphant stare at me.

I shook my head. "With all respect, sir, this is the sort of obscure and seemingly doctrinaire assertion that tends to bring the label 'Idealist' into a bit of disrepute. If we're going to eliminate the distinction between consciousness and object, why even bother with the object? Why not just investigate my own consciousness?"

He sighed. "It is always the beginner's temptation to think that, since the standpoint of the object is superseded, it can be dispensed with. This argues a false view of Truth and of its relation to what is false."

I couldn't suppress a laugh. "Far from me to wish to hold a false relation of the falsely true to the truly true!"

The owl tossed its feathery head. Mr. Hegel gave a harumph. "Today's youth wishes to dispense with the long and arduous road to true knowledge. Falsehood is not simply the slag or dross which must be rejected to arrive at Truth: it is the unshaped metal which must be reshaped and refined into Truth, and which is necessarily present in the final shape of such Truth."

I resisted the temptation to equate his theories with alchemy. "So you're saying if I succeed in solving the mystery, all of my prior false assumptions will somehow be rolled into my final conclusion?"

"Exactly," he said. "Every error is a necessary step in the progression, and each is recalled in the final synthesis. Error becomes part of Truth, and the falsity of the false is instantiated in the Truth of the True."

I pondered his words. If the truth included all previous errors, indeed was constructed on a foundation of their ruins, maybe there was yet hope for the ultimate meaning of my admittedly meandering life.

Mr. Hegel crooked his neck and peered at the owl as if consulting, then bade me adieu and faded away.

I set out across the Quad, heading for Mr. Testascrittore's office in the Albertus Magnus Empirical Metaphysics Building to compare the crime scene to the photos.

With lunch hour coming on, walking in a beeline was out of the question.

Before I covered a quarter of a block I was swept up in a torrent of humanity and deposited a block to the east. Fighting my way back to the Quad, I was swept back behind where I'd started.

After a couple more ill-starred attempts, I resigned myself to catching a cab to cover the two blocks to Mr. Testascrittore's office.

The cab had a plexiglass shield between the front and back seat, but the sliding window was open. The driver introduced himself as a former professor of Twenty-Second Century Literature and launched into a tirade about the curse of being ahead of one's time.

He rambled on for some time. Finally, feeling like we should have covered the two blocks, I asked if we were close to my destination.

He inclined his head toward the opening in the plexiglass. "Close is a relative term, son. When I was doing research for my dissertation on 'Twentieth Century Precursors of Twenty-Second Century Prosaic Poetics' in the cafés of Paris, I'd have considered where we are right now to be about as close to where you're trying to get as one could possibly ask. If I were an aspiring artiste trapped in fin-de-siecle New Orleans who never dreamed of setting foot in a city so exalted as Terre Haute, I'd consider you a wretched ingrate for even bringing it up."

He reached over his shoulder and slammed the glass divider.

Damn, I thought, These big-city cabbies are so touchy. I tried to relax. The main point was getting to Mr. Testascrittore's office and finding the white spot on the shelf.

With that clue clarified, I would in all likelihood be a lot closer to knowing who the killer might possibly be.

Of course, that assumed that I knew what "knowing" meant in the first place. It wouldn't do me much good to know the answer, if I didn't know that I knew it.

What is knowledge, anyway, that we can wonder whether we know what we know?

20.

Reluctant to incur the further wrath of the literature professor turned cab driver, I resigned myself to enjoying the sights. In avoiding the bottleneck around campus, the driver had detoured through Terre Haute's Historic Latin Quarter Preservation District.

Now that we were on bohemian turf, the driver slid the glass divider open and narrated the sights.

"The Historic Latin Quarter Preservation District is one of Terre Haute's most renowned historic preservation districts," he stated. "See the Hedonist's Haven motor inn? A guy used to live there who could recite every one of Cicero's comedy routines by heart. He used to perform in the cafés and drugstores for spare change."

He slowed down in the next block and pointed out the window. "Look at the water-stain on that highrise – it's the spitting image of Seneca the Elder."

I studied the multi-story stain. It certainly bore a striking likeness to some Ancient Roman, although I had no idea what Mr. Seneca Sr. looked like.

The cabbie drove on. "Over there – the Lucky Toga Etrusco-Chinese Laundromat. No one can clean and press classical wear like they can."

We took several turns, snaking our way through the Historic Latin Quarter Preservation District. The driver slowed and pointed to a drive-up diner.

"That's the Paradox Café. Be careful if you go there – the waiters are absolute, inveterate liars. They'll pretend to take your order, tell you it's on the way, keep you waiting an hour, then bring whatever they feel like. If you ask for the restroom, they steer you to the walk-in freezer. And don't bother reading the prices on the menu – they aren't even close."

I gave a laugh. "Why would anyone go there?"

"The idea is to try to outwit them," the cabbie explained. "You phrase everything as a double question, so the waiters have to lie about lying and wind up telling you the truth."

I considered the strategy. "That gets you a true answer," I said. "But does it get you better service?"

"No, not really," he said. "But it's all part of the authentic Terre Haute experience."

He steered around a stalled chariot, then made a sweeping gesture with his hand. "All through these streets echo the stories from the Silver Age of Latin Stories. Everyone has their favorite. Mine is 'The Man Who Looked Like Augustus Caesar.'"

He paused as if ordering his thoughts. "There's this guy here in Terre Haute – I'm pretty sure he's still around. When you see him from a certain angle, at nighttime, with the street-lighting just right – you'd swear it was great

Caesar himself, walking the streets of Pride City. Kids run along ahead of him and sprawl on the sidewalk, trying to get just the right angle so he looks like the statue in the Vatican museum. The Man plays along, striking a dignified pose and lifting his right arm a bit to foster the resemblance. It's uncanny."

As the driver reminisced, I looked out at the Historic Latin Quarter Preservation District, home to so many stories. Of course New Orleans and New York and Paris had their celebrated preservation districts. But could any of these rival Terre Haute?

Suppose I set out to determine once and for all which was The Best urban preservation district. Where would I start? Perhaps I could conduct an inventory of all districts, tallying their pros and cons on a large grid and reading off the results at the bottom of each column.

Yet what if one district somehow escaped my notice, and by a wicked twist of mordant fate it was this very one that would outrank all others, if only it were known? Could I prove that I hadn't missed one?

With a chill of discouragement, I realized that the same problem existed with the clues to Mr. Testascrittore's death. I could endlessly analyze the clues I had – but could I prove that I hadn't overlooked the most important one? Was there any way to be sure?

Can you ever prove that something does *not* exist?

Or can you only prove that you haven't found it yet?

Can *any* assertion finally be proven, or can I only prove that I haven't yet discovered a contradicting example?

As we passed out of the Historic Latin Quarter Preservation District, a stunning edifice ahead of us glowed like a giant jukebox, a stone and steel basilica with neon-lit art deco arches rippling off each side. A soaring steeple was crowned by a blinking infinity sign.

I craned my neck, unable to take my eyes off the splendor. "Is that the Temple of Logic?"

"That's it," said the cabbie with a touch of pride. "Built with the donations of philosophy students from around the world, who save their nickels and dimes to help provide the most splendid possible setting for the sacred rites of logic."

"I know," I said in a hushed tone. "I used to donate spare change to the Berkeley Ontology Club, never dreaming that one day I might set foot

within the Temple's precincts."

"Truth be told," the driver said sadly, "it's not that simple. Only members and their immediate kin are allowed inside, and the memberships are passed along through families, seldom coming onto the open market except at a prohibitive cost."

"Have you ever been inside the Temple?" I asked, then wished I hadn't.

"No," he said with a hint of shame in his voice. "I'm afraid my family has always been much too careless in our deductions for me to dream of qualifying."

Then he brightened. "But in my line of work, I have been fortunate to hear tell of the magnificence of the high altar where the Universal Compendium of Human Inference is kept, along with the gold-plated chalice in which the Wine of Truth is shared."

He spoke so enthusiastically that I found myself nodding along. I made a mental note to stop by the Temple and learn what was required for admission. Surely aspiring students of epistemology were accorded visiting privileges.

The cabbie let go a sigh. "True," he mused, "I've never set foot inside the Temple. But I regularly take fares to Club Pascal."

"Club Pascal? What's that?"

"You don't know about Club Pascal, eh? Not surprising – it's only the most exclusive philosophical nightspot in the entire tri-county area."

He leaned toward the opening in the plexiglass divider and lowered his voice. "A lot of what happens at Club Pascal is off the record, if you catch my drift."

"Where exactly is it?" I asked, thinking I might walk by sometime and check out the storied watering hole.

"Down by the Wabash," he said. "More than that I cannot divulge. But I can take you there for a price." He winked and nodded.

Not knowing quite what to make of his possibly magnanimous offer, and having numerous pressing concerns such as solving a murder mystery and getting my homework done, I thanked him but declined.

He shrugged and slid the divider shut. Immediately I regretted that I hadn't asked him to take a more direct route to the Albertus Magnus Empirical Metaphysics Building. I'd already lost a half-hour.

At least Mr. Testascrittore wasn't going anywhere if I was late. Thank goodness I was dealing with a murder and not a job interview or a first date.

21.

I was growing impatient to reach Mr. Testascrittore's office and get on with my investigation. As the cab passed a run-down strip mall, I had the distinct impression we were lost. I hesitated to confront the somewhat prickly driver, but intuition told me that I needed to intervene.

Intuition? What grounds are there for taking such dramatic action based on intuition? Had I never before been mistaken?

Is it possible to intuit incorrectly? How could I know that this particular intuition was actually performed correctly?

"You need a new intuition," came a voice next to me. I turned to see Mr. Levinas, the eminent Phenomenologist, making himself comfortable on the over-stuffed cab seat. He was a heavyset man with swept-back brown hair and a toothy smile, conservatively dressed except for a black and yellow honeycomb tie. "Time erodes any intuition, so you must constantly intuit anew."

I nodded slowly. "So in order to criticize the cabbie, I need an intuition that my action is correct. Then I need another intuition to assure me that the first intuition is still correct. That means I'm using one intuition to verify another."

"Correct," he said.

"That seems circular. Somewhere along the way we need to ascertain the relation of intuition to the outside world. Who cares if the intuition 'feels' true, if it doesn't correspond to external reality?"

Mr. Early Wittgenstein squeezed in on the far side. His thick brown hair hadn't been combed, and his white button shirt was open at the neck. "Yes, correspondence is the key, if you're interested in philosophy as a practical skill in the real world."

As he and Mr. Levinas shook hands, I mulled the situation. A true intuition or perception "corresponds" to external reality. That sounded like a good criterion.

But how do we decide whether correspondence has been attained? We need a new criterion to decide if the first criterion has been met.

Who will render this new decision? Why, a specially appointed Epistemological Assessment Panel, no doubt. Unfortunately, they are going to need a while to establish new criteria for checking on the criterion for establishing whether the first criterion has been met.

Mr. Levinas shifted in the middle cab seat, forcing me and Mr. Early Wittgenstein to squeeze toward the sides. "It all comes back to intuition in the end," Mr. Levinas said. "No matter how perfect your criteria are, you still have to intuit whether they are adequate to the specific task."

"And yet," I said, "who hasn't been tortured on the rack of false intuition? What *proof* do I have that my intuition is correct?"

"Precisely," said Mr. Early Wittgenstein. He leaned forward so I could see him around Mr. Levinas. "We need to establish clear criteria for determining when an intuition is correct."

"Fine," said Mr. Levinas. "But we still need to intuit whether the criteria are correctly applied. Criteria don't apply themselves, nor do they tell you when you're in the appropriate situation to apply them. Only intuition can do that."

Wait, I thought. Are we intuiting our criteria, or applying criteria to our intuitions?

Should we seek intuitive approbation of our criteria for ascertaining the validity of intuition?

Or should we prioritize developing criteria for assessing our intuitions of previous criteria?

Given the sort of epistemological challenges we face every day, it's a miracle that we survive as a species.

A sobering thought crossed my mind. Can one epistemologize incorrectly? How does one *know* that one's theory of knowledge is correct?

Is there an "epistemology of epistemology," a meta-theory which assures us that we actually know what epistemology is?

And what if we're wrong after all?

Mr. Levinas and Mr. Early Wittgenstein argued back and forth. But I needed to get to Mr. Testascrittore's office and see if I could find the white spot on the Copleston bookshelf.

I closed my eyes and tried to shut out their argument. I needed to

establish a criterion for stopping the cab, and get down to the dirty business of intuiting it.

I glanced at the clock on the dashboard. I'd now been in the taxi for 29 minutes. In a frenzy of philosophical creativity I brought forth the necessary criterion: If we had not arrived at our destination in one more minute, I was stopping the cab.

Intuiting my criterion was not as difficult as I feared, and by the time the clock hit 30 minutes, I'd made it my ownmost. I figured it was best not to mention my decision to my riding partners, lest they call my entire enterprise into question amid their interminable bickering.

Summoning my resolve, I reached for the glass divider.

22.

At that moment, the cab screeched to the curb. The driver slapped open the divider. "This is the closest I can get you," the driver said. "I don't have a license to drive on campus."

A bit chagrined, I paid him for the ride and opened the door. "Which way is campus from here?"

"Go up six blocks, then right two blocks, then left four more – I think there's a gas station around there somewhere – ask them for directions."

It was another half-hour before I made it back to campus, swearing under my breath that if I ever took a cab again, I would demand that the driver tell me the route in advance.

Of course, not knowing the grid of the vast city, it probably wouldn't do me any good. But having lost an hour of my precious time, I felt compelled to swear about something.

It being the middle of a class period, the Quad in front of the Albertus Magnus Empirical Metaphysics Building was less crowded than usual. I made my way up the stairs to Mr. Testascrittore's office.

Casting a furtive look in both directions, I quickly tried the handle. But it refused to turn. I gave it a harder twist. Nothing.

Locked! The carpet cleaners must have finished their job. Why hadn't I foreseen that? I stepped away from the door. Now what was I going to do? I couldn't very well force it open without attracting unwanted attention.

Where could I get a key? The police? Mr. Grosskase? The custodian? All of

the above? Obviously the police weren't going to give me the key. And the custodian, whose name I had learned was Johann, didn't seem like the most cooperative type.

That left Mr. Grosskase. Stopping by to see him was no problem – I could always cook up some excuse about needing advice on a class. But how was I going to persuade him that I needed to get into Mr. Testascrittore's office?

There was only one way – I needed to confide my suspicions to him.

The class bell rang. Suddenly the hallways were swarming with people desperate for lunch. I flattened my back against the wall, trying not to get trampled. I inched my way down the hall, reaching Mr. Grosskase's office just as the starting bell for the next round rang. Of course that meant I should be in class, but it was going to have to wait.

I raised my fist to rap on the office door, when a handwritten note caught my eye: "Mr. Grosskase is ill today. Please leave a message with the secretary."

Which secretary was intended was not clear. But it didn't matter. I wasn't going to leave a message. What would I write? "Need your help capturing Mr. Testascrittore's murderer – please call!"

No, that wouldn't do.

Suddenly the office door sprang open, and I found myself facing Perkins, attired in a white labcoat and black safety glasses. He seemed startled to encounter another human being.

"What?" he stammered. "What do you want?"

"Nothing," I improvised. "Just coming by to see Mr. Grosskase about a schedule change, that's all."

"I am authorized to receive messages at the present time," he said.

"No thanks. I'll catch him another time."

Perkins gave me a cold stare. I bowed silently and turned toward the stairs.

Outside again, I looked up at the building. How was I going to get into Mr. Testascrittore's office? Perhaps a window was open. I could scale the outside wall in the dark of night and gain access.

But if the police caught me it would ruin everything. Having declared the death an accident, they had a vested interest in preventing any contrary

evidence from emerging.

Should the authorities realize that a daring yet perspicacious graduate student was independently investigating the office, they might post a guard, and I'd have no chance at all.

Johann. He must have keys to every office. I needed to ask his help. The only problem was how to win his confidence.

Luckily, my apprenticeship as a Berkeley custodian had taught me a few tricks. I checked my pockets – ten dollars and change.

It was time to make an investment.

23.

If I was going to make a good impression visiting Johann and asking him for the key to Mr. Testascrittore's office, I needed to arrive bearing gifts. I headed for the commercial strip on Wabash Boulevard.

Flashing signs announced a liquor store. I squeezed past a giant cardboard cutout of a scantily clad hedonist touting Old Wabash Malt Liquor and nodded to the man behind the counter.

After a brief dialog, he handed me a vacuum-sealed package with a bright green "Terre Haute is Pride City" sticker on the front. I thanked him and promised to visit regularly.

Ten minutes later I descended the back stairs of the Albertus Magnus Empirical Metaphysics Building searching for Johann's quarters.

Overhead were heating ducts wrapped in dirty white muslin cloth. I figured if I followed the pipes, I'd find the boiler room.

Interesting how we take a simple object like a padded overhead cylinder and not only fit it into a coherent system, but build up an entire mythology about what will happen at the end.

It got me to thinking how most of our lives are spent in penultimate pursuits. What percentage of our life is spent "preparing for the future" or "maintaining the infrastructure" – and what percentage is "fully lived in the present moment"?

In my case, it's fairly simple to say. I live one-third fully in the present moment. That's the eight hours I sleep.

As for the sixteen waking hours, those are entirely consumed with preparing myself for future endeavors. My long-term plan is to be ready

someday to do something important.

But for the foreseeable future – and honestly, that's as far ahead as I can bear to look on most days – I am in preparation.

I am grimly aware that, from the appearance of things, the world might conclude that I spend my entire waking life preparing to sleep.

To which I reply – I am not the first philosopher to be scorned by his own generation!

Not the first, nor the second, nor the third – in fact, I might not be a philosopher at all. But regardless of what I turn out to be, I'm certainly not the first to be scorned. And that is all I claimed.

As I surmised, the boiler room was found at the end of the pipes. The door was partway open. I knocked, then called out: "Anyone home?"

The music went down, and Johann shuffled from behind the boiler. He was wearing a sleeveless undershirt, and hadn't shaved since I'd seen him in my garret the day before. He put one hand on the partly-open door as if ready to slam it.

"Does this look like my home?" He stared at me with his head cocked, and I realized he thought I'd come down to complain about something.

"Hey, I didn't mean to intrude," I said. "It's just that I worked my way through college as a custodian, and I thought I'd come down and see if you wanted to smoke a joint and share a few stories."

"Oh, why didn't you say so?" he said. The door swung open and soon I was ensconced in the comfort of an overstuffed recliner testing out his antique 1960s bong.

Johann's working quarters were decorated in tasteful retro-custodial chic. On either side of a tool-adorned workbench, tall metal shelving overflowed with a wide array of parts, pipes, fittings, and the like. A vintage pinball machine was piled high with tattered manuals and instruction sheets. Antique calendars featuring buff auto attendants hung above a cluttered desk.

As we smoked, he wandered around the spacious boiler room showing me his prize possessions: a plaster cast of the key to Mr. Voltaire's cell in the Bastille; a left-over simulacrum from Mr. Baudrillard's trip to America; a link of the gold-plated chain from Mr. Kant's pocketwatch; and a terrycloth fragment from the towel used by Mr. Thales after he stumbled into a well as he contemplated the starry heavens.

"What great relics," I said. I needed to get him talking, loosen him up. "The Institute is fortunate to have a custodian so dedicated to the heritage of Western philosophy."

Johann took a hit and passed me the bong. "More than they know. The professors and students come and go. But me? I'm the one who keeps it all functioning around the clock, all year long."

He gazed into the distance. "Even Phineas Q. Testascrittore, the mightiest pillar of Sartreanism, has passed – yet the Institute will not only continue, it will flourish. Why?" He leaned closer, and his voice fell to a whisper. "Not least because of my work."

He reached across his workbench and picked up a huge ring of keys.

I could hardly believe my eyes. The keys! Maybe this was going to be easier than I'd thought. "That's quite a key-ring," I said.

He held them aloft like Bacchus contemplating a stem of grapes. "Power," he said deliberately. "Raw power."

"Indeed," I said, forcing myself to smile. "The keys to the empire."

"Precisely."

"I'm surprised, though, that you have so many keys. Why not just a couple of masters?"

His eyes narrowed. "You *are* a custodian, aren't you? You're right – only three of these keys actually open anything. The rest I just carry for effect."

Johann set the keyring on the work bench and got us each a bottle of Sycamore Blossom Ale from the icebox.

I eyed the big keyring, picturing how impossible it would be to "borrow" it without risking disaster. If Johann caught me it would destroy all chance of cooperation, and even paint me as a suspect if he, like I, saw Mr. Testascrittore's death as a murder.

No, I needed to proceed slowly and gain his confidence. Opening my newly-purchased weed I poured out enough for a cigar-sized joint.

"What brought you to the Institute?" I asked as I rolled it up.

He accepted the joint from me. "I came here to study with Mr. Grosskase. That was back before he was Rector."

"So you were a student under him? He sure looked beat when I saw him yesterday."

Johann nodded, perhaps a bit quickly. "This is too much for old Grosskase. He's no longer up to this sort of crisis. I'm afraid we may lose him."

I pictured life at the Institute with neither of my sponsors. "You don't think he'll retire, do you?"

"He will at some point," Johann said. "The main reason he's still around is that the various factions can't agree on a new Rector. Every tendency has its own candidate, any of whom would tear the Institute apart. There is no compromise candidate. Unless there's resolution soon, they're going to have to look outside the Institute."

"Is that so bad?"

He gave a cold laugh. "Are you serious? The Institute is the foremost epistemological foundation in the Western world. Paris, Santiago, Alexandria, and Cambridge send their brightest and most creative graduates to Terre Haute for advanced studies." He directed a withering stare at me. "And you suggest we look outside the Institute?"

I hastily apologized for any aspersion I may inadvertently have cast on the exalted role of the Institute.

Johann pulled up a footstool and straddled it. "It's a formidable challenge," he said. "For the past generation the systematic philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre has served as the unifying force. All other thinkers adapt their ideas to fit the Sartrean paradigm in order to maintain the semblance of unity. Even those who critique it remain within the Sartrean fold."

"This was Mr. Grosskase's achievement?"

"Exactly. When he came on board, the Institute was torn among various tendencies which bitterly divided Western philosophy, labeling entire colleges as 'Analytic' or 'Phenomenological' or 'Behaviorist' – as if any one approach or 'method' can alone produce truth!"

Johann took a long toke and passed the joint back to me. "The thought of returning to such chaos disheartens anyone who values the unity of the Western intellectual tradition," he said. "Ever since the decline of Hegelianism the newer tendencies have proceeded in virtual ignorance of each other instead of seeking unity in the common quest to understand and articulate what life is all about. It's that unity that Mr. Grosskase is fighting to save – a unity he believes is provided by Sartrics."

I nodded solemnly. "That's what drew me to Terre Haute," I said. "I trust that Sartreanism will provide me with intellectual moorings."

Johann laughed drily. "Didn't we all! The whole time I was studying here, I clung to that vision – the belief that all of contemporary philosophy could be subsumed under the rubric of Sartrean Studies." His eyes got a bit misty, and he seemed to gaze away. "I don't think it was mere chance that I 'lost my focus' around the same time as I began to question Sartrics."

My strategy of winning his trust seemed to be working. I leaned forward in the recliner and looked around the boiler room. "How did you wind up working down here?"

"Because I refused to be exiled from Terre Haute. I grew up in the very shadow of the Institute. I took my B.A. in Pre-Post-Structural Infra-Semiotic Hermeneutics at Indiana State, then began my graduate work under Mr. Grosskase, hoping one day to join him on the faculty.

"After I'd studied here for the better part of a decade, Mr. Grosskase and Mr. Testascrittore" – he spoke the latter name deliberately, filtering any emotion from his voice – "told me that I needed some 'seasoning,' and urged me to apply for teaching positions at other schools.

"But I had no desire to leave Terre Haute. My life is here, my haunts are here. I'm a creature of habit, a disciple of Mr. Kant. So I said to them, perhaps with a touch of passion: 'I'd rather be a janitor in Terre Haute than the Dean of Harvard!'"

He paused and took a drink of ale, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand. "Back in his prime, Mr. Grosskase wasn't one to be trifled with. An hour later, an application for building custodian was in my mail slot."

I smiled involuntarily. "That must have been sobering," I said.

"You might think so. But no, it had quite the opposite effect. In a burst of righteous anger I filled out the application and dropped it off personally at the human resources office. They called me that evening, did a two-minute phone interview, and I started work the next morning."

"Wow, you must make a great impression over the phone."

"It turned out that Mr. Testascrittore had already called them and given me a strong recommendation for the job."

He gazed at the floor as if feeling again the weight of his decision. His face betrayed no emotion. Was he bemused? Resigned?

Or was he secretly seething at those whom he blamed for his exile here in the basement, far from the ivory heights?

Had he nursed a grudge all these years, and finally found the moment to

dispose of one of his tormentors?

If so, was Mr. Grosskase next on the hit list? By Johann's own assessment, Mr. Grosskase was just as culpable as Mr. Testascrittore. No wonder the Rector looked shaken.

Was I smoking weed with a would-be serial killer?

24.

Was Johann the murderer? My suspicions hinged on the custodian's secret seething.

When he looked up, though, his face showed the opposite. He shifted on the footstool. "Think about it," he said, gesturing around his lair, "is this such a bad life? I work when I feel like it, study what I want to study, and get high when the spirit moves me. Who's to say that mine isn't the truly philosophical path?"

I felt a pang for my time at dear old USB. "If you believe in what you do, that's what's important," I said.

He looked me directly in the eye. "I know in my heart that I'm doing essential work to maintain the Institute's most important endeavors. And in my spare time I'm pursuing unique, cutting-edge philosophical studies. That's enough to satisfy me."

Over by the workbench, a cluttered bookshelf caught my eye. "What are your present studies?"

He tilted his head slightly. "I'm working primarily in the field of Paralogic."

"Paralogic?"

Yes," he said, his voice taking on more resonance. "Paralogic. An emerging discipline devoted to promoting clearer, more rational thinking from academia to Wall Street to the kitchen stove."

"Why 'para'?"

"Well, you know how paratroopers are the first troopers into battle? And paramedics are the first medical people on the scene?"

I nodded, imagining logicians on the battlefield or in the operating room.

Johann paused as if summoning his fortitude. "Paralogicians will be front-line exponents of crisp, logical thinking in all facets of life. Whether it's correcting the muddled reasoning of a Secretary of State or getting a

house-husband to follow a Beef Stroganoff recipe, paralogicians will be on the spot, making the world a safer place for clear, rational thought."

"That's a great idea," I said, more impressed than ever with Terre Haute. "This new science is honored with a department of its own here at the Institute?"

Johann took a deep breath and released it with a sigh. "Well, no, not yet. But I've been working on a syllabus, and I have both a basic text and an advanced treatise under development."

His eyes glazed a bit. "Most of all, I have my vast experience here in Terre Haute, from the cobbled streets of the Historic Latin Quarter Preservation District, to the factories and warehouses that line the Index District, all the way to the marbled halls of the Institute. From the depths to the heights of this great city I have ploughed the fields of Paralogic. And while it is as yet a science in its infancy, I remain steadfast in my conviction that I have inaugurated a great discipline – one that will bring honor and renown to the Institute and to my native Terre Haute."

I raised my Sycamore Blossom in tribute. "A most noble goal! Bravo!"

He bowed forward. "Thank you very much."

I was touched that he had confided his dream to me. It was the first heartfelt conversation I'd had in the big city, and for a moment I felt drawn to open up and share my suspicions regarding Mr. Testascrittore's death. Once Johann saw my true motive, he might not only lend me the keys – he might accompany me to the office.

But instinct said no. I barely knew him. Someone in this school was a murderer, and Johann certainly had a motive. I couldn't take any chances. Just play along, ask the occasional subtle yet probing question, and see what I could learn.

I gazed at the keys for a long moment, trying to spot the masters. "Say," I said slowly, as if the idea had just occurred to me. "I wonder if you could do me a favor. I'm, uh, I'm assisting the Assistant to Mr. Testascrittore's Assistant, who is of course potentially liable for rendering all assistance with regard to Mr. Testascrittore's entire course and curriculum, which is surely an awesome assistantorial responsibility. I need to – I want to help out by grading some test papers. It's very important that the students get feedback on their work this early in the term. If I could borrow your keys for just a moment..."

He took a long toke, held it for a few seconds, then exhaled. "Not a good

idea. Nothing personal. From a strictly Utilitarian perspective, I see a risk with no corresponding benefit to myself. From the point of view of my potential well-being, the balance is negative."

I finished my ale and set it on a wooden crate that served as an endtable. "I'd like to question your Utilitarian calculus. You say that lending me the keys would be of negative utility. I believe I can demonstrate the opposite."

"Oh?"

I nodded. "First, as to the alleged negative effects – an event which may never happen cannot be counted as a malady. An illness one may never suffer cannot be counted as having a dilatory effect on one's health.

"Secondly, as to the benefits to you – humans are by nature social. We're drawn to share our lives with our fellow creatures. Our happiness and well-being are not purely individual matters but are inextricably interwoven with that of our neighbors.

"That being the case," I concluded, "a strict accounting will show that any increase in well-being for one person is a net gain for all, since it will result in a more satisfied, less frustrated fellow citizen. My satisfaction directly contributes to your well-being."

He looked at me, then down at the bong resting on the coffeetable. "Well argued, I must admit." He scraped the ashes out of the bong. "I think I see a solution whereby we can achieve the greatest happiness of the greatest number. I'll put my keys on the table. You put your weed on the table. I don't ask what you do with the keys, and you don't ask what I do with the weed."

"Oh," I said. "Don't ask, don't tell?"

He nodded.

"I believe those terms are acceptable," I said. "Just save me a little for later."

He was already taking another hit, and the bong bobbed up and down with his head. He tossed me the heavy ring of keys, which I deftly caught. "Which one opens Mr. Testascrittore's door?"

He exhaled a huge cloud of smoke, coughed a time or two, then took the big ring from me and detached a penlight with a single green key attached. "This is the one you need."

25.

Leaving the boiler room, I made my way up to the second floor hoping at last to discover exactly which volume of Copleston might be indicated by the pointing foot and the white spot on the photo.

The building seemed deserted. The night-security system gave me enough light to find Mr. Testascrittore's door. The key worked smoothly. Stepping quietly into the dark office, I eased the door shut, switched on the penlight, and scanned the room.

Everything looked the same as I'd last seen it – the bust, the trophy, the chalk outline on the floor – but something felt wrong, as if the room were slightly off-balance. I scanned again, but nothing struck me.

I turned the light toward the Copleston shelf. Sure enough, underneath one of the volumes was a small white tag. I knelt down to read it, but the faded ink was illegible. Based on the angle of the foot in the photograph, I estimated two volumes to the right of the white spot – Volume Nine, Contemporary Philosophy.

Unfortunately, that didn't narrow the search at all. I supposed I could eliminate the professors of Medieval or Ancient philosophy. But they themselves were, in a way, "contemporary philosophers," bringing to present life the thoughts of yesteryear. Assuming they actually *did* some philosophy and didn't just teach it by rote.

Giving them the benefit of the doubt on that count, I didn't see how I could eliminate even the aforesaid professors of Medieval philosophy from consideration. Far from honing my search, the new clue seemed to widen it to include the entire Institute. Maybe I better stop before I found a clue that implicated everyone within a 50-mile radius.

So much for the Copleston clue. As I stepped back toward the door, though, something about the room bothered me again. I shone the light around the periphery. Nothing unusual. I stepped slowly toward the closet, then yanked the door open – nothing. The door to the small water closet at the back was open, but nothing seemed out of the ordinary there.

I turned toward the door, looking across the desk – the same view Mr. Testascrittore would have had if he had lived long enough for me to come into the office and meet him. His high-backed swivel chair was rolled away from the cluttered desk, which hadn't been cleared off since he died.

Or had it? That's what was wrong – the manuscript was missing! Where

had Mr. Testascrittore's manuscript gone?

Had it been removed for safekeeping? Or had someone stolen it?

Philosophy thieves. Hardly the first in history. During the collapse of the Roman world, pillagers and pirates stole precious classical manuscripts and sold them to Arabic traders, fortuitously preserving the treasures of declining Greece and Rome for later ages.

Renaissance humanists "borrowed" one-of-a-kind treasures from unsuspecting monasteries, often keeping them well past the due date.

Mr. Heidegger, under the guise of "getting back to the roots," padded out his books by pilfering key Pre-Socratic fragments.

And what of the illustrious Mr. Plato, whose immense fame rested squarely on his appropriation of the legacy of Mr. Socrates?

Now the great Mr. Testascrittore's ultimate screed was missing. Had a rival philosopher stolen the manuscript, meaning to claim Mr. Testascrittore's ultimate observations for himself?

I shuffled through the papers on the desk, half-expecting to find the manuscript hidden under them. But I knew where I'd seen it, and it was gone. I looked around the room, even under the desk and couch, in case someone had set it aside. Nothing.

Maybe Mr. Grosskase had taken it for safe-keeping, although it seemed unlikely he'd been back, given his debilitated condition. Still, I needed to find a way to ask him without having to go through Perkins.

A shuffling outside the door startled me. Was it Johann? Maybe I was taking too long. But he had the weed. Why would he care?

A key turned in the lock. My breath froze in my throat. With nowhere to run, I ducked under the big desk just as the door opened.

Feet shuffled in. As the door swung shut, I shifted as far under the desk as I could get. The front panel covered all but the last couple of inches above the floor. I bent my head down to see through the crack.

Entering the room, the intruder coughed slightly – a man. Like me, he had a small flashlight. He came over toward the desk, but stayed on the front side.

Suddenly a heavy weight thudded to the floor. I jumped, banging my head on the underside of the desk. Wincing, I stifled a groan.

Footsteps slowly circled the room. I squeezed myself smaller. Papers

rustled on the desktop. Then a file cabinet opened and closed.

There weren't that many places to search in the lightly-furnished office, and presently the feet shuffled around behind the desk. I pressed myself against the front panel. The feet came up to the edge of the desk and stopped.

Drawers began to open and close. I should bolt out, knock the intruder over and run for it! But my limbs were paralyzed.

Papers shuffled again on the desktop. Then the noise stopped. The shadowy figure bent down. As the light angled toward me, he suddenly coughed sharply. The light jerked upward, and more coughs followed from that height. A foot kicked at the chair. The coughing subsided, and the footsteps shuffled back around the desk.

I didn't budge an inch. At last the door opened. I heard a final muttered curse, followed by the door closing.

I waited just a moment before venturing from my refuge. My instinct was to get out of the office. But I couldn't help wondering what had made the loud thump.

As I shone my light around the floor, I tripped over a bundle the size of a thick phone book, carelessly wrapped with twine.

I opened the bundle and recognized in an instant – Mr. Testascrittore's handwritten manuscript was back!

Q.E.D.

Vintage Voltaire

Chapter Two

1.

Back in my garret I leafed through the manuscript of *The Being of Nothingness and the Nothingness of Being (Part II)*, struggling to decipher the nearly-illegible scrawl.

That I was in possession of the treasured document was the result of a hasty and perhaps not entirely sagacious decision that the irreplaceable pages were better in my hands than lying prey to a would-be philosophy thief. Once I got my bearings and figured out whom I could trust, I would pass the manuscript on to more worthy hands.

Of course, if I got caught with the priceless handwritten manuscript my name would be mud in philosophy texts for the next millennium. Regardless of my later prodigious achievements in numerous and varied fields and the notable awards that might inevitably accrue to me, the opprobrium of attempting to steal Mr. Testascrittore's proof would cling to my name.

Maybe I should quickly change my name. That way the mud would bespatter the new name, and I could later change it back to Jeff Harrison and be none the worse for wear. I made a mental note to explore the option.

Thanks to my youthful apprenticeship reading Mr. Copleston's *History* I could follow the main thread of Mr. Testascrittore's argument, which

traced the trajectory of the quest for a proof of existence from Ancient times through the most recent treatments of the issue.

In the painstaking if rather predictable estimation of our own Mr. Testascrittore, all previous attempts at proving existence had failed, although each had offered new insights into the problem.

Medieval thinkers from Mr. Augustine to Mr. Anselm and beyond based their proofs of God's existence implicitly on an assumption of the reliability – hence existence – of unaided human reason. But who had such blind faith in human reason after a century of eugenic science, nuclear horror, and environmental devastation?

Mr. Descartes' cogito ergo sum – I think therefore I am – seemed airtight for nearly three centuries until Mr. Sartre showed the nullity of the Cartesian ego, or self.

Mr. Hegel's Idealist dialectic founded self-awareness on the existence of a subjected Other whose awareness validates our existence – a master-versus-slave theory which perhaps not entirely coincidentally crumbled about the same time that old Honest Abe the Railroad Splitter signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

More recently, Mr. Heidegger's Phenomenological description of time and temporality was based squarely on his explication of human existence as the self-evident "being-there" (dasein) of consciousness.

As I squinted over the penultimate chapter of the manuscript, I found my hands trembling at the approach of the crowning moment of Western philosophy – Mr. Testascrittore's long-awaited proof of his own existence.

I paused and took a deep breath. A lifetime of prior studies – from my youthful flirtations with the overheated Mr. Nietzsche to my more recent forays into the cold logical investigations of Mr. Husserl – had been but a propaedeutic for this moment.

Philosophy students for generations to come would thrill to the same experience, approaching the text with fear and trembling. What an extraordinary honor to be the first.

I turned the page and awaited the epiphany. To my dismay, what I beheld was a gaping hole adorned with a bright red post-it: "Insert Final Proof Here."

Insert Here? The proof was still in process?

I sagged, then felt a surge of anger. This is people's existence we're talking

about, for God's sake! How can anyone be expected to make long-term plans based on a red post-it?

I slogged through the rest of the final chapter, hoping an explication of the missing proof might lay buried in the erudite references. But if it was there, it eluded my Hermeneutic skills. Disappointed, I tucked the pages back into their envelope and slid it under my futon.

I stood up and stretched, irritated by the debilitating lacuna in Mr. Testascrittore's manuscript. How could he leave us dangling on the most important of all questions? Clearly he had at least an inkling of the solution. Had he written it down somewhere?

I paced around my cramped quarters, wishing something would distract me from my obsession.

An elegantly-inscribed graffitto in blue felt-tip caught my eye: "I thought, therefore I was – Descartes."

Had his ghost visited the Institute and written the line? Or had Mr. Descartes simply been looking ahead?

Of course, he probably didn't write the graffitto himself. It could have been anyone, when you think about it.

I cringed. Don't get started on that line of thought. I'd had enough sleuthing for one day. Just read the graffitti. I made my way slowly along the wall, absorbing the wisdom of the past:

- Russell is an egghead
- Truth will be truth when truth is truth
- The future will be just like the present, only more so
- Aristotle got a blister
- What do you think they think we think?
- Hemlock smoothie

The last one made me thirsty. I stirred up a big glass of Ovaltine, mulling over the "truth will be truth when truth is truth" aphorism. It made sense, in a satisfyingly tautological way, even though it offered no criterion for ascertaining precisely when "when" arrived.

It was only after I'd finished my Ovaltine and flossed my teeth that it really hit me what a close brush I'd had with death in Mr. Testascrittore's office that evening.

I stared into the sink. Here I was on some amateur paper chase, thinking if I could just locate the exact volume of Mr. Copleston's *History* to which a dead professor's foot was pointed, I could save the world – and a ruthless murderer had likely been standing inches from me. If he'd discovered me, I could be dead right now.

Although on the plus side, I'd have a pretty solid idea who Mr. Testascrittore's murderer was.

If a detective discovers the murderer, but is killed before he or she can communicate the discovery to anyone, can they be said to have "solved" the crime?

Technically, I suppose so. But it can't be a very satisfying achievement.

And that would have been my fate. What in God's name was I thinking? Completely alone in the office with a cold-blooded killer.

One thing puzzled me – the guy had a key. Where did he get it? Had someone else dazzled Johann with their logic? Did he hand out keys to anyone who got him high? Thank goodness I didn't confide in him.

And he'd probably smoked all the weed to boot. I'd gone back to the boiler room after I left the office, but the door was locked and Johann didn't answer.

On an impulse I'd taken his key back to my garret. By a stroke of good fortune I'd brought with me to Terre Haute the portable high-speed key duplicator I'd been required to purchase as part of my custodial apprenticeship at USB. I didn't bring most of my tools – I figured you can always find a double offset counter-wrench or a left-handed philips head screwdriver somewhere. But how many philosophy departments have their own key-cutter?

Although I was quite proud of my foresight, the custodial ethics of copying a borrowed key were a bit sketchy. However, given my dedication to the cause of bringing Mr. Testascrittore's killer to the bitter bar of unrequited justice, I would surely be remiss if I didn't make a copy or two.

Having availed myself of the opportunity to obtain my own key to Mr. Testascrittore's office, I'd gone back to the Albertus Magnus Empirical Metaphysics Building and slid Johann's key under the boiler room door.

I resolved to ask about the weed later. I'd specifically asked him to save some for me. Even if he'd smoked it all, I owed it to my own holistic process of infradialogical self-actualization to get closure.

Besides, I needed to find out who got the second key to Mr. Testascrittore's office. That information alone might solve the mystery.

I dropped onto my futon and groaned. What was I thinking? I had to be done with this murder business. Forget Johann, forget the police. The best way to honor Mr. Testascrittore's legacy was to attend my classes and study hard. A string of straight A's would justify Mr. Testascrittore's confidence far more than wasting time trying to solve the mystery of his death.

Anyway, if I wanted to be effective, why didn't I put my trusty Berkeley organizing skills to work, instead of trying to play Sherlock Holmes? I could instigate a media campaign to demand that the police re-open the investigation. Circulate a petition. Organize a community forum.

The key to that sort of grassroots outreach, I knew, was to immerse myself fully in Terre Haute and the Institute. And that meant engaging with my academic program. I closed my eyes and considered making a resolution to attend all of my classes for the rest of the term.

I made such a resolution once as a USB undergrad. I kept it for almost two entire days. Which doesn't sound like much. But it's better than nothing.

Mr. Russell, dapper as always in black coat and bow-tie, winced. "Two is not 'better' than nothing. One number is not better than another."

I leaned up on my elbow and greeted him with a nod. "I beg to differ, sir. To my mind, certain numbers have more dignity and elegance than others. Am I the only one who feels a secret yearning for particular numbers? How could 26 possibly compare to 25? Who can deny that 44 is more satisfying than 43?"

"Okay, granted that," my visitor said. "Is it fair to compare zero to a number? It's a cheap victory – *any* number would come off better than zero."

"You're right," I said, a tad embarrassed. "I suspect it comes back to the crypto-Manichean basis of the entire Western moral and epistemological attitude: 'Being is better than nothingness.'"

"As if we're in a position to say," Mr. Russell said skeptically.

"Well, being in class would probably be better than not-being in class," I said. "At least in the professor's eyes."

"Quite right," assented the pride of Cambridge with a smile.

I bade Mr. Russell adieu and focused on a decision that I knew would

almost certainly irrevocably change my life forever.

Resolved – to prioritize my classwork and to meet all academic deadlines for the entire semester. Any sleuthing I felt compelled to undertake must take a back seat to that commitment.

Steeped in a newfound sense of purpose, I drifted off to sleep – only to be stirred awake by a chill permeating my garret.

2.

I woke in the dead of night to a damp chill filling the room. As I fumbled around for the blankets, I noticed a hazy specter hovering near the door.

The cloud, which seemed to swirl around its own center, drifted toward me, gradually condensing into the shape of a smallish man with grey hair, or rather a powdered grey periwig. His clothes were silvery green satin, with a frilled white shirt poking between the lapels.

"What? Who...?" I managed to articulate.

The floating apparition came to a halt next to my bed. "Monsieur Pierre Arouet de Voltaire at your service," it said with a sweeping bow.

"Mr. Voltaire – or is it Monsieur Arouet? I am but a humble American graduate student. If I have in some inadvertent way offended or disquieted your ghost, please forgive me."

A smile played over his thin lips. "Not in the least, my good man. I ran into Mr. Copleston this evening, and he said that you might need my assistance."

I assumed he was offering to write some of my term papers for me, an offer I heartily appreciated, knowing what a great stylist he was.

Of course, his writing had landed him in the Bastille, so maybe I ought to proofread what he wrote before turning it in. But if it would free up my time for more important projects, I could hardly refuse the offer.

"I must confess," he said, "solving murder mysteries is not my forte. But Mr. Copleston thought perhaps you needed a bit of encouragement."

"Oh, that..." Should I tell Mr. Voltaire that I was retiring from the detective trade? Or would that just earn me visitations from less convivial philosophers? "Yeah," I told him. "I feel like I'm in a bit over my head. I almost got myself killed tonight, trying to track down a clue."

He flashed a smile. "Risking your life in the service of Truth? Not a bad start."

That's a different way of looking at it, I thought. Maybe if I did a Phenomenological analysis of the experience, I could get extra credit in my Descriptics class.

But for the moment, I was more concerned with the ghost hovering next to my bed. "I, uh, well, I think that... I mean..."

"Speak up, my man. This is no time to lose your wits."

"I thought wit was your province."

"Once it was. But I must admit, death takes the edge off one's sense of humor."

"I see. So what should I do?"

He shrugged. "I think you're supposed to ask me some deep, searching questions, or beseech me for supernatural guidance."

"Wow, really? You can do that?"

"I didn't say I could do anything. I'm just telling you what *you're* supposed to do."

"Okay." I thought for a moment. "Well, it's simple. Can you tell me who killed Mr. Testascrittore?"

He closed his eyes, and his breathing became slow and regular. I thought he'd fallen asleep on his feet, which ghosts probably can do. But suddenly his eyes snapped open. "Yes, I see it all now. Someone came into Mr. Testascrittore's office as he worked on his ultimate manuscript. He gained Mr. Testascrittore's confidence, then when the victim wasn't looking, the intruder plunged an ice-axe into his skull!" He shuddered as the vision passed through him.

I was speechless for a moment. "Uh, Mr. Voltaire, that's amazing – but I think you're getting a vision of Mr. Trotsky's death, not Mr. Testascrittore's."

He drew his smallish frame to its full stature. "It's easy for you to criticize! It's not like they're wearing name tags!" The apparition started to dissolve before my eyes.

"No, wait! I meant no offense. I need your help!"

"I've done what I can," he said, sounding airy and far away. "Now I'm off to the Philosophers' Parliament."

"The what?"

"The Philosophers' Parliament. The great thinkers of the Western lineage

meet and try to settle the deepest questions of all time. Plus there's an awards banquet and a swap meet."

"The Philosophers' Parliament," I repeated slowly. "For real?"

"Absolutely. We're debating the fundamental nature of reality, and I don't want to be late."

"What about my case?" I said. "What should I do?"

"Seek justice," he tossed over his shoulder. "Demandez justice!"

"What? Seek justice?"

"Oui!" His voice was so ethereal now that it sounded as if it were echoing inside my own head. "Seek justice. But beware of those who find it!"

And I was alone again in the darkened room.

3.

I woke in a sweat. Was I late? Where was I supposed to be?

Class. I was in grad school in Terre Haute. How did that happen? Only a week earlier, I'd been sitting in a Berkeley café catching up on my correspondence. I opened a message from Professor Testascrittore inviting me to study at the Institute. Before I could catch my breath I was swept into the maelstrom of Terre Haute.

How far away USB and Berkeley seemed. How past-tense. Sure, my current program was only seven years. I could go home after that.

But I knew that if I was serious about philosophy, my future was here in West Central Indiana. Or, if my talents were deemed of lesser rank, perhaps a tenured position at Oxford, Cambridge, or the Sorbonne. If all else failed, there was always Yale or Harvard.

But a return to Berkeley? What an admission of failure!

Not that I was ashamed of my hometown. I thought of all the great Medieval writers whose cognomens reflected their places of origin: Mr. Siger of Brabant, Ms. Christine of Pisa, Mr. Giles of Rome, Mr. Marsilius of Padua.

In acknowledgement of the high likelihood of my making significant if as yet unspecified and belatedly recognized contributions to the dignity and honor of Western culture, I would like to lay claim to the appellation Mr. Harrison of Berkeley, as an homage to the good people of provincial

California from whom in my callow youth I unwittingly imbibed my passion for knowledge, truth, and the correct answer on the upcoming exam.

Exams. My resolve not to miss a class played through my mind. I wondered how much it mattered to the professors. Those who bothered to notice.

If it were me, I'd take it personally. When I'm a professor, I'll give pop-quizzes all the time, so students have to show up. I want them on the edge of their seats.

Philosophy is a risky business – the sword of Damocles and all that. Mr. More's commitment to truth cost him his life at the hands of Henry the Eighth. Mr. Socrates chose hemlock over exile and silence. Mr. Abelard sacrificed his manhood in the service of his craft.

Given the dangers lurking within the covers of philosophy texts, little surprise that there have been demands for warning labels.

Crude proposals have included a black and white sticker:

"Warning! Contents Under Pressure! Not to be taken internally except on the advice of your metaphysician."

More sophisticated ideas envision easy-to-remember letter-symbols identifying the suitability of a given text for impressionable young readers.

Mr. Plato and Ms. De Pisa might rate a G for General consumption, while Mr. Baudrillard would probably receive an F for Foreign Influence – even in France.

Mr. Bruno and Mr. Valentinus would be classified O for Obscure. Mr. Duns Scotus and Mr. Aristotle would share a B for Boring.

Idealists and Scholastics would get a U for Unreadable, while the incomparable Mr. Voltaire and his inspirator Mr. Apuleius would rate an H for hilarious – even centuries later.

I had to get ready for class. I dragged myself out of bed. One day at a time, I thought. Just commit for one day.

But attending all my classes for two days in a row would break my all-time record. Okay. Two days at a time. Starting today.

Even as I prepared to leave for my first lecture of the new era, though, I couldn't quite shake the thought of the manuscript that lay tucked under

my futon. I wasn't writing off the mystery of Mr. Testascrittore's murder altogether. I could keep my eyes and ears open for suspicious signs.

If my hunch was correct, the truth lay somewhere within the confines of the Institute.

4.

As the clock tolled ten a.m., I settled into a desk-chair in the back row of the classroom. "Analytic Sartrics." Back in Berkeley, I'd have been mystified as to what such a course could encompass.

But here in Terre Haute, it was obvious – Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and the Logical Positivists. Basically the Analytic tradition with a dash of Mr. Sartre thrown in for form's sake.

As a token of my resolve to be more fully engaged in my academic pursuits, I got out a brand new notebook.

My neighbor two seats to the right already had his notebook open and dated. Not to be outdone, I opened mine to the first page and wrote "Analytics – September 17th" at the top.

September 17th. Convenient, having months. Otherwise we'd have to remember it was the 260th day of the year.

Which I would have little trouble doing, since I was already looking forward to the weekend on days 264-265.

It's a trouble most people choose to avoid by naming particular durations of time after Norse and Roman deities. An excellent idea, we must admit.

And while we're at it, let's hear it for the inventor of the "day." What a great organizing device.

The existence of discrete days is one of those little serendipities that incline me to believe in a benign intelligence behind the apparently mechanical unfolding of Time. Without days as a fundamental organizing tool, we'd have to date our lives minute by minute for the entire year.

Which admittedly has a certain entertainment value. I scratched out the date, performed the requisite computations on my fingers, and wrote: "Minute #373,560."

My neighbor glanced over as I was counting and scooted his chair-desk a little further away.

The professor, Mr. Denkenschnelle, was talking with a couple of students

at the front of the class. Let's go, I thought. We're paying good money for this class.

Actually, I wasn't paying any money at all, having received a full fellowship which covered not only tuition, room, and books, but also included a year's worth of coupons for free meals at Logico's, Home of the Hot & Hunky Humeburger, in the heart of Terre Haute's Historic Latin Quarter Preservation District.

But some people were paying tuition, and they presumably wanted class to begin. I was only showing solidarity.

As for myself, what was I expecting from this class? If I had some expectations, I could engage more readily.

Suddenly it struck me – why not use my Analytics class to clarify the mystery of Mr. Testascrittore's murder? What a great idea!

Not that I was the first person to apply the tools of logic to solving mysteries. In fact, it was a long tradition.

Sherlock Holmes got so good at logical deduction that even death couldn't stop his powers of raciocination.

Miss Marple's forensic methodology rested on the bedrock of her belief that every detail and every clue would ultimately fit into a logical, coherent picture of the quaint country gathering at which the story was taking place.

Sam Spade, better known for his bare-knuckled approach to truth, always trusted that at the end of the story the various clues would all "make sense" – even when their rational implications meant sending his lover up the river.

Detectival ancestors from Auguste Dupin through Nancy Drew and beyond implicitly trusted in the ability of rational inference to produce true knowledge.

As the literary record attests, their faith was well-placed.

Stepping into this proud lineage, I could do some critical thinking about potential suspects as well as conduct a methodical review of the clues I had gathered thus far – the position of the corpse and its pointing limbs, the reference to Mr. Copleston's *History*, and the disturbing gap in Mr. Testascrittore's manuscript wherein should have been found the long-awaited proof of his own existence.

Or former existence.

If someone succeeds in proving that they exist, then dies, does the proof carry over, so that we can remain convinced that they existed? Or is a new proof needed after death?

Does such a quest commit us to metaphysics? Or is it merely a matter of having one's soul properly probated?

The incessant recurrence of these sorts of epistemological questions threatened to bring my entire investigation grinding to a halt.

I needed to prioritize. It was simple, really. First I needed to figure out what I needed to figure out first, before I figured out the other things I needed to figure out after that.

So – what exactly did I need to figure out? Well, everything. Most of all, I needed to get clear on where I was confused.

With this pressing concern foremost in my mind, I pledged to use my Analytics class to shine a lamp into the shadowy recesses of my troubled mind.

After all, what is philosophy for, if not to illuminate our confusion?

Mr. Denkenschnelle was a shorter, stouter version of the Man behind the Curtain in *The Wizard of Oz*. As he lectured he paced the front of the room with his hands meshed behind his back. Every few moments he would stride to the chalkboard and write – always on the lower half, since he could only with effort reach above the mid-point – key words from his disquisition.

Although I specifically planned not to cut out of class early, I appreciated his diligence at the chalkboard. You never knew when an emergency might develop. A predictable chalker was a boon in such contingencies.

Mr. Denkenschnelle actually took the "Sartre" component of "Analytic Sartrics" seriously enough to introduce him together with the renowned Mr. Russell.

"Mr. Russell and Mr. Sartre," he declaimed in a high-pitched voice. "Mr. Sartre and Mr. Russell. Seldom indeed do we hear their names uttered in the same breath. Yet here I have done it not once but twice.

"To some, it must seem far-fetched to lump together these exemplars of competing philosophical currents of the twentieth century: Mr. Sartre the dean of Existentialists, and Mr. Russell the champion of the Analytic school.

"But were they really so different, after all? That is what we are here to

explore." He gazed portentously around the room. "As we delve below the surface dissimilarities, we may find a deeper resonance that defies our expectations."

With the final phrase he thrust the chalk-stick into the air like a beacon of truth, then whirled and strode to the chalkboard.

5.

Reaching as high as he could on the chalkboard, Mr. Denkenschnelle carefully inscribed the names Sartre and Russell side by side and drew a line under each. For each item he named, he wrote a short phrase under the name:

"Words – Jean-Paul Sartre named his autobiography 'Words.' Bertrand Russell titled the first chapter of his book on knowledge 'Words.'

"Resistance – Mr. Sartre served time in a Nazi prisoner of war camp and then joined the French Resistance. Mr. Russell served time in a British prison for resisting the First World War.

"Opus Magnus – Mr. Russell never read Mr. Sartre's major work. Mr. Sartre never read Mr. Russell's major work."

He turned back to face the class. People leaned forward eagerly, tilting their desk-chairs onto the two front legs. One guy's notebook slid off his desk and clattered to the floor, marring the dramatic suspense. Mr. Denkenschnelle waited a moment for the silence to gather, then continued in a hushed tone:

"This series of incredible 'coincidences' culminates when we consider the amazing fact that Mr. Russell's name starts with R and includes two S's, while Mr. Sartre's starts with S and includes two R's."

Around me, pens raced across paper, capturing the insights. I thought it sufficient to jot down "Rss/Srr" as a synopsis of the entire lecture to this point. I might have omitted it altogether, but you never knew, we might be tested on this material.

As he wrote another word on the board, I found myself wondering about Mr. Denkenschnelle's relations with Mr. Testascrittore. Like many a professor at the Institute, Mr. Denkenschnelle must have felt cramped by the dominance of the Sartric paradigm. To be compelled to filter the mighty Mr. Russell through the prism of Mr. Sartre must gall him.

Or was I building castles in the air? So far Mr. Denkenschnelle had spoken

of the two men with equal respect. I'd expect the killer to unconsciously deprecate Mr. Sartre, as if to justify his murder of the Institute's leading Sartrean.

Mr. Denkenschnelle resumed his lecture. "The primary way in which the two titans differed was in their treatment of metaphysics." He stopped to spell the word on the chalkboard. "Mr. Sartre dove in headfirst, from the ontology of *Being and Nothingness* to the dialectics of his later work. Mr. Russell, on the other hand, scorned metaphysics as meaningless and incoherent.

"I think," said Mr. Denkenschnelle in a thin voice, "that we shall find a great deal of value in Mr. Russell's views. Metaphysics is, in a word, nonsense."

He turned and wrote "nonsense" in large letters under the word "metaphysics." Around me, people carefully recorded the word, but I was transfixed.

Had he just tipped his hand? Did I have my murderer? What more of a motive did I need?

I needed to be certain. Deliberately I raised my hand. "Did I hear you correctly? Metaphysical statements are nonsense?"

"That's correct," he said. He turned and drew a sharp line under the word. "Knowledge can be defined as 'justified true belief.' First, we must believe the proposition. Second, it must actually be true. And third, we must be justified in so believing. Metaphysical statements refer to no verifiable object or state of affairs. Whether they are true or false is impossible to determine within the bounds of empirical experience. Thus there can be no 'justification' of the belief, hence no knowledge."

I put on an incredulous look. "How can you so blithely dismiss all metaphysical propositions? Have you heard all of them and weighed them carefully? In making that claim *you* are going beyond the empirical and making a metaphysical statement. Or rather, it's a meta-metaphysical statement. And you can't avoid metaphysics by doing meta-metaphysics."

Several other students picked up the phrase "meta-metaphysics" and whispered it at odd intervals, so it sounded like we were in an echo-chamber.

Mr. Denkenschnelle rolled his eyes. "Metaphysical assertions have no referent in the real world. They can neither be verified nor falsified. This is the very essence of a meaningless statement. One must be allowed to

hold certain statements meaningless without being accused of meta-metaphysics."

"Sir," I insisted, hoping to provoke him into repeating his anti-Sartre jibe so I could study his facial expression. "You're the one doing metaphysics. You're going beyond the physical, verifiable realm, and then on beyond metaphysics, to claim a 'universal standpoint' from which you – and you alone – can survey the entire universe. From this lofty vantage point, you have ruled out all possible verification of metaphysical statements. That sure sounds like meta-metaphysics to me."

"You're turning this into a parlor game," Mr. Denkenschnelle said in a tight voice. "The point is, what cannot be verified by experience is meaningless."

Realizing that I needed more space for the bold gestures that would augment my dialectical points, I stood and pushed my chair-desk aside. "And I insist that is not a consistent assertion," I said, sweeping one arm to the side to indicate my rejection of his view. "You claim that metaphysical assertions are without meaning simply because you personally are unable to discover an adequate method of verification?"

"Nor has anyone else," Mr. Denkenschnelle countered.

"Not in *your* estimation," I said. "And you draw from that judgment the conclusion that no one, anytime, anywhere, could possibly verify a single metaphysical assertion?"

"That's a good summary," Mr. Denkenschnelle said blandly.

I smiled, recalling my introductory logic class at dear old USB. "Your claim of unverifiability is finally based on induction, is it not? It asserts that whatever has happened many times in the past will likely hold in the future."

Mr. Denkenschnelle eyed me carefully and said nothing. I continued: "Of course, you know that inductive conclusions are always open to revision. So what you are actually stating is, 'So far, no one has convinced me that they can verify metaphysical propositions.' That may be a defensible conclusion. But it hardly allows you to proscribe such statements for all eternity."

Mr. Denkenschnelle was unfazed. "My conclusion was not inductive. It is based on an analysis of the meanings of the terms involved. If you grasp the meanings of the words, you see that metaphysical propositions have no empirical referent. Hence they are logically incapable of verification and therefore meaningless."

I could see the circularity of his argument – he was defining "metaphysics" in such as way as to render the term odious, then scoring points by affecting to scorn it. But how did I convince my professor of his error?

How did I convey my knowledge to such a skeptical auditor?

What was my own knowledge worth if I couldn't communicate it to others?

6.

A slight breeze wafted through the room, and a tall, athletic man in a freshly-laundered toga strode forward. "Mr. Plato," I exclaimed. "Perhaps you can lend a hand here?"

Mr. Denkenschnelle seemed not to notice the entrance of the Greek sage. I shot a glance at my classmates. They were frozen – pens hovering over notebooks, fingers scratching noses, mouths drooping open.

"Epistemological concerns, eh?" Mr. Plato said to me. "I grappled with those sorts of questions myself. Really – what is knowledge?"

I started to formulate an answer, then realized it was a rhetorical question of the Socratic variety.

"Knowledge," he continued, "is a recollection of the true reality – the Eternal Forms, the Divine Ideas. These Ideas are the actual forms of things, of which mundane life is but a dim shadow."

I nodded appreciatively, recognizing the notion from the early chapters of Mr. Copleston's *History*. But I was less than convinced. Was Mr. Plato saying that Mr. Testascrittore's murder was only a shadow?

What would be the Ideal Form of a murder? What is its true Being, such that an Earthly death is but the pale shadow?

They didn't teach us that at Berkeley. Or maybe I missed that day. It was a bad habit I had as an undergrad – a habit which I was determined to break here in Terre Haute – signing up for classes that looked so fascinating in September and so stale in November. Or October. Or late September.

Unfortunately, no matter what I signed up for, right away I'd want to study the opposite. Register for Nietzsche, read Hegel. Sign up for Hegel, read Kierkegaard. Take a class on Kierkegaard, read Skinner. Sign up for Skinner, read Nietzsche. Sort of a perpetual motion machine of the intellect.

I mulled over Mr. Plato's Eternal Ideas, or Divine Forms, as they were

sometimes called.

"It's an appealing theory, I admit – that Truth exists once and for all, and all we need to do is discover it. None of the shifting sands of time or relativism. But suppose I try to apply your paradigm. That means that all of the clues I've gathered regarding Mr. Testascrittore's death are nothing but shadows."

"Yes," he said. "But in the realm of the Divine Forms are to be found the corresponding Ideas – the Eternal Clues, you might say."

"Fair enough," I said. "But how will I know an Eternal Clue when I see it? How will I know it isn't just one more shadow?"

Mr. Plato pondered my question for a moment, then said, "Contemplate the Divine Forms, the Eternal Ideas. Look past worldly appearances and see Beauty. Look past your obsession with facts and correctness and learn to see Truth. Look past the mundane goods and desires that you pursue, and see The Good."

Mr. Plato started to fade. "Sir," I said quickly, "I see much merit in your program. But how do I know that I am focusing on the *real* Good? What if I discover The Better? Should I cling to The Good? Or should I transfer my allegiance to The Better? And as for The Best – assuming it comes along – how does one *know* it's The Best?"

"Contemplate the Ideal Forms," came his distant voice. "Look to the Truth."

My classmates stirred again. Mr. Denkenschnelle's face was sullen as Mr. Plato disappeared. Had the Analytics professor been listening? Or was he oblivious to the classical challenge?

I studied his visage. Despite Mr. Plato's instructive visit, I felt no closer to establishing Mr. Denkenschnelle's attitude toward Mr. Testascrittore.

Was he the killer? My only evidence so far was Mr. Denkenschnelle's general distaste for all things Existentialist. It seemed like a flimsy basis for a first-degree murder charge.

As he came back to life, Mr. Denkenschnelle resumed his raillery. "As I noted, that which is incapable of verification or falsification is by definition meaningless. Thus there are no meaningful metaphysical propositions."

"Of course there are," I countered in a bold voice, thinking of Mr. Plato's Divine Forms. "We can speak of ideals that never yet existed, and of truths that will never be instantiated in this realm."

"Not meaningfully," the stout man countered.

"Of course we can. Suppose I say 'Justice is an ideal worth pursuing.' If you deny my meaning because we humans never actually experience the ideal of Justice, how would you even be able to respond to my claims? If you allow no metaphysical propositions, then you have no way to evaluate or critique *my* metaphysical statements. You've rendered your own words meaningless."

"I'm afraid I'm finding *your* talk meaningless," Mr. Denkenschnelle said with a patronizing smile. "Maybe you should plead your case in Philosophy Court."

"Philosophy Court? Where's that?"

The whole class burst into laughter, and with chagrin I realized I'd been played for a rube.

Philosophy Court. They probably pulled that old chestnut on every newcomer.

As the laughter died away, Mr. Denkenschnelle took up his position at the front of the class and put his hands on his wide hips. "Mr. Harrison, I fail to understand what you intend by this pernicious defense of metaphysical speculation. If you can offer no verifiable proof of your assertions, I must ask you to take your seat."

I glared at him, then dropped back into my seat. I wasn't about to admit I was wrong, but I didn't see any way to convince a devout Analytical Positivist of the value of metaphysics. I understood what I meant – but damned if I could prove it.

Seemed like a theme lately. After all, I *knew* that Mr. Testascrittore had been murdered. But damned if I could prove it.

So what about Mr. Denkenschnelle? Could his aggressive anti-metaphysics stance extend to the complete elimination of his academic adversary? He certainly seemed sensitive about any abridgement of his Analytic principles.

Of course, maybe it was just insecurity, the result of an absentee mother and overprotective father who failed to prepare him for the onslaughts of the Existentialist-dominated academic world.

During my time at dear old USB I took a Psychology class where we learned to spot this particular Analytically-retentive type, clinging to sterile deductions that re-assured him the world was a cold and meaningless place.

If addiction to Analytics went untreated, who knew where the victim would wind up? Would it lead someone like Mr. Denkenschnelle to kill? Had it already?

The manuscript, I realized, held the answer.

If the killer was also the would-be manuscript thief, it seemed a safe inference that the contents of the manuscript must reflect particularly poorly on said killer or on the historical philosophers with whom the killer had the closest affinity.

If Mr. Testascrittore had undermined the entire life's work of Mr. Denkenschnelle (or his mentors Mr. Russell or Mr. Early Wittgenstein) – if the essential narrowness of Analytics and the need for a Phenomenological approach to the deepest problems of Western philosophy were demonstrated beyond a reasonable doubt Q.E.D. – no wonder Mr. Denkenschnelle might react irrationally.

The manuscript was the key. Luckily, it was mine to study. I needed to pore over it line by hand-scrawled line.

But if the manuscript was all so valuable or incriminating, why had the thief returned it to Mr. Testascrittore's office and then conducted a further search? Clearly he was looking for something more.

Another manuscript! The thought struck me like a bolt of lightening. There must be a second manuscript. Mine was merely a rough draft!

7.

A second manuscript. Was it the final version, or just another draft? Had Mr. Testascrittore re-shuffled his chapters? Had he reached any new conclusions? Was the handwriting any better?

And most crucially – did the second manuscript contain the proof of his own existence? What wouldn't I give to find out!

I'd have to settle for the first draft for the moment. At least I could start familiarizing myself with the outline of his arguments.

But right now I was stuck in class. I looked up at the clock. 9:20. Thirty more minutes. And I had another class immediately after. It would be at least two hours till I attained the intellectual liberty to peruse the manuscript again.

I contemplated slipping out the back door when the professor turned

to the chalkboard. But as the lecture wore on, Mr. Denkenschnelle developed a most annoying habit of jerking around to face us, almost as if he were trying to catch someone cutting out early.

Anyway, what was my rush to play detective? My last round of sleuthing had almost gotten me killed.

Or had it? Why was I so certain that the murderer was in the office with me? Logically, it could have been anyone who wanted to get their hands on Mr. Testascrittore's writings, whether to claim them as their own, to peddle them on the underground market, or to destroy them.

In fact, I'd seen the manuscript lying on his desk the first time I was in the office, so the murderer clearly didn't steal it when he or she did the killing. Why assume there was a connection between the murder and the theft?

But surely the two acts were connected. Probably the killer was so unnerved after crushing Mr. Testascrittore's skull that he didn't have the presence of mind to take the manuscript with him.

Or maybe he was frightened off? Of course – I remembered Perkins going to see why Mr. Testascrittore was late, and running back into the classroom in shock. His footsteps must have scared the attacker away before he could grab the manuscript.

It all made sense. The killer fled, returned later, and stole the manuscript. Then, realizing he had only a rough draft, he returned and searched for a second manuscript while I hid under the desk.

I hadn't noticed any other manuscripts. Not that I'd looked through all the drawers. But the intruder had been more thorough, and he'd apparently found nothing either.

Where could it be? Did professors rent safe-deposit boxes for such things? Obviously they would if they knew that they were about to be murdered. But the first manuscript was lying there on his desk for all the world to see.

So where was the second?

At his villa. Of course. In my short time in Terre Haute, I'd caught word of Mr. Testascrittore's luxurious accommodations on South Sixth: a faux-Roman villa and sculpture garden. He probably preferred working there, rather than sitting in his office. The manuscript might be laying in plain sight.

An impulse rushed through me to cut out of class and head for the villa,

but I fought it back. It'd be my luck that the killer – armed and dangerous – would pick the same moment to show up.

Should I go to the police? But they weren't going to pay any attention. They had declared the matter a malfortuitous incident of accidental death. Asking them to post a sentinel at Mr. Testascrittore's villa was only likely to get me on some sort of "crank caller" list.

Maybe I *was* a crank. I was spinning elaborate theories when I had no evidence that another manuscript even existed, let alone that it contained the missing clue to the identity of the killer.

Once again my over-zealous imagination was running a marathon on a sprinter's breakfast. I took a breath. What I needed to do was concentrate on my class work for a few more minutes...

8.

Rrrriiiiiinnnnggg!

What a great touch! Actual school bells to signal the moment of freedom. I felt a rush of appreciation for the Institute's commitment to the highest ideals of Western civilization.

The sense of release was truly exhilarating, even if I had to return to class in ten minutes. It must be this feeling that got people hooked on attending classes. It wasn't a conscious choice, but simply a behaviorally-conditioned response.

I have long been intrigued by Behaviorism's attempt to discount "consciousness" and "choice" and get down to the material, animal core of our being.

During my time at USB I conducted a series of experiments involving Watson, a time-share cat who frequented my quarters.

It started innocently enough with my efforts to improve his social habits. But soon I found myself locked in an epic struggle over who was going to out-condition the other.

I was aiming to teach Watson acceptable social behavior. He was trying to get me to buy him fresh fish for dinner.

My strategy was to reward him if and only if his behavior improved. His strategy (which I have reconstructed with the benefit of hindsight) was to feign good behavior long enough to secure the fish.

The duel of behavior-modificational wits went on continually at first and intermittently for some months afterward. I experimented with different schedules of reinforcement, carefully tabulating the results and adjusting the protocols as necessary.

In the end, Watson got fresh fish daily, caught a mouse now and then, and seemed possibly to improve his social graces slightly, at least when company was present.

For my part, my understanding of symbioperant conditioning deepened immeasurably, adding a starkly materialist dimension to my philosophical outlook. The only drawback was that I found myself salivating whenever a bell rang.

From which I learned a valuable lesson – you have to be careful when you conduct scientific experiments.

Of course, isn't there a built-in problem with Behaviorism and other theories which discount the role of consciousness? In order to propound a theory that says that consciousness doesn't matter and expect others to consider our ideas, we have to assume that consciousness does matter.

Mr. Skinner was standing near the drinking fountain wiping his wire-rim glasses. Thick white hair swept back from his high forehead.

As our eyes met he forced a smile over his tight features. "I think you'll find," he said, putting his glasses back on, "that what you call 'consciousness' or 'knowing' is simply a series of conditioned behaviors."

"Greetings, sir," I said. "I'm all down with your ideas about conditioning. But what about the 'self' who experiences this conditioning?"

He laughed slightly. "The 'self' is just patterns of conditioned responses."

"But according to your ideas, humans can be aware of and attempt to alter our conditioning – doesn't there have to be some 'self' which is conscious of these patterns and can 'choose' to alter them – some 'consciousness' which can choose to defy our previous conditioning and try a new approach?"

He shook his head emphatically. "Everything you call 'self' or 'choice' is a result of reinforcement," he said. "In point of fact, we are conditioned all the time – stupidly and blindly. With no plan and no control groups, without a shred of awareness, we continually reinforce anti-social and destructive behaviors. Now, facing the threat of extinction brought on by our own myopia, we must choose – take rational control of our social

evolution by applying behavioral science, or perish from the continued reinforcement of counterproductive behavior."

"You've got a point," I admitted. "But even supposing your ideas are correct and you had the finest plans for creating a utopia by modifying our behavior, it seems to me there is a serious flaw in your theory."

I paused dramatically, but he didn't seem impressed. I continued: "The flaw of Behaviorist experiments is that they try to address one behavior at a time. When the pigeon performs the specified task correctly, a pellet of food is dispensed. All other behaviors are treated as irrelevant, correct?"

Mr. Skinner stared at me as if this were sufficient response.

I pressed ahead with my point. "But sir, a pigeon is a complex creature exhibiting myriad behaviors simultaneously. When we reinforce the bird for pecking the bar at the right moment, we also reinforce every other behavior occurring in temporal proximity to that peck. We reinforce accidental behavior, anti-social behavior, nervous ticks – all for the sake of the one item we desire."

I drew an audible breath to underscore my ultimate point. "My suspicion, sir, is that you produced severely neurotic pigeons."

"Well," said Mr. Skinner, pulling his head back, "the rest of you are producing severely neurotic human beings."

That annoyed me, since I had as yet produced no human beings whatsoever, neurotic or otherwise. But embracing a collectivist position, I accepted responsibility for the biological and cultural reproduction of the species into which droll Fate had cast me.

"Perhaps we humans can be a bit socially challenged," I countered. "But still I think you contradict yourself. You want humans to condition ourselves differently. But that implies a choice, and a 'self' with some measure of freedom from the constraints of behavioral conditioning, does it not?"

He scrunched his mouth and shook his head sharply.

I nodded my head in return. "Your theory seems to imply," I said, "either that I am free to believe that I am conditioned, or that I am conditioned to believe I am free, or possibly both."

He harrumphed. "It hardly matters. What you call freedom is just invisible conditioning," he said. "All behavior is conditioned."

"Suppose I toss a coin and allow it to determine my choices?"

"The decision to toss the coin was conditioned."

"So are your comments," I said.

"So are yours," he rejoined.

"No fair – I said it first!"

"That's because you were conditioned to say it first," he said.

"Well, you were conditioned to respond..."

As my voice trailed off, Mr. Skinner smiled triumphantly. "Exactly," he said, and turned away. "Come visit me sometime at Walden Two and I'll show you how Behaviorism can create a new social order. I'm dining there tonight with Mr. Bentham and Mr. James."

I scowled, irked not just by his smug Behaviorism, but by Positivist-scientific reductionism in general.

I'd never had much truck with attempts to base philosophy and knowledge on one of the empirical sciences such as psychology, sociology, or sports therapy. It seemed like the point was for philosophy to provide a foundation and critique of other fields, not vice versa.

Still, my innate if occasionally overactive curiosity sometimes got the better of me, and one semester at USB I found myself researching an arcane new life-centered theory of knowledge called Bio-Epistemics.

The life-centric approach supplanted earlier physics-inspired theories which posited entities such as the epistetron, the deciditron, and the expositron as the sub-atomic bases for knowledge and philosophy.

Those theories reached a zenith (or nadir, depending on your viewpoint) with the application of Electro-Chromo Epistemics and the claim that quanto-epistemic tunneling lay at the root of such mysterious phenomena as deja-vus, hallucinatory apparitions, and the way it's always the cheesiest songs that get stuck in your head.

But an undercurrent of resistance soon developed, critiquing Quantum Epistemics as simply the latest incarnation of mechanistic Cartesianism.

From this counter-current grew Bio-Epistemics and its recognition of the biological, chemical, and genetic factors underlying knowledge.

After some initial forays down the blind alleys of genetic logical determinism, a more subtle strand emerged in the recognition of the role of enzymes. The discovery of epistemase, logicase, and notional polymerase drew attention to the molecular roots of philosophizing.

Growing awareness of cellular functions such as factoid transfer chains and source uncertainty gradients revealed the microscopic details of the processes of acquiring and communicating knowledge.

And the use of genetic labeling allowed scholars to trace the influence of such progenitors as Mr. Plato and Mr. Ibn Rushd to a far greater degree of accuracy than cruder textual methods allowed.

Recollections of taking part in a Bio-Epistemic experiment known as Dessert Cramming (where you stuff yourself with pastries while speed-reading required texts) whetted my appetite for my upcoming class: Foundations of Quantitative Metaphysics – better known as Metaphys Lab.

9.

The metaphysics laboratory occupied the penthouse of the Albertus Magnus Empirical Metaphysics Building, a skylit hall half the size of a basketball court. Aisles of immaculate black formica work benches were lined with flasks and retorts, rune stones, and other experimental apparatus.

A huge Periodic Table of the Elements adorned the front wall, with a predella of hand-painted Tarot arcana beneath it. At the corners of the Periodic Table were silver medallions showing symbols of the four classical elements – earth, air, fire, and water.

I hadn't taken a lot of lab courses back in Berkeley. Mainly I'd been in the theoretical end of the human sciences. During my years at the University of Southeastern Berkeley I'd changed majors a few times, trying to get to the root of the matter.

I started off in Modern Philosophy, focusing on the foundations of logic and mathematics. A critique of Psychologism led me into studies of the mind, and I majored in turn in Psychology, Anthropology, Neurology, Noetic Science, and Pharmacology.

Each fell short of my expectations of clarity. Feeling I lacked a sufficiently diachronic approach, I focused in succession on European Economic History, Lineages of Medieval Art, Origins of the Universe, Non-Darwinian Evolution, and the History of Rock and Roll.

These studies were supplemented and occasionally displaced by periods focused on Anthropophilic Sociology, Contra-Saussurean Linguistics, Trans-Marxian Structuralism, and Pre-Post-Colonial Studies, interrupted by a semester in which I majored in Australian Rules Rugby (basically,

you have a ball and a field, and whoever goes home first loses – a tad amorphous for my steadily sharpening intellect).

Attempting to synthesize my studies, I undertook to create an interdisciplinary major in History of the Sociological Psychology of Philosophy, then in Sociology of the History of Philosophical Psychology, then in Philosophy of the Historical Psychology of Sociology, and finally a Foucaultian joint major encompassing the entire panoply of Western culture in roughly chronological order.

I might have lost my way but for the fortuitous introduction of a new major called Theory. I took my first class out of curiosity, wondering "theory of what?"

Soon I realized the naivete of the question, and found that it was Theory's meticulous avoidance of sullying entanglements with traditional disciplines that gave it a special brilliance in the Trans-Postmodern era.

I was certain I'd found my passion. But mordant Fate had other ideas in her grim mind, and before I could complete my thesis on Certain Theoretical Theories Regarding Theorizing about Theory – indeed before I could even complete my prospectus for this admittedly baroque topic – I was whisked off to Terre Haute and a grandeur of which I had scarcely dreamed.

Breathing the rarified air of the Queen City of West Central Indiana, I could see that all my prior studies were but a prologomena to what was doubtless now my true calling – to read, understand, and help propagate Mr. Testascrittore's proof of his own existence.

But first, I had to deal with Metaphys Lab. I didn't have a lot of experience with experimental philosophy. The Ontology and Epistemology labs at Berkeley were seriously underfunded, and they didn't even have an Ethics lab.

The one lab I enjoyed at dear old USB was Aesthetic Qualitology, where we learned to test artwork to see if it was any good or not. The development of verification protocols had removed the guess-work from art appreciation, rendering it an exact science.

I thought again of the classical bust in Mr. Testascrittore's office, pointed to by the late professor's left hand. Hardly an accident, I was sure. It must have been an attempt to identify his murderer. But what was he trying to say?

I pictured the bust, a generic "Roman sage." When I first saw it, I figured that Mr. Testascrittore might have been indicating someone who loved classical

art. But now, with the leisure to apply my Qualitology skills, I had to laugh. If the killer *did* appreciate sculpture, he would certainly be repelled by the mechanically-rendered imitation – a fact that surely would not escape Mr. Testascrittore's keen perception even at the moment of his death.

No, had Mr. Testascrittore intended to indicate an art-lover, he'd have chosen the Venus de Sappho across his office, an objectively beautiful work.

No sooner had that last phrase passed through my mind than a misty cloud began to coalesce next to a cabinet of beakers.

Gradually it assumed the shape of a young, pale-looking man wearing a heavy jacket and wrapped in a wool scarf: Mr. Feuerbach, the voice of early nineteenth century materialism.

"Objective beauty?" he scoffed. "This is a scientific laboratory. It's a place for physical investigations, not subjective projections."

"Wait," I said, fearing that my carefully-wrought chain of deductions regarding the aesthetic proclivities of the killer was about to collapse. "I don't see how you can say that beauty is 'subjective.' After all, it's the *object* that's beautiful. What could be more objective than the Venus de Sappho's beauty?"

Mr. Feuerbach grimaced. "If we want to understand knowledge as the image or expression of reason, we must be clear on what the objective realm is. For the statue, it's the material, physical object – the stone, the way it's cut, the play of light and shadow – as well as the specific figure or symbol that is being portrayed. That's the objective substrata."

"And you would consign the Venus's obvious beauty to the realm of the subjective?"

"Absolutely. To speak of 'beauty' as if it shared in this objectivity is Idealist obfuscation. The judgment of beauty varies from one person to the next, and is dependent on culture, class, education, family background, and personality. These projected aesthetic meanings are the epitome of the subjective."

I fumbled for a reply. Aesthetic meaning as subjective? That couldn't be right.

But I couldn't exactly say why, aside from a vague feeling that it would lead to aesthetic solipsism.

10. Pop Quiz

Solipsism is:

(A) a speech defect which causes the sufferer to mispronounce "aesthetic."

(B) the belief that sooner or later, given an infinite universe, everyone will be reincarnated as the Sun King.

(C) one of the five standard elipsoids delineated in Euphonius's brief treatise on standard elipsoids entitled *A Brief Treatise on Standard Elipsoids*.

(D) the belief that my consciousness is the only consciousness in the world, and that all other beings are either illusions or bio-mechanical automatons.

While you ponder your answer, I'll tell you about a BBC documentary on solipsism where they interviewed various specialists and experts. Apparently the condition is nearly incurable, although one expert claimed to have perfected a treatment which could bring certain cases of solipsism under control.

However, the side effects included the patient talking endlessly about their former experience as a solipsist, so the treatment had not proven popular with victim's families.

And – the correct answer to the quiz is D: Solipsism is the belief that mine is the only consciousness in the world.

Honestly, this theory would explain a lot, and I have been tempted to undertake a systematic proof. That way I could demonstrate to the automatons around me that they are not conscious.

The Enlightenment philosophe Mr. La Mettrie claimed to prove that humans were nothing more than sophisticated machines.

History of course proved him completely wrong, as any notion of sophistication went out the window amid the political and architectural atrocities of the twentieth century.

But it didn't discredit his machine theory.

Suppose the automatons are programmed solipsistically? I'd wind up having to prove my own existence to them before they would even allow me to question theirs.

Which brought me back to the necessity of recovering Mr. Testascrittore's proof. Without proof of my own existence, I wasn't sure of the wisdom of debating an automaton.

What if *I* am an automaton?

Is *wondering* a sufficient refutation? Can an automaton be programmed to wonder whether it's an automaton? What evidence would we accept to confirm that it was indeed engaged in wondering?

The Legendary Samuel Johnson had a clever response to solipsistic thinking. Perhaps I embellish Mr. Johnson's story slightly, but after all, if you're going to make your mark in history by sitting in a London tavern spouting apothegms, you have to accept that your myth may be embroidered from time to time.

The Legendary Samuel Johnson actually went by the title "Dr. Johnson." This is of little import in a day when academic titles are considered vestiges of ostentation rather than signs of true wisdom.

Indeed, it was Terre Haute and the Institute which led the international movement to spurn honorifics in recognition of the communal quest for Truth. Henceforth, all philosophical aspirants were to be known simply as Mr., Ms., or simply M.

Gone were the days when doctors could lord it over masters and plebeian bachelors. Besides, a lot of those so-called "doctors" couldn't change a band-aid if their life depended on it.

Now, about that story concerning The Legendary Samuel Johnson.

It seems, at least in my telling of the tale, that a certain man expressed solipsistic views to Mr. Johnson, stating that he sincerely believed that his was the only operative consciousness in the world, and that all the rest of humanity, including the illustrious Mr. Johnson, were but a product of his imagination.

The great man thereupon stood up, kicked the wannabe solipsist in the shins, and declared: "Sir, I refute thee thus!"

It's a story I tremendously admire, and I shared it with Mr. Feuerbach. But my spirit-guest seemed to find little humor in it. "If you have nothing more to offer than threadbare tales," he said, wrapping his grey wool scarf tighter, "I will assume my views on objectivity and subjectivity have prevailed, and take my leave."

"No, wait," I insisted, refusing to accept his contention that beauty and meaning were merely subjective – a theory which implied that an obviously derivative and inferior work of art such as the Roman bust could be construed as indicating an art-loving murderer.

He stopped and looked at me petulantly. "Yes?"

I was sure there were answers to Mr. Feuerbach. But unless I found them quickly, he was going to claim victory.

"Help, Mr. Copleston! Help!"

To my relief, my guide materialized in the aisle near us. I explained my predicament vis-a-vis beauty and objectivity. Mr. Copleston listened carefully, then gestured like a baseball manager making a pitching change.

From out of the mists came the lone figure of Edmund Husserl, early twentieth century pioneer of Phenomenology. He was a rather delicate man in a grey tweed jacket and round wire-rimmed glasses.

His broad forehead rippled with intensity as he addressed Mr. Feuerbach. "A word with you, good sir."

Mr. Feuerbach squinted at the goateed man with the receding hairline, but said nothing.

Mr. Husserl paused to catch his breath. "If beauty is subjective, as you say, how can we talk about it? How exactly do you and I discuss our separate, inner experiences? That sounds about as exciting as hearing someone talk about their dreams."

Mr. Feuerbach gave him a suspicious look. "We don't talk about subjectivities. The true object of our discourse is the objective painting, not its subjective beauty."

"Really?" said Mr. Husserl. "By your reasoning, the painting itself is 'subjective.' After all, 'objectively' it is simply a piece of canvas covered with oil-based chemical compounds which reflect various wavelengths of light. To call this 'a painting' is to grant the material elements a meaning, which is a subjective act by your account. If we are consistent and scrupulous materialists, the painting disappears entirely."

"Ah," said Mr. Feuerbach. "There is a difference. With aesthetic judgments, we find widespread disagreement. For instance, there is no general agreement concerning whether Expressionist paintings are beautiful or not. But no one disputes that they are paintings. That's clearly objective."

"My friend," said Mr. Husserl, tapping his fingertip into his open palm as if citing a text, "you're basing your definition of 'objectivity' on what a bunch of 'subjective' observers happen to agree upon. If our meanings are subjective, why would a bunch of them taken together suddenly become objective? You're sounding positively Hegelian."

Mr. Feuerbach clenched his fists, groping for an answer.

Mr. Husserl smiled. "If we can talk about an 'object,' whatever it may be – a material object, an idea, a fantasy – it's objective. The task of Phenomenology is to describe our experience of objects and situations, not to pass metaphysical judgments on whether they are 'real' or not."

As my guests faded, I pondered Mr. Husserl's argument. My opinion of the faux-classical bust certainly was "objective" in the sense that I could state and discuss it. And even with just a single semester of Aesthetic Qualitology under my belt I could safely conclude that the cheaply-wrought bust could not possibly indicate an art-lover.

Clearly we were dealing with a reference to an Ancient philosopher. Or at least to his head and neck.

A rustling to my right distracted me. I looked around the metaphysics lab. The other students were hard at work. My neighbor had her goggles on and was heating a clear liquid in an Erlenmeyer flask, distilling it into a round-bottom flask at the other end. Across the workbench from me, another student worked with an identical apparatus.

Oh, no – what had I missed?

I quickly hooked together tubing looking more or less like theirs, poured a little water into the first flask to keep it going until I figured out what they were working with, and cranked my bunsen burner up to high. The lab assistant walked by and gave my work an odd look, but said nothing.

As her flask bubbled, my neighbor would cast her rune stones, then scribble furiously on her paper, while my compatriot across the table worked at a more methodical pace. I could see that he was writing three- and four-digit numbers in columns that seemed to correspond somehow to the casting of the runes. I imitated his approach, using lots of 8's and 2's, which research has proven are the most sympathetic numbers.

I filled three pages with numbers in neat columns, stopping now and then to look at my flask, which was in danger of boiling dry. When no one was looking, I added some water. Then I cast my rune stones and wrote more numbers.

Gradually people wrapped up their experiments, turned off their burners, and disassembled their apparati. I followed suit and passed in my paper along with the rest.

Not the steadiest of starts. But at least I had done the experiment.

Or had I? Even supposing that my results were acceptable and I got a passing grade – a long shot at best – I had no idea what I was doing or what the point was. Could I be said to have "done the experiment"? It seemed like stretching the meaning of the verb "to do."

But enough of academics. It was lunchtime. And I had important business.

11.

The relief I felt on completing the lab session was decidedly less than what I'd felt following my first class. Diminishing returns of a continuous schedule of operant reinforcement, no doubt.

But there was no time to dwell on the niceties of behavioral psychology. I had just two hours till my next class.

Reviewing Professor Testascrittore's manuscript was the most pressing concern. I needed to familiarize myself with its contents if I was going to deduce who was trying to steal it – and who might have killed for it. I decided to cash in a food coupon at Logico's and then head home to study the handwritten draft.

The streets of the Historic Latin Quarter Preservation District were alive with noontide bustle. The narrow cobblestone streets were lined with eateries ranging from purist ristorantes such as Aventine's Roman Hoagies to provincial cafés like Parisian Cheesebreads or Sangria de Madrid.

No place hopped more than Logico's, whose flashing neon sign declared it The Home of the Hot & Hunky Humeburger. I squeezed inside and looked around. The decor was Italian Retro Chic – speckled formica table tops, plastic-lined booth seats, vintage ketchup and mustard squeeze-bottles, and authentic bent silverware.

The walls displayed ageing photos of famous Institute philosophers wearing white and red Terre Haute sweaters and posing alongside antique Fiats and Maseratis. I half-expected to recognize my professors, but they must have been children when these photos were taken.

The jukebox, unrivalled in its Latinate selections, looked like it hadn't been updated since the end of the Middle Ages aside from a few remixes. The speakers were especially trebly, designed no doubt to cut through the rumble of philosophical dialog.

I joined the To Go line and scanned the lunch menu. To my delight I spied, alongside the various philosophical offerings, a Berkeley Burger! A wave of

nostalgia almost led me to order the sandwich for everyone in the house.

Then I realized that the Berkeley Burger wasn't named for the city, but for its namesake, the good Bishop Berkeley of Cloyne.

That gave me pause. I mean, this is a guy who cast grave doubt on the reality of the material universe, who took great pains to argue that the only true substance derived directly from God.

I had the feeling that the Berkeley Burger was either going to pack all the punch of an air burrito or wind up tasting like a communion wafer.

I decided to play it conservative and go with the house specialty: the Hot and Hunky Humeburger with a side of Frege Fries.

Swapping a coupon for my fare, I started for home to review the manuscript, when another impetus seized me – I should visit Mr. Testascrittore's villa on South Sixth!

Who knew, the second manuscript might be sitting there in plain sight, with the servants dusting around it. Why should I spend time reading the first draft when I might have the second, just for the asking?

Besides, my query might save the irreplaceable pages from further risk. The simple curiosity of an unintrusive yet civic-minded graduate student might render an invaluable service to the future of Western philosophy.

I wolfed down my lunch as I trekked across town to South Sixth, where the Institute's more distinguished professors built their luxury palaces.

Like its neighbors Mr. Testascrittore's residence was set back from the street. The main building was modeled on a Roman villa. Classical structures were sprinkled around the grounds, which were surrounded by a black iron fence partially overgrown with hedges. A stone gatehouse punctuated the tall fence.

I looked around the arched gatehouse for a bell, but didn't see one. Although the gate was unlocked, a weather-beaten sign declared No Trespassing.

The meaning of the sign was plain enough. The only question was, was it intended for me?

How could it be? When the placard was painted, no one could have had any inkling that I was coming to Terre Haute, let alone that I would visit the villa. Even the most paranoid of residents couldn't have planned against that contingency.

Even supposing that it was intended specifically for me – can someone *give* me a sign? Or can a sign only be "taken"? Don't I have to accept and interpret a sign for it to function for me?

Semiotically speaking, do signs exist apart from interpretation? Is there any sign so clear that no interpretation is needed?

Nuclear waste engineers puzzle over this problem. Our society has created toxic waste that will last for tens or hundreds of thousands of years – vastly longer than the paltry 5000-odd years that historical civilizations have blessed the planet.

Based on what I've seen in my lifetime, I'd say it's a long shot that we'll be around for another 100,000 years to keep an eye on the mess we've created.

And so the problem arises – what sign can we place on our waste repositories to let future species – Earth-bred or alien – know that the contents are highly radioactive, and will fatally poison any creature who comes in contact with them?

Can we create a sign that cannot possibly be misunderstood, regardless of what language the creatures read or speak?

I suggest a pile of bones. Or better yet, a bunch of rotting carcasses strewn around the grounds.

A future species interprets the carcasses as the sign of a picnic area and holds a barbeque on the grounds.

But all is not lost – the trespassers die on the spot, and their carcasses become the sign for the next visitors. Sort of a Darwinian test of a species' ability to interpret signs.

Concluding that the sign at the villa could not possibly have been intended for me personally, and seeing no one in the front yard, I let myself in the gate and followed the stone walkway to the main building.

A ring at the front doorbell produced no answer, which wasn't surprising, since the occupant was deceased. I tried the doorknob, but it was locked.

As I stepped off the porch a fluttering in a window caught the corner of my eye. A curtain had moved. I jumped back onto the porch and rang again, knocking for extra emphasis. I braced myself. But no answer came.

I stepped off the porch and studied the window. The curtains hung limply, blocking any view into the interior.

I made my way around to the back. The villa was studded with windows, but curtains were pulled over every one. Unless I found an open door, my visit was going to be short and unproductive.

Of course, suppose a servant did answer. What was I going to say? "I'm here to let you know Mr. Testascrittore was murdered, and that it's highly likely that his final manuscript is laying unguarded in this very house. Do you mind if I have a poke around?" That would practically invite the servant to pad their own account by stealing the papers.

A new thought occurred to me. Was it possible that Mr. Testascrittore was killed by a servant? They'd know his schedule, his habits – and any of them might have a personal grudge. The fact that the body was found at the office presented no problem. By doing the deed at the Institute the killer cleverly diverted attention from the villa staff.

Why hadn't it occurred to me before? Here I'd been focusing exclusively on the Institute. The villa servants and grounds crew presented a different problem altogether.

A door slammed. Heavy footsteps stomped across the back porch. I pressed my back against the house and sucked in my breath, ready to deal with any contingency.

No one emerged. They must have gone the other way. I jumped onto the back porch and tried the doorknob. Locked.

I looked out over the huge back yard, which was centered around a kidney-shaped pool ringed by classical columns and statues. Clusters of shrubbery provided lush backdrops for various sculpted ensembles.

A rustling further out in the yard caught my attention. I focused just in time to see a man leap up and clamber over the stone wall that bounded the rear of the property.

12.

I leapt off the back porch of Mr. Testacrittore's villa and dashed across the yard to where the fleeing man had so unceremoniously exited. I hoisted myself up and peered over the stone barrier.

My view of South Seventh was unobstructed. Light traffic flowed up the old two-lane avenue. A delivery truck spewed exhaust fumes at me. But the only people I saw on the street were a mother and her kids.

I dropped back into the villa yard and landed in a puddle, splattering mud

across my shoes and socks. I grimaced as the water soaked through holes in my tennis shoes. I tried to wipe the mud on a patch of grass nearby, but it just smeared around.

Who was the fugitive? I reminded myself that they weren't necessarily sinister. It could have been a publicity-shy servant, or a housekeeper taking an unauthorized break.

Or was it the manuscript thief from last night in the office? Had he arrived before me, found the second manuscript, and fled with the stolen document?

A wave of dejection crept over me. Once the manuscript was in the thief's hands, I didn't see what I could do, especially when I didn't even know who the culprit was.

I started back toward the house. It was worth one last try. Maybe the person I'd seen fleeing had kept the servants from answering my previous knock. Maybe now they could tell me who it was.

But before I reached the porch, an older man hollered at me from the far side of the pool.

"Hey – what are you doing here? This is private property." The man bustled toward me carrying a wicked-looking pair of pruning shears. A tiny dog completely covered in long grey fur except for its bare head bounded along by his side.

"Oh, sorry," I improvised as he approached. "I was just looking for a shortcut."

"No shortcuts," he said. The dog started barking, a high-pitched yapping that made me laugh.

The gardener gestured at me with the shears. "Feller, I wouldn't be laughing if I was you. This dog is a cross between a pitbull and a pekingese."

I tried to restrain myself, but another laugh escaped me. "He's pretty ridiculous-looking."

"Yep," said the man without a trace of humor. "And he knows it. Makes him vicious." He held the wooden handle of the shears toward the dog and snapped his fingers. The dog lunged and sunk its teeth into the handle.

I stopped laughing. The gardener, struggling with the shears, looked at me. "Exit by the front gate. Now."

I found the dog quite persuasive, but I urgently needed to pump the guy for information. "Sorry," I said. "I saw the other guy hop the fence, and thought I'd try it, too."

"What other guy?" His eyes narrowed. "There's no one here but me and Anaximander." He indicated the dog, which let go of the shears and emitted a guttural growl.

"Anaximander," I said, trying to keep the conversation going. "Interesting name for a dog. How'd he come by that?"

"He's named for a Greek philosopher who held that Earthly beings were formed from a collision of opposite elements. Suits him well, don't you think?" The pitbull-pekingese eyed my leg and bared its miniature fangs.

I gave it one last shot. "No idea who the other guy was, huh? You're sure someone wasn't in the house?"

Anaximander growled again, and the gardener glared menacingly. Obviously the guy was under orders to get rid of me. The whole situation was getting more suspicious by the moment. But I wasn't going to risk an encounter with a vicious doglet.

I made my way back to the front gate. The gardener didn't follow, and I surreptitiously stuck a pebble into the lock-jam. I had the feeling I might need to come back. And next time I'd definitely bring some dog biscuits.

I headed up Sixth Street toward campus, stopping at the corner to scrape the mud off my shoes. It mostly came off, but on my socks it had dried to a greenish shade that clashed with the grey cotton.

Green mud, I thought. A sickly yellowish-green, to be precise. Not something you see every day. Had I stumbled into some long-forgotten waste dump? Who knew what sort of toxic soup the Alchemy Department had cooked up?

13.

Back in my garret I pulled off my soiled socks. The greenish mud still disturbed me, and I considered taking the socks to the Metaphysics Lab and running a few tests.

Not that I had a clue what sort of tests to run. But it seemed like a good idea, in principle.

Half an hour till my next class. I sat down on the futon and pulled out Mr.

Testascrittore's manuscript.

The scrawl was starting to sort itself into recognizable patterns, and I could make out entire phrases like "The being of the for-itself projects the nothingness of the in-itself in the act of negating itself," and "The negating of the for-itself becomes the being of the in-itself toward which the for-itself transcends itself."

I nodded appreciatively. The man certainly had a gift for clarity.

If only he had sketched out the proof of existence half so clearly! Surely he had some notion of what he intended to propose. Couldn't he have jotted a few preliminary thoughts on the red post-it for the sake of impatient posterity?

And what of the second manuscript, which might well contain the proof? Surely that was why someone had broken into Mr. Testascrittore's office, and now apparently into his residence – to get their hands on the fabled proof.

Whoever it was wouldn't have taken the risk without having a further scheme for profiting from the contraband. If they had gained possession of the final manuscript, it was only a matter of time until they published the proof as their own, or auctioned it to a wealthy private collector.

As for stopping them, the situation looked grim. I had no idea who it was, and not a clue as to what their plans for the purloined proof might be. All I knew for certain was that in all probability their nefarious plans were quite likely underway.

Up till now, I'd been able to work at my own pace. But if the revised manuscript was in the hands of an unknown desperado, I was racing against the clock.

14.

The urgency made it even more difficult to face my final class of the day. It was with grim resolve that I trained my sights on the classroom door.

As I made my way down the crowded hall, I overheard Mr. Testascrittore's name spoken in a little cluster of students. I elbowed closer. The circle was dissolving as the bell sounded, but someone mentioned the villa in a concerned tone.

The villa. I stopped in my tracks. Had something more happened? Better not act too interested. Maybe I'd pick up some information during class.

The classroom door was already shut. I opened it noiselessly, thinking to slip in and find a seat at the rear. But as luck would have it, my point of entry was directly across from the professor's rostrum.

"Sorry, sir," I muttered.

Mr. Zeitenschreiber was a tall thin man with high cheekbones and a hooked nose. His coat hung limply on his narrow shoulders. "So, I see Mr. Testascrittore's star pupil is following in his mentor's footsteps when it comes to understanding temporality."

Was it a sarcastic jibe at me, or was he using me as a vehicle to insult Mr. Testascrittore? Kind of rude to speak ill of the dead.

Actually, though, Mr. Zeitenschreiber stood in a venerable tradition which had only grown stronger in the past century – the philosophical insult.

As philosophers became more intimately acquainted with the thought of the past, cross-generational feuding escalated to new heights. It became a fashion to pick bones with the Pre-Socratics, and the Idealists and Early Moderns were regularly raked over the coals.

Of course, as many a dead philosopher has discovered to their dismay – it's better to have the future speak ill of you, than not to speak of you at all.

I made my way to the rear and settled into a chair-desk. The course was called Foundations of Existentialist Sartreanism, which I had expected would review the basics of Mr. Sartre's thought.

But Mr. Zeitenschreiber turned out to be an expert on the Early Heidegger, receiving his doctorate from Terre Haute for his massive treatise on the opening sentence of the second paragraph of Section 66 of *Being and Time*.

Introducing the course syllabus, he spoke with barely-concealed disdain of Mr. Sartre's "borrowings" from *Being and Time*. As he honed his grudge, I got another whiff of intra-Institute politics: in the prevailing Sartrean wind, Heideggerics could only get sufficient enrollment if it were disguised as Sartrics.

The course focused on what Mr. Zeitenschreiber termed the "essence" of *Being and Time* — sections 45-53. I was concerned that Mr. Zeitenschreiber was teaching outside his paragraph of expertise. But around me heads nodded slowly, as if acknowledging the inevitability of the material. I nodded too, although I was embarrassed to admit I couldn't

quite recall what those sections were about. Authenticity? Temporality? Discourse?

"Death." Mr. Zeitenschreiber spoke the word dispassionately, as if stating the answer to a mathematical question.

Come to think of it, why are we so dispassionate about math? What if we really *cared* about 143 + 86, or the cube root of 2197? Imagine how different life would be.

Billboard magazine runs weekly charts of the most-used equations, numbers, and operations. For a while, they feature a list of the most popular square roots, but it never catches on, and is replaced by a ranking of favorite fractions.

Among the Top Ten, the number 7 is voted number one to almost universal acclaim. The number 1 itself comes in a distant fourth, trailing 4 and 9. The biggest loser is 6, which garners so few votes that proposals are heard for dropping the number entirely.

"Death is the pivot of Mr. Heidegger's entire early project," Mr. Zeitenschreiber was saying as I tuned into his lecture, "and remained central to his thought as long as he lived."

Yeah, and look where it got him.

Mr. Zeitenschreiber's heuristic style mixed meandering synopses of Mr. Heidegger's writings on Death with platitudes about "living each day as if it were our last."

Seriously – what would you do if you were told this was your last day on Earth?

Return overdue library books? Have a party? Study philosophy?

Would you visit loved ones? Rob a bank? Spend your final hours in wild and wanton sex – possibly with a partner?

Would you floss?

"When we face our own mortality," Mr. Zeitenschreiber intoned, "we're thrown face to face with what truly matters to us – and this reveals who we really are."

I could see where this sort of approach to the deepest questions of my ownmost mortal existenz might increase my chances of living uniquely and authentically in each moment. Not to mention finding the right seat at a dinner party.

Mr. Zeitenschreiber rambled on. Surely death was more exciting than this.

I glanced up at the clock. 31 minutes and 34 seconds to go. Somehow I had to re-engage, if only to keep myself from snoring.

Ask a question. Reframe the discussion so that it interests me.

Of course, if there was anything I hated, it was people who asked rhetorical questions intended more to display their own erudition than to elicit any insight from the professor.

But having decided to engage, I couldn't refrain from sharing my doubts as to the wisdom of the entire Heideggerian project.

"Excuse me, sir," I said in an especially polite tone. "I don't mean to interrupt, and I assure you that I grasp your point that we never finally know who we are until the moment of our death. But at the moment of death, we don't know anything at all, do we? So at the moment when I finally can be 'known for what I truly am,' I'm no longer there to witness it."

"Precisely," Mr. Zeitenschreiber said.

I scowled. "So we never know ourselves until it's too late to do us any good. What plainer declaration of the utter futility of this desolate journey we call life?"

The professor shook his head. "I didn't say that."

"No, but you implied that life is ultimately meaningless."

"By what nihilistic logic did I imply that?"

He had me there. What logic applies to situations which are by definition devoid of meaning? "I withdraw my question," I said with ill grace.

"No, I insist we see it through," Mr. Zeitenschreiber said. "As long as you are alive, the sheer existence of a future makes it impossible ever fully to know yourself. Are we agreed?"

"Well, yes," I said. "I'm not complaining about having a future. The problem is that when we *do* finally achieve self-knowledge in the face of death, we're no longer in a position to appreciate it. Seems sort of hollow."

"And your problem is?"

How was I supposed to answer that? I tried to return to my own thoughts, but Mr. Zeitenschreiber persisted in making me the butt of his lesson. "I believe your problems might lie in confusing 'death' with 'demise.'"

"I apologize," I said. "I didn't know we got a choice in the matter."

The remaining color drained from his long, bony face. "This is no joking matter. 'Demise' is the end of the human as a physical being. 'Death' is a condition – we might also call it 'Mortality.' As such, it is the human condition, hovering over our entire existence. To be human *is* to be mortal, to live constantly in the face of death."

His mouth spread into a razor-thin smile. His teeth gleamed through the crack in his lips. "Death is not a one-time occurrence at the end of life. Death is the future toward which we live every day!"

He glared at me triumphantly, then spun on his heels and strode to the front of the room. As the final bell rang, he called out: "For tomorrow, read *Being and Time*. Dismissed."

Free at last! I was the first one out the door, shedding my exasperation at the first breath of hallway air.

What a distraction, all his jabbering about death. It was like he was obsessed with the topic. Enough already. I had a mystery to solve.

But wait. Was I overlooking something? He must have said "death" a dozen times. Was there something more than Mr. Heidegger on his mind? In my concern to counter the Heidegerrian miasma had I missed a veiled confession of Mr. Zeitenschreiber's involvement in Mr. Testascrittore's death?

Or was it just a standard academic trope designed to shock students into an appreciation of the depth and profundity of Zeitenschreiberian thought?

Confession of murder or academic flourish? I wished I'd paid closer attention to his inflections.

Luckily I'd be seeing Mr. Zeitenschreiber again soon.

15.

Despite my disappointment at not having paid sufficient attention to a possible confession of murder, I was exhilarated at making it through all three of my classes. I was on target to break my all-time record.

Would I feel the same tomorrow?

How would I know? How can I have a feeling today and say, "that's the same feeling as yesterday"?

What criterion could I possibly apply that could go back in time to

measure yesterday's feeling?

Face it – wasn't that the problem I faced with Mr. Testascrittore's murder? Just because I was sure of something today, how did I know I'd feel so sure the next day?

Even if I did feel the same, how would I *know* that I did? I might think I was feeling the same, when really I wasn't at all. How could I tell the difference?

Sheer material necessity drew my attention back to the present moment. Time to head to Logico's and cash in a meal ticket.

But wait. Didn't I have more pressing affairs? I'd still never found out who got the second key and came into Mr. Testascrittore's office, and whether they got it from Johann.

A simple answer to that question would tell me who was after the manuscript, whereas evasion would suggest that Johann himself was involved. Either way, I'd save myself a lot of other sleuthing.

As I made my way down to the basement, I thought about Johann – a wizened veteran of Institute infighting. Even if he had been demoted to custodian, he knew the terrain. As such, he could prove an invaluable source concerning jealousies and professional feuds.

On the other hand, having once been in the thick of the academic tumult Johann doubtless still operated from his own private motives.

How did I know that he would share honest information? He might use me as a pawn to advance his personal agenda, leaving me twisting in the wind.

Yet I urgently needed to trust someone. I wasn't going to unravel this mystery on my own. I had to find an ally who grasped the labyrinthine workings of the Institute,

What was I supposed to do? Take a leap of faith and trust Johann? I'd have to turn off my critical faculties.

One semester at USB I took a class in Non-Critical Theory, where we practiced trusting a selected authority figure. In hopes of securing a better grade, I made a tactical decision to dump my usual good-natured skepticism on the scrap heap.

"From this moment forward, I will believe whatever I read in the newspaper. Unless it contradicts what I hear on TV, in which case I'll listen to the radio to break the tie."

Unfortunately, I was unable to stop thinking critically about the decision not to think critically, and in the end I was compelled against my better practices to accept an Incomplete in the class.

Reaching the basement hallway I followed the pipes to the boiler room. The door was open just a crack. I knocked lightly. No answer. I knocked again with more urgency.

At first I heard nothing. But then, faintly, came the muffled sounds of a struggling voice.

16.

I stepped cautiously into the boiler room and inched my way around the huge water heater.

"Down here," came Johann's raspy voice. "Give me a hand!" An arm stuck out from under the boiler. I grabbed hold and pulled.

A sweat-streaked, soot-begrimed face appeared. "Thanks. Damn, it's messy under there!"

Johann stood up and rubbed his hands on a towel. "Have a seat. I've got to finish this emergency repair or we won't have any cold water in the drinking fountains tomorrow."

"Since when are water fountains an emergency? Don't you think you might be taking your job too seriously?"

"Excuse me?" His eyes grew large. "A well-placed cold water fountain has prevented many an epistemological meltdown. True, no one has suggested that Mr. Testascrittore's death was a result of overheating. But I don't want the fountains broken when there might be investigators roaming around."

"Why would there be investigators around?" I asked. "I thought the police considered the case closed."

He shot me a quick glance. "Yes, I suppose you're right," he said. "Still, best to err on the side of caution."

He selected a dozen wrenches, connected a blow-torch, and crawled back under the water tank. A valve on the side of the tank started sputtering and hissing. Johann, cursing a multi-colored streak, reached out from under the tank and twisted a knob that made it sputter even more.

From underneath came the sound of a wrench hammering on a metal

pipe, alternating with blasphemous curses. The sputtering and hissing increased. Johann pulled himself partway out and grabbed a hydro-electric steam drill.

Sliding back under, he began to jack-hammer the tank. His curses blended in a symphony with the hammering. The hissing built to a crescendo. I edged over by the door, ready to run for my life.

A sharp explosion pierced the air. The hissing stopped abruptly. Red smoke poured from the tank.

Johann scrambled out and staggered to his feet, hands clutching his eyes. He banged his fist on the door, then tugged at his eyelids.

"What happened?" I cried.

"I got dust in my eyes!"

I got him a cup of water, and gradually he cleared the debris from his eyes. "Are you okay?" I asked again. "That must have been terrifying, having it explode while you were under it."

"Oh, I'm used to that," he said. "It's the dust I hate."

"Why don't you wear goggles?"

"I suppose I could do that. Seems like a lot of trouble, though." He wiped his face with a cloth. "I need to wash up. Make yourself at home." He gestured loosely around the smoky room. "There's a new issue of *Ontology Today*."

I sat back in the overstuffed recliner. Although the glossy periodical was published in Paris, several of the Institute's celebrity professors were pictured in the "People" section, and on the back cover was a full-page ad for Epist-o-Rama, scheduled at the Institute on homecoming weekend.

A short article on "Refurbishing Your Modes of Being" caught my attention. In the opinion of the author (a contributing editor to the much more prestigious *Ontology Yesterday*), most people's modes of "being-with" and "being-alongside-of" were chronically out of alignment.

A simple ontologico-physiological attunement which could be done in the privacy of your home or office in just minutes promised to produce crisper deductions, to foster more daring inferences, and to keep one's razor blades sharp for months.

I sat up straight and tried to focus on the exercises, which involved resolutely aligning my present mode of being-in-the-world with that

being-toward-the-future which was in the last instance authentically my ownmost.

I did my best, but my mind kept wandering to Johann and whether I could trust him. Maybe I just needed to take the plunge.

But something didn't sit quite right.

Suppose I did trust him – it wasn't like we communicated all that well. Even if Johann had no intent to deceive, I could still misinterpret his motives or his words – wouldn't the effect be the same?

Or what if I understood him perfectly, but was so wracked by doubts that I failed to act on the knowledge I had attained? The end result would be the same as if he'd lied to me.

What if he lied to me, but I didn't believe him, yet out of self-doubt I failed to act on the non-belief that I so ardently held?

Was there no end to my enquiry concerning human misunderstanding?

Johann came back into the room toweling off his wet hair. "Well, glad to have that done." He reached in a drawer, pulled out a little plastic bag, and tossed it to me. "Here's your weed. Thanks for sharing, it was great."

I felt embarrassed for having suspected he'd smoked it all. Didn't I feel any more solidarity than that with my fellow custodian?

He sat down on a folding chair. "I guess you heard the big news?"

"No, I've been stuck in classes all day. What happened?"

"Someone broke into Mr. Testascrittore's villa."

17.

"A break-in at Mr. Testascrittore's villa?" I almost choked on the words.

Of course. The figure I saw flee across the yard and over the wall – he'd been ransacking Mr. Testascrittore's villa! And I had almost caught him.

And almost been caught myself. I pictured the gardener, so adamant that there was no one else in the house or yard. Was he in league with the thief?

"Was anything stolen?" I asked as calmly as I could. "It might have been related to Mr. Testascrittore's murder, don't you think?"

His eyes narrowed. Immediately I realized I'd said too much. Was his expression conveying skepticism – or fear? Did he think me a lunatic? Or

had I just tipped off the killer as to my suspicions?

"Mr. Testascrittore's *death*," I said hurriedly.

His expression didn't change. "Well," he said flatly, "the police aren't saying a lot, but they've ruled out any connection between Mr. Testascrittore's demise and the villa incident. After all, one case involved a death, and the other was breaking and entering. Doesn't sound like the same criminal mindset, does it?"

"Well, no," I said, although I was anything but convinced. I wondered where Johann had been that afternoon when I was at the villa. Was it he who ran from the house and jumped the fence?

Was Johann the killer? I hated to suspect the only person I'd befriended since I got here. But if I was serious about this sleuthing business, I couldn't rule anyone out.

Truth be told, I had pretty much ruled myself out. If I was the killer, I was not only an amnesiac, I had been in two places at once. That sounded like a solid defense: "Your honor, not only did I not do it – I was insane at the time."

I thought again of Mr. Testascrittore's manuscript. Suppose the intruder who hopped the fence at the villa had purloined the hypothetical second version, and the gardener's job was to stand lookout while the thief made off with the papers.

Could it have been Johann? Hardly surprising that he knew the gardener. They probably worked together on occasion.

How ironic if Mr. Testascrittore, who was responsible for the employment and perhaps even the introduction of the two men, met his fate at their hands.

18.

I studied Johann's profile. The scruffy shadow of a beard softened a sharp jawline.

Was Johann the villa intruder? And if so, had he found the second manuscript? It might be hidden right here in the boiler room, within easy reach. If only I had thought to look around while he showered!

He hadn't sat down, and I started to feel like I was overstaying my welcome. I groped for a way to question him about his whereabouts that

afternoon. Plus, I wanted to ask about the duplicate key from the previous evening, which I'd still never found a suitably subtle way to introduce. I had to keep him talking.

"Want to have some dinner? I'm going over to Logico's."

"No, thanks," he said. "I've got plans tonight."

"Oh, come on, I'll buy you dinner."

"No, really, I'm busy." He wiped his hands on his pants, then smoothed down his unruly hair as if preparing himself for an important date.

I stood there facing him. I needed to find out about the key, regardless of whether it tipped him off as to my suspicions. I had to know where we stood.

"Last night," I began carefully, "after I borrowed your keys and went to Mr. Testascrittore's office, someone else followed me there. They also had a key. I was wondering if you had any idea who it was, or how they got a key?"

His brow furrowed. "I don't know anything about it," he said, avoiding my eyes. "I smoked some weed, then put on headphones and fell asleep in the recliner. I didn't talk to anyone else."

"And you're sure no one came in and got a key?"

He looked right at me. "I locked my door."

I nodded silently. Any further questioning would practically accuse him of lying. And I wasn't yet ready to make a formal charge.

Frustrated with Johann's evasion, I excused myself and headed across campus toward the Historic Latin Quarter Preservation District. The night was warm, with a low fog that obscured the moon and stars.

Along a dark block, a knot of street urchins clustered around me, tugging at my clothes and trying to draw me into a Socratic, or more accurately Socratistic, dialog.

Besieged by their incessant prodding, I instinctively grabbed for my wallet, then remembered I never carried one.

Knowing that if I were to engage in authentic dialectic I would be there a while, I opted for Protagoras's strategy in the Platonic dialog of the same name: whatever the other party says, you just keep going uh-huh, right, of course, indubitably. Sooner or later even Socrates runs out of steam, although it might take the better part of the night.

As for the urchins, once convinced that I would play no hapless Gorgias to their rag-tag Socrates they settled for giving me a few good thwacks and moving along to their next victim.

Logico's was hopping when I got there. I ordered a Lockeburger and felt a sudden craving for a side of Potatoes Malebranche. After the waiter left, I noticed the smell of the deep fryers. Had the aroma of the hot oil sparked my desire – or was my desire simply the occasion for savoring the scent?

Potatoes Malebranche was an old-world appetizer named in honor of Nicolas Malebranche, the 17th century French Occasionalist – a radical follower of Mr. Descartes' dualist philosophy, which postulated an unbridgeable split between mind and matter.

Mr. Malebranche held that all causation came directly from God, and that any human action or thought could not possibly cause its so-called effects, but was simply the "occasion" for the good Lord to bring the effects about.

If Mr. Malebranche's rather lengthy nostrils itched and he wished to scratch them, this desire would become the occasion for the God of the one true Catholic Church – for our devout Occasionalist managed to reconcile his unusual doctrine with orthodox Christianity by granting God all power and majesty – the desire, I say, became the occasion for God to cause the muscles in Mr. Malebranche's arm to contract and lift his index finger to his nose.

How far to carry this is an open question. My guess is that once God gets the arm in motion, it's probably up to each of us to do the actual scratching. Divine grace may be necessary, but it can only carry us so far.

But a strict Malebranchovian might impute the precise pressure and motion of the scratching to God as well.

As I waited to eat, I looked over the jukebox selection. The music was mainly Medieval hits, all naturally sung in Latin. Dropping a coin into my tabletop selector, I punched an electronic remix of Perotin's "Viderunt Omnes" which I remembered dancing to on Pride Night back at dear old USB.

The waiter brought my Potatoes Malebranche. After a moment's reflection I grasped how the steamed spuds were in no way the cause of the cheese-and-ketchup compote in which they were smothered, but were simply the occasion upon which the omnipotent short-order chef had concocted the recipe.

They were excellent in any case. But the same could not be said for my Lockeburger. The patty was fine, but the lettuce and tomatoes were wilted and uninspiring. Coming from Berkeley, among whose proudest cultural achievements was seasonally fresh lettuce, I was a trifle annoyed.

I stood to seek the manager and register a complaint, but found my way barred by a woman of middle years with wide-set eyes and full lips. "Bringing your California expectations to Indiana?" Ms. Beauvoir said in a Parisian accent. "A slight shift of context, n'est-ce pas?"

"Perhaps," I said, aware of the French's reputation as sticklers with regards to matters culinary. "But something as critical as the trimmings on a Lockeburger should be expected to be of the highest quality regardless of the context."

"All human culture is contextual," she said, lighting a cigarette. "As is all knowledge."

I didn't want to argue with so eminent a thinker, particularly if it put my lunch on hold. But I felt she was confusing the *content* of knowledge with the *context* of our knowing it.

"Perhaps a truth can only be *known* in a given context," I said. "But the truth itself is beyond context. Soggy lettuce is soggy lettuce."

"I don't think so," Ms. Beauvoir said, blowing a wreath of smoke over my head. "Truth is shaped by its context, and appears differently to each generation, to each race, to each class, to each gender. There is no absolute truth apart from context."

"Okay," I said, "I can see where the quality of lettuce might be contextual. But what about a fact like the identity of Mr. Testacrittore's killer? That's true outside of any context, isn't it?"

"Not at all," she said. "It's true *within* a context. It's true in this time and place, not in some timeless, eternal ledger of facts. The more you recognize and study the context in which that fact is embedded, the more likely you are to see the truth. Look to the context, not just a list of facts. Truth is contextual."

She faded up the aisle, and I found myself standing by my booth at Logico's staring down at my meal. I glanced around, but no one seemed to take it amiss that I had just been conversing with Ms. Beauvoir. My Potatoes Malebranche hadn't even gotten cold.

Sadly, the lettuce on my Lockeburger looked less appetizing than ever.

I started toward the counter to politely request fresh trimmings. But Mr. Carnap, a brusque man with combed-over brown hair, headed me off with a bit of linguistic analysis.

"I believe if you analyze the name of the item," he said, "you will conclude that the only grounds for complaint would be the burger itself. No amount of analysis of the words 'Locke' or 'burger' can lead one to a necessary expectation of fresh lettuce."

I gave a sharp laugh. "Excuse me, but where I come from, the trimmings are deemed part of the order. I consider quality lettuce to be implicit in the association of the name of the great Mr. Locke with the concept of a burger."

Mr. Carnap craned his neck as he adjusted his thin black tie. "In all seriousness," he said crisply, "your chances of prevailing on such an argument are extremely slim. Even if you are the prevailing party, by the time you've paid your attorneys' fees your settlement will never justify the ill will that such an action will gain you throughout Terre Haute."

"I just want some fresh lettuce," I said plaintively. "I wasn't threatening to sue."

He laughed coldly. "You think the management will recognize that distinction? If you make a scene about your lettuce, you're likely to wind up talking to their legal department anyway. So unless your attorney is present and prepared to begin filing motions, I suggest you hold your tongue."

19.

With ill humor I settled back in my booth. I opened my Lockeburger and scraped off the wilted lettuce, and was none too pleased with the texture of the pickles and onions. The white-bread bun was nothing to write home about, either. Except for the patty itself, the Lockeburger did not appear to be one of Logico's finer efforts.

Of course, that implied that the proprietors of Logico's were morally responsible for the sandwich, which was at best a dubious proposal. Given that the management grew up in the midst of a corrupt and greed-driven culture, can they be held culpable for cutting a few corners when it came to ingredients?

Really – is it fair to hold a human being individually responsible for their actions? How can a reasonable society hold its members responsible

for being warped by that very society? As Ms. Beauvoir observed, is the context not crucial in assessing truth?

Do we not act within the constraints and parameters of the broader society? Are we not the misbegotten children of our depraved culture?

Yet if this were true, what would that imply about Mr. Testascrittore's killer? Should he not be held accountable for his crime?

Clearly the killer was the immediate cause of Mr. Testascrittore's death, whatever the larger context.

Unless we say that the *Cambridge Dictionary* was the immediate cause, and the murderer merely a mediate cause. Or maybe the dictionary was a mediate cause, and massive loss of blood was the immediate cause of death.

When you came right down to it, the safest statement would be that the immediate cause of death was dying, and everything else simply led up to it.

A mist swirled next to my booth. Accustomed as I had become to my spirit visitors, I was still taken aback when Mr. Hume himself pulled up a chair. Immediately I wished I'd ordered the Hot and Hunky Humeburger. Eating the house special with the eponymous philosopher would be like having Ben Franklin pay you with a hundred dollar bill, or hearing Jesus quoting the gospels.

As I collected myself, Mr. Hume took a sip of cognac and stared at me warmly. He had a round, reddish face with a long nose and arched eyebrows. A silky white wig ended in curls over his ears.

"Young man," he said pleasantly, "you are certainly postulating a lot of causes."

"Well, sir," I said between bites of my Lockeburger, "*something* was the cause of Mr. Testascrittore's death. People don't die of no cause whatsoever."

"Really? Have you ever actually seen a 'cause'? A succession of events, yes. A highly regular succession, yes. But a 'cause,' never."

"Let me think about that," I said. "If one lifts a huge dictionary into the air and brings it down on someone else's head, would not the effort be said to 'cause' the book to rise and fall? I can't precisely explain the anatomical workings of the human arm. But how would the book rise and fall apart from such impetus? And if you don't call that a 'cause,' what would you call it?"

"I would call that a 'regular sequence,'" Mr. Hume said, taking up a cheese danish and eyeing it judiciously. "When people perform actions such as lifting and lowering their arm, we observe a regular sequence of events. The regularity of the occurrence leads us to postulate that there is causation and necessity involved. But we never actually witness a 'cause,' do we?"

"No," I said, "but I'm using the word 'cause' to encompass the various steps that led up to the act in question."

"Oh, I see," he said. "So a 'cause' is just a word? That doesn't sound particularly efficacious."

Great, I thought. Just when I was about to solve the murder of Mr. Testascrittore, the Law of Causality lets me down.

Mr. Hume carefully adjusted his elegant white curls. I couldn't resist pointing out that his action presumed that causality would operate as usual. "You lifted your hand and touched your head because you assumed you would actually affect your wig. How could you live your daily life if you really believed causality doesn't operate?"

"My boy, I don't live my daily life by such principles. My reason shows me these cold truths. But I don't have to let them dominate my life. One can know the hard reality of the world, and still enjoy the softer pleasures now and again."

I scowled. "So you don't exactly see philosophy as a guide to life?"

He held his wine glass aloft and studied it. "Well, in a way, yes. The chief aim of philosophy – aside from ethics, which is of course the highest aim of all philosophizing – the chief aim of philosophy is to analyze the formation, connections, and justification of our inferences."

I couldn't help laughing. "How's that supposed to help us live a better life?"

He daubed his puffy lips with a silk napkin. "It helps us recognize and avoid errors. There are so many sources of mistaken inference, and they wreak havoc on our lives: limited information, biased hypotheses, superstition, prejudices, overconfidence in human testimony, speculative metaphysics, improper methodology, rash causal inference, and certain functions of the mind."

"I think you forgot being in a bad mood," I said with a hint of sarcasm.

Mr. Hume ignored my tone and savored a sip of wine. "That's included

under 'certain functions of the mind,'" he said.

I found that I'd lost my appetite. Mr. Hume wiped his pudgy fingers on a napkin, then excused himself.

Even if I didn't buy his line of argument, I envied Mr. Hume's cavalier ability to think the most harrowingly skeptical thoughts, then wash his hands and sit down to a fine meal. I doubted that he ever let a bit of epistemological legerdemain spoil his appetite.

Perotin's song was winding down on the jukebox. I wiped my mouth and stood up.

Where to? I should head back to my garret and do some studying. Clearly that was the best use of my time. If I was going to keep up with Terre Haute's pace, I needed to stay on top of my lessons right from the start. On that I was firmly resolved.

Although maybe I should check up on Johann and see if he really had plans for the evening, or was just making an excuse to avoid talking to me. If he was down in the boiler room, it was a good sign he'd been lying to me, and I'd know where I stood.

As I stepped out into the night air of the Historic Latin Quarter Preservation District, a familiar figure caught my eye. Mr. Zeitenschreiber, my Heideggerics professor, strolled by with a gaggle of students on his heels.

Recognizing an opportunity to observe him candidly in his natural habitat, I followed their rat-pack down the block to The Vienna, another of the legendary Thousand Taverns of Terre Haute. The interior resembled a big yurt, with a circular bar in the center.

Mr. Zeitenschreiber took a seat at a large table. His devotees pulled up chairs and fell to arguing among themselves about whose being-toward-the-future was most authentic.

Their debates were of little relevance to me. I had a mystery to solve. With my customary relentless yet fluid determination, I prepared to study Mr. Zeitenschreiber at close range, scrutinizing him as he bantered with his minions.

Then, when his guard was down, I'd pose a few seemingly innocuous yet slyly probing questions that would lay bare his baser motives.

20.

But first, I needed a beer.

If I were to properly observe Mr. Zeitenschreiber here on his home turf, I needed to get into the spirit of things.

I worked my way up near the big circular bar. The bartender seemed more intent on polishing the beer steins than in serving anyone, making the patrons more urgent in their cries for service.

Waiting for the queue to thin out, I pondered my strategy for interrogating Mr. Zeitenschreiber. I had to be careful. If I showed too much interest in "death," he might become wary and clam up.

Or worse, he might see me as a threat and decide to kill me. If he had murdered a full professor, I doubted he'd have any compunction about killing a first-semester grad student. Even one on a full fellowship.

No, I needed a more circumspect approach. A disarming parry, preparatory to a subtle yet incisive thrust, following which I'd study his reaction most attentively.

Only one problem – what exactly was I watching for? It's not like there was an agreed-upon set of signs indicating a person was a cold-blooded killer, and all I had to do was look at the chart and find out whether he was the murderer or not.

Isn't that the semiotic quandary that sicklies over the native hue of all our resolve? It's not just that we're searching for signs of happiness, or love, or knowledge – we've also got to establish some criteria so we'll recognize the signs if we *do* ever find them.

Sensing a market niche, I briefly considered launching a semiotic services corporation.

"Visit CriteriaMax today! Whether it's academia, art, or your love life, we have the criteria for you! All criteria are guaranteed free from deductive defects, inferential flaws, or infinite regress.

"Available singly or in the handy grad-pack. And ask about our refurbished criteria – guaranteed for 90 days or we will replace them with comparable criteria at no additional charge."

I'd offer the Godel plan – what a business model! No matter how many criteria someone buys, they always need one more. Even if you had every criterion you needed, you'd still need one more to assure you that you had gathered enough.

Now, though, I faced a major problem: Mr. Zeitenschreiber was in all probability about to possibly slip up and reveal a subtle yet unmistakable sign that he was the murderer.

By what criterion was I going to recognize the sign of guilt when I saw it?

Even more, how would I know I wasn't just projecting the signs that I desperately wanted to see?

Here was the crux of the matter: how did I know that the signs I perceived were really there? How did I know I could trust my own eyes and ears?

Face it – how do I know anything at all about the external world?

"Perception of the external world – back to the basics, is it?" I turned to see Mr. Locke standing next to me. He leaned against the circular bar, wavy brown hair tumbling over his shoulders. His slender fingers curled around a bottle of Tabula Rasa malt.

I greeted him, then explained my plan to interrogate Mr. Zeitenschreiber. "In particular, sir, I'm concerned that even if he shows signs of guilt, I won't be able to understand them. And even if I think I grasp them, how do I know that what I'm seeing is really there? Especially given that right now I'm seeing the spirit of a dead philosopher. Really, how do I know anything at all about reality?"

Mr. Locke was nonplussed. "A good question," he said. "Let's start at the beginning, with external perception. When I look at an object, my eyes and ears and other sense organs receive stimuli consisting of light, sound waves, tactile surfaces, and the like. My mind then connects those stimuli into the objects of sense-experience."

"Hmm," I said. "How do I know which sense-data to connect into what objects? I see a lot of room for embarrassing errors."

"So true," he said with a sad smile. "Experience is our only teacher. There are no innate ideas or concepts. Every object we see is a synthesis of sense-data. Experience teaches me which sense-data belong together, and groups them into objects based on utility, proximity, and so on."

I looked away for a moment, weighing his words. "As long as we're dealing with concrete objects," I said, "that might work. But what about imaginary objects? What is the 'data' when I imagine a unicorn, or some more far-fetched creature? Am I synthesizing 'imaginatrons'?"

"No," said Mr. Locke. "You are taking past sense-data from a multitude of experiences, and synthesizing them into a fantasy figure. It's no different

in essence from when you produce a memory based on selected past sense-data. The key point is, every mental image of any sort comes from past experience. There are no innate images or ideas."

"Okay," I said. "But if fantasies and reality are both woven out of sense-data, how can I tell the difference? Suppose I think that I hear Mr. Zeitenschreiber make a suspicious statement. How do I know it's a real-world experience rather than my imagination?"

"You test your hypotheses concerning the outer world, and correlate your observations with those of others."

"A correlation," I said. "Interesting suggestion. But how would we perform such a task? Seems like each of us needs to make an exhaustive list of our experiences, then compare them with others. I suspect most people haven't done this recently. Maybe we should stop and be sure."

I stood on my tiptoes and shouted at the top of my voice: "Could everyone make a list of everything they have ever seen, heard, tasted, smelled, or touched? We're trying to correlate perception with reality."

The effect was not the widespread recognition of the immediate importance of the task for which I had hoped. But it had the salubrious effect of getting the bartender's attention. "One Pride City Lager," I called out.

I paid the tab, then turned to Mr. Locke. "What's troubling me, sir, is that I believe Mr. Zeitenschreiber may be involved in Mr. Testascrittore's death. But when I ask for some guidance in recognizing the signs of his guilt, all you have offered is 'experience,' which I must note has not invariably proven entirely reliable as a guide to reality."

Mr. Locke shrugged, as if to say, what's the option?

Mr. Dewey passed us on his way to the bar. He brushed his center-parted hair off his forehead. "How do we ever know what's 'real' and what's not, regardless of our epistemological theories? Pure pragmatism. There is no 'criterion' that separates reality from fantasy. All we can do is compare the present case to past ones, make our best estimate, and put it to the test."

I shook my head. "A test can't distinguish reality from fantasy. Suppose you give me a math test, and I wildly guess the answers, and by chance I get them all right – what does this tell you about whether or not I know math?"

"Fine," Mr. Dewey said with no rancor. "Show me a better method to

ascertain that 'knowing' is taking place. Shall I try to intuit your mental state as you take the test? Shall I attach electrodes to your skull and make charts of your brainwaves to prove that understanding is taking place? In defining 'reality,' the best we can hope for is a general agreement on what works."

"But who decides 'what works'?"

"Ah," he smiled. "That's the political question, isn't it? But as far as one's personal experience, the answer is clear – no one but you can judge it."

I exhaled in exasperation, looking from Mr. Dewey to Mr. Locke and back. "So you're saying that when I talk to Mr. Zeitenschreiber, all I can rely on to corroborate what I observe and experience is more observations and experiences? What kind of criterion is that?"

"Young man," Mr. Dewey said, "if you can show me a better criterion for discovering what's real than experience – I'll modify my views accordingly."

I promised Mr. Dewey that he'd be the first to know when I found such a criterion. Although I found his lack of "solutions" frustrating, I had to admire a thinker so committed to Pragmatism that he remained consistent by changing his views.

But enough philosophy. I had my beer. It was time to focus on Mr. Zeitenschreiber.

21.

Back at the table, Mr. Zeitenschreiber was holding forth. The students hung on his every Germanic neologism, miming his facial expressions and hand movements.

I elbowed my way in and took a seat near his, setting my Pride City on the table as if opening the bidding.

"Ah, Mr. Testascrittore's protégé," Mr. Zeitenschreiber said out of the corner of his mouth. I was flattered that he recognized me, although what followed was none too cordial. "You must be feeling a bit adrift – a condition which, of course, Mr. Heidegger describes most eloquently in section 40 of *Being and Time*."

I nodded knowingly, recalling some verbiage from the *Cliff Notes* version. "I'm just hoping to disclose a bit of truth in the clearing of being-toward-understanding," I said.

"And how will you recognize that truth when you see it?"

"Because it will correspond to reality, that's why," I blurted out, realizing too late that I'd probably just fallen for a classic Heideggerian trick.

"Yes," he said icily. "And how exactly is it that you will determine whether or not your ideas bear any relation to 'reality'?"

Committed as I was to the notion of an objective reality, I knew by his sneer as he pronounced the word that I was in trouble.

But it wasn't like I was the first person to walk down this road. Spying Mr. Russell nearby, I called him over to our table. "Help me out, sir – we need an explanation of how 'correspondence' theories of knowledge and truth work."

As he stepped over, the bar around us seemed to freeze and fade into the background, leaving only Mr. Zeitenschreiber, Mr. Russell, and I in a tight circle.

Mr. Russell straightened his tie and ran a hand through his thick white hair. "Correspondence? It's simple – take the song on the jukebox. Imagine reading a musical score while listening. The notes on the paper and the audible tones would match up, one-to-one. So we say that the score and the recording correspond, that they are the 'same' song."

Mr. Zeitenschreiber crossed his arms and tilted his head as if he were a skilled barrister examining a key witness. "So you're saying that we 'know' what an object is when our knowledge 'corresponds' to the actual object?"

"Correct," said Mr. Russell, and I nodded.

Mr. Zeitenschreiber leveled his gaze at me. "Only one small problem. Suppose that I am trying to determine whether my perception of an object corresponds to 'external reality.' An everyday task, wouldn't you agree?"

I eyed him hesitantly.

"But how do I test my experience of external reality," he said, "except by another perception? So in the end, I'm simply comparing one perception to another. As far as any correspondence to a 'reality' outside perception, how would we ever know?"

I realized Mr. Zeitenschreiber's objection was analogous to my own comment to Mr. Locke – if all we have to verify our experiences is more experience, where exactly does this get us?

Mr. Russell started talking about theories of types and problems of totalization. I encouraged him to get another pitcher of beer, and called Mr. Hegel to take his place.

The German Idealist carried the sleek brown owl of Minerva on one arm. He placed the well-groomed bird on a perch and joined our little circle.

The overhead light cast strange shadows on Mr. Hegel's face, emphasizing his jowls and the deep bags under his eyes. Did he always look so haunted, or did philosophical authority weigh heavily on his shoulders?

"The question we're puzzling over," I said, "is how we establish a relationship between our personal knowledge and the external world." Then I lowered my voice and leaned closer to him. "It's a question that I believe has a direct bearing on Mr. Testascrittore's death."

Mr. Hegel nodded slowly without meeting my eyes. "The link between perception and reality isn't a matter of correspondence," he said in a passionless voice. "It's a question of coherence. At any given moment, I have a world-view which is reasonably coherent and allows me to live in the world. If a new idea or perception 'coheres' with my pre-existing views, I hold it true. If it does not, either I deem it false, or my entire world-view needs adjusting."

"But since when does coherence guarantee truth?" I said. "At one time, the notion that the Earth was flat 'cohered' perfectly well with other knowledge. That doesn't mean it was true."

"I don't believe it actually 'cohered,'" Mr. Hegel said. "If we had access to all of the known facts of that period, we would spot the inconsistencies and 'incoherences.' And of course subsequent history has borne this out. Only one completely coherent view of reality is possible, and it contains no errors. This one entirely coherent worldview is what we commonly call 'The Truth.'"

The owl fluttered its wings and nodded.

Mr. Zeitenschreiber leaned back in his chair. "Pray tell, Mr. Hegel – by what yardstick is 'coherence' measured? Suppose you discovered – as you claimed – the 'one truly coherent system,' but I disagreed and produced a different one. How can we determine whether your theory is 'more coherent' than mine? Doesn't any attempt to evaluate such coherence presume a standpoint of absolute knowledge by which the various proposed coherences are to be measured?"

I expected Mr. Hegel to respond that the bar of history would be the

ultimate judge, although I realized that there was nothing very final about historical verdicts. But he took a different tack.

"The guarantee of coherence," the somber Idealist said imperturbably, "is the function of Absolute Mind, or God – to grasp the final, sublated meaning of the entire process as the culmination of that very process."

Mr. Zeitenschreiber stifled a laugh as Mr. Russell returned to the table with a pitcher of beer and poured Mr. Hegel a glass. Mr. Hegel thanked him and offered a sip to his owl.

"I think the same problem bedevils both of our systems," Mr. Russell said to Mr. Hegel. "Both of us tried to construct a flawless, internally coherent system – yours of metaphysics, mine of logic. Mr. Godel's objection destroyed my system, and I believe yours as well. Namely – in order to know that we have a complete, coherent, perfectly consistent theory of a given system, we would need to stand outside that system."

"Why is that hypothesis needed?" I interjected. "Why couldn't you see coherence and completeness from within?"

Mr. Russell turned to me with humor in his eyes. "From inside, you never know if you have overlooked some problem or inconsistency. Even God, if He existed, would suffer from this defect. Only if you stand outside the system can you say for certain that it is complete, and therefore entirely coherent and consistent."

Minerva's owl cocked its head thoughtfully. Mr. Hegel stroked its feathers as he and Mr. Russell fell to commiserating over the fate of philosophical systems.

Mr. Zeitenschreiber looked at me in triumph. "So much for your correspondence and coherence theories of truth," he said. "I think we'll inevitably find that only Mr. Heidegger's notion of disclosure can account for the primordial experience of truth. And unless you start paying more attention in class, you're going to be left in undisclosedness."

With that, he lifted his stein, toasted Mr. Heidegger, and drained the last of his beer. The assembled students, who had sprung back to life as our spirit guests disappeared, echoed his toast and followed him out of The Vienna. I polished off my lager and left with the crowd.

Out on the street, I shivered in the cool night air. A faint scent of the Wabash River wafted past. Mr. Zeitenschreiber signed a few autographs before turning to his waiting limo.

As he opened the door, we locked eyes. His were somewhat glazed. "Mr. Testascrittore's Sartrean efforts notwithstanding," he said, "I believe you'll find that Mr. Heidegger's is the only viable theory of truth and knowledge."

I held his stare. "And what exactly is that theory?"

"It takes time to explicate such a profound vision. You'll have to come to class to find out."

I studied his eyes. Was he bluffing? After all, why did it take time to convey Truth? Either Truth is evident, or it's not. This "taking time to unfold" business seemed like a diversionary tactic.

Was it a ploy to force me to attend class, distracting me from my dogged investigation of Mr. Testascrittore's death?

Mr. Zeitenschreiber waved one last time to his coterie, then stooped and sat down on the back seat of the limousine. As he swung his feet up, a flash of yellow-green mud on his shoes caught my eye.

I jumped forward, bumping several people aside to catch a clear view. I'd seen that color before – that very day, in fact.

It was the color of the mud on my socks and shoes when I left the villa.

Q.E.D.

Michelangelo's rendering of the Delphic Sybil, whose motto is Know Thyself.

Chapter Three

1.

The harsh glare of the overhead bulb made the irregularities of my garret ceiling look like the surface of the moon. Yet despite the brightness overhead, the ends of my hallway abode were shrouded in shadows.

I sat on the edge of the futon and picked up my soiled socks from earlier in the day. Under the bare bulb, the mud from the villa looked more yellowish than in the sunlight. Was it the same as that on Mr. Zeitenschreiber's shoe?

Closing my eyes, I tried to call back the image of his shoe. But the colors weren't stable. Even when I did think the color matched my socks, I couldn't tell if it was a memory or an overactive imagination.

I was back to the post-Lockean quandary: if perception and memory and imagination are all based on the same original sense-data, how do I tell them apart?

Suspicions and doubts danced through my mind. If the colors matched, Mr. Zeitenschreiber was almost certainly the villa intruder I'd spotted, and quite possibly a murderer and manuscript thief.

But my accusation of Mr. Zeitenschreiber rested on a dim memory of a fleeting perception of a mud-splotch whose precise hue was shaded by wishful thinking.

Any thought of getting at the underlying truth was undermined by the evening's skeptical dialogs. The traditional correspondence and coherence theories of truth lay in tatters, with only a vague promise of a Phenomenological alternative.

And who offered that slenderest of Heideggerian hopes of attaining any degree of certainty regarding perception and reality?

The very same Mr. Zeitenschreiber.

The possibilities swamped me. It wasn't just about getting the facts right – I was drowning in the facts themselves.

My philosophical ancestors struggled with this predicament. Western scholars have long dreamed of knowing everything. We speak of encyclopedic knowledge, or a Renaissance scholar – one who aspires to all knowledge, even if, as with Dr. Faustus, it requires a touch of magic.

Today a quick perusal of Philosopedia makes it obvious that there is vastly too much data for any one consciousness to hold.

But back in Ancient times, when fewer dissertations had been written, one person came as close as anyone ever has to knowing everything.

During the heyday of the Roman Empire, a scholar named Facticus Maximus traveled from the banks of the Indus to the Pillars of Hercules in search of all human knowledge – at least of the Western variety.

Thanks to an encyclopedic art of memory Mr. Maximus was able to retain every significant bit of information he came across, and mentally to cross-index all of this knowledge so that it was accessible on demand.

By his later years, he actually did know everything that was to be known. According to the lost testimony of the eighth-century natural historian Mr. Isidore of Seville, Facticus Maximus did not miss a single important item.

Sadly for Mr. Maximus, he was undone by his own immense learning and keen insight, which had taught him that just around the next corner might be the most sensational fact of all, the fact which would upset and re-order every previously known fact.

He was haunted to the end of his days by the realization that he could never prove to his own satisfaction that he truly knew everything. Facticus Maximus died a miserable and tormented man, overwhelmed by the nagging fear that there was something he didn't know – and most galling, that he had not an inkling what it was.

It gets worse. In the early twentieth century, a Swabian professor named

Herr Gestaltus set out to write the definitive biography of Facticus Maximus.

Like any good German scholar, Professor Gestaltus strove to learn everything about Facticus Maximus's life, his travels, and the world in which he lived. Despite dedicating his entire career to the task, he died without ever publishing a word, drooling over his footnotes and scribbling incoherent references on index cards.

Herr Gestaltus's noble if unfulfilled vision inspired others, although the attrition rate was horrendous. Eventually entire History Departments were dedicating their efforts to documenting Facticus Maximus.

The project became a black hole of research assistants. Many disappeared without a trace, sacrificed to the obsession to know everything about their subject.

It was a humble yet insightful graduate student who finally saw the Godellian flaw inherent in the quest – that a truly complete study of Facticus Maximus and his world would have to include an exhaustive study of itself as part of the corpus – and that study itself would need to be thoroughly studied, and so on and so forth...

Thus any book that attempted to provide "the final word" on Mr. Maximus would be rendered incomplete by its own existence.

It was past midnight when I splashed water on my face and toweled off. If I was going to wake up in time for my first class, I needed to get to bed.

Whose idea were morning classes, anyway? The world would be a better place if everyone slept till noon. Think of it. Ninety percent of the misery in the world is created between eight a.m. and five p.m. Do away with half of that time, and no matter how hard people work to make it up, the total amount of suffering in the world is bound to diminish.

But I was determined to be in class. Maybe not every morning for the rest of my life. But at least tomorrow. If I made all three of the next day's classes on time, I'd break my lifetime best attendance record.

I stretched out on the less-lumpy side of the futon, as much as the curve of the wall would allow. After a minute, I sat up, turned around, and lay the other direction. But however much I tossed and turned, I couldn't get settled.

Closing my eyes, I tried to fall asleep by counting Spinozean axioms. But I kept getting distracted by postulates and corollaries, and found myself

drifting into thoughts of Anaximander's vicious snarl, or Johann's evasive behavior, or Mr. Zeitenschreiber's muddy shoe.

I took a deep breath and tried to calm my worries. Anaximander could be avoided by steering clear of the villa. And Johann's evasiveness might simply be part of his personality.

But I couldn't deny the muddy shoe. Granted, I knew little enough about Terre Haute. Maybe greenish mud was found all over town. But given Mr. Zeitenschreiber's obvious interest in Mr. Testascrittore's Existentialist researches, his aggressive behavior that evening at The Vienna, and the fact that the wall-hopping suspect at the villa had in all likelihood stepped in the same mud puddle as I – the signs pointed to Mr. Zeitenschreiber as the culprit.

Given that conclusion, it was entirely within the realm of possibility that he had found the second manuscript. I had to proceed on that assumption.

What he might do with the priceless manuscript was anyone's guess. But with the police insisting the death was an accident and Mr. Grosskase on the verge of collapse, I bore the full burden of stopping the misappropriation of Mr. Testascrittore's philosophical testament.

And what of the murder? Honestly, that part seemed a tad far-fetched. In my brief encounters with Mr. Zeitenschreiber I could hardly imagine him to be a cold-blooded killer. The way students followed him around, hanging on his every word, it was hard to see why he would be mortally jealous of another professor, no matter how brilliant.

But if it wasn't him, who could it have been? A disgruntled student? Another professor?

What about Mr. Denkenschnelle? Philosophically, it made perfect sense that a Wittgensteinian, forced to channel his hero's thoughts through the dominant Sartrean paradigm, would hold a grudge against the leading Sartrician of the day. And the insult must especially sting on the opening day of classes, when the very course titles drove home the inequity of Mr. Sartre's ascendancy over the once-favored Mr. Wittgenstein.

Of course, the same could be said for almost any professor at the Institute. However celebrated Mr. Testascrittore had been, jealousies surely ran rampant beneath the surface.

With all academic factions on edge because of the need to choose a successor to the ageing Rector, maybe it was inevitable that the bitterness

and rivalries would spill over into bloodshed.

I'd read *Macbeth*, at least the *Classics Illustrated* version, so I knew where these sorts of things might lead.

It gave me a likely motive, even if it did implicate the entire staff of the Institute. At least I'd narrowed it down to a faculty member.

Or had I? It seemed incredulous that a mere student could have killed the doyen of philosophers. But not impossible. As I made my way through my classes, I needed to keep an eye out for any hints of suspicious behavior.

But wait. I was the one who was going around suspecting everyone. Clearly I was exhibiting "suspicious behavior." I'd be remiss in my detectival duties if I were to overlook such evidence.

Again I questioned myself as to my exact whereabouts on the day of my sponsor's death. What exactly had transpired in the moments before I took my seat in the lecture hall?

Did I know something that I didn't know?

I couldn't answer that question.

I had to admit, on the surface of things, it didn't look good. Luckily, no one else seemed to suspect me yet.

It wasn't like I was the main suspect, anyway. What about Johann? With a chill I remembered my earlier realization that he had a deep personal grievance. And as custodian for the Albertus Magnus Empirical Metaphysics Building, he was in a perfect position to plot revenge on Mr. Testascrittore.

And revenge on Mr. Grosskase. I'd nearly forgotten that angle. If the murder of Mr. Testascrittore was motivated by Johann's sense of injustice, the Rector who had blocked his advancement and then relegated him to custodial duty was a likely target as well. No wonder Mr. Grosskase had gone into seclusion.

But that was all speculation. Why focus on Johann? Any rival professor or disgruntled student could have done the foul deed. The clues pointed in a hundred directions.

I wasn't getting anywhere. What did I really know about this situation? Or about the Institute? Who was I, the greenest of greenhorns, to go prying into the inner recesses of an organization so labyrinthine as the Institute?

No wonder I was confused about Mr. Testascrittore's death.

Face it, I was confused about a lot more than that. I wondered if I could state a single fact with certainty. Was there one thing I was sure of?

Did I know anything at all?

2.

A chill breeze startled me. My covers were all in a tangle. As I sat up to straighten the blankets, a slight glow by the stairs caught my attention. I strained to make it out, and realized that it was growing larger as I watched.

"$X^2 + Y^2 = \cos Z$," a voice with a French accent intoned. "$4P^2 = Q - 1$."

"Excuse me," I said with a touch of irritation. "This is a bedroom, not a classroom."

"Pardonnez-moi, monsieur," came the voice. "I thought this was a public hallway." The misty shape floated over by my bed, resuming its recitation of equations. "$A - 7B = C^2$."

Maybe it was my growing familiarity with the world of spirit, or maybe because I'd always done well in math. But I couldn't just sit and listen to such indeterminate equations. "What does A or B or C have to do with anything?"

"Just working out a few Analytic Geometry problems. Didn't mean to bother you. Monsieur Descartes is the name."

"Oh, I see," I said, embarrassed at having chastised the eminent thinker. "Well, welcome."

He was wearing a fashionable yellow silk coat. His silvery-white periwig was styled in tight curls that fell over his shoulders, leaving a halo of powder wherever they touched. "Mr. Copleston said you needed assistance," he said.

"Not with math," I answered. "But thanks for stopping by. It's philosophy that's giving me fits."

Mr. Descartes pulled up a spindly Baroque chair that he seemed to have brought with him. "Do tell."

"I can't make heads or tails of anything that's happened since I got here. One of my sponsors is dead, and the other is in seclusion and probably headed for a forced retirement. I'm trying to figure out who killed Mr. Testascrittore, but I swear, I'm more confused now than when I started."

"Look on the bright side. At least you have clarity about your confusion. That's more than most people can say."

"Yes, I suppose that's true. But it's not much consolation. Ever since I got to Terre Haute I've watched my ideas about knowledge crumble. I came here to learn epistemology, but I think I'm going backward."

"Clearing the ground, we used to say."

"Well, yes. But meanwhile my sponsor is dead, and I haven't a clue how to solve this mystery. Where do I even start?"

"Excellent question. Let's be methodical. What do you know for certain?"

"Nothing, that's the problem."

"Okay – what exactly do you *not* know? Let's start with your doubts."

"Well, for starters," I said half-seriously, "I doubt my sanity, given that I'm sitting here talking to a guy who's been dead for 300 years."

"Good. What else?"

"I doubt my perceptions of physical reality – the old straw-looks-bent-in-water trick. Not to mention imagination and hallucination. I mean, I could swear I saw greenish mud on Mr. Zeitenschreiber's shoes – but how do I *know* it was really green, and I wasn't fooled by the streetlights? Or maybe I'm imagining it altogether. How do I know that my memory isn't playing tricks on me?"

"Precisely. Memory is remarkably unreliable. Even our immediate perception can fool us. What about your entire waking experience, period? Are you certain it's not all a dream?"

"I can see we're making a lot of progress here," I said. "I can't trust perception, experience, or memory. What's left?"

"Doubting."

"That's just a negative, a vacuum."

"I wouldn't be so sure. Can you doubt that you are doubting?"

I closed my eyes and made an effort. "Well, I can doubt whether I'm doing it correctly."

"But even when you doubt whether you are doing it right – you're still doubting. That much is certain."

"So I'm certain that I'm doubting. That's a source of comfort?"

"Absolutely!" He jumped up from the spindly chair. The ringlets on his wig

bounced as he landed in front of me. "From my doubting I can infer my own existence."

"Oh yeah," I said, my interest piqued. "I've heard something about that."

"It's simple," said Mr. Descartes. "If I doubt, I must exist in order to do so. I doubt – therefore I am."

I turned it over in my mind. "Can I really be certain that I'm doubting? That's like being crystal-clear that something is vague."

"Well, why not?" said Mr. Descartes. "Can't a blurry photograph be clearly seen, in all its blurriness? Can't one precisely repeat a confused assertion?"

"So by doubting that I exist, I prove my existence?"

"Precisely."

"Okay," I said, ""Suppose I agree that doubting proves my existence. Where does that get me?"

Mr. Descartes smoothed his silk coat. "That's up to you. For myself, having achieved the assurance that I existed, I could get back to my daily life: a dinner with friends here, a diplomatic mission there, and a bit of Analytic Geometry in the evening."

As I mulled over his response, he began to fade. "Wait," I called after him. "What about Mr. Sartre's critique? I understand he negated your conclusions."

"Pour rien," said Mr. Descartes. "Just because Mr. Sartre proved *he* didn't exist doesn't say anything about the rest of us."

"No, I suppose not," I said. "Still, I'd be interested in your reply."

"Another time," he said. "But now I need to prepare my acceptance speech for the Philosophers' Parliament. I'm receiving an award for Most Readable Philosophy Text."

"And rightly so," I said, recalling how short his *Meditations on First Philosophy* was.

He bowed to me. "Perhaps we can talk during a break."

"So anyone can take part in the Philosophers' Parliament?"

"Well, not exactly. Anyone can attend the Parliament. But the seating plan is determined by Mr. Croce and the History Sub-Committee. Unless you are seated on the main floor no one pays any attention to you."

With that, the spirit faded into the night.

I woke into the grayness of a Wednesday morning. I stretched and yawned, struggling to call back the details of my visitation from Mr. Descartes. The silvery wig with its bouncy curls. The equations. And something about doubting.

If I doubted, then I could be certain. If I wasn't sure, I was better off than if I was sure, but shouldn't be. So long as I kept doubting, I could be sure of something, even if it was only that I was doubting.

Fortunately there was plenty of opportunity for doubt. Last time I counted, every living person remotely connected with the Institute was a suspect in Mr. Testascrittore's murder. All I had to do was ask a question, and the list grew.

I needed an anchor. One unshakable point from which to reconstruct my knowledge of the world. In a word – a foundation.

I flipped over on my futon and reviewed Mr. Descartes' maxim: I doubt, therefore I am.

By doubting that I exist, I prove it. What if it worked? The more I doubted, the surer I'd be.

My old concerns continued to haunt me, though. Was the vision of Mr. Descartes real, or a fantastic product of my overheated imagination? Was I channeling Western philosophers, or just yammering to myself at an especially esoteric level?

And how exactly could I tell the difference?

Suppose Mr. Descartes turned out to be a figment of my imagination. I could doubt his existence. I could doubt my memory of his words. I could even doubt my sanity for wondering about such things in the first place.

Yet there I was again, doubting. The Cartesian method seemed to be working!

True, one of the tenets of Sartreanism was the belief that Mr. Sartre had undercut the ontological basis of Mr. Descartes' proof, casting us all into the Existential void.

But even if Mr. Sartre caused me to doubt the validity of the Cartesian proof, didn't that doubting work to my advantage in the end?

"I doubt, therefore I am." A fairly minimalist program, but at least I'd gained a toe hold.

Now – how to move forward?

3.

As I lay there pondering, Mr. Aristotle passed through my garret with a bunch of students. The entire group was attired in dusty togas. Several of his acolytes, carrying papyrus scrolls, eagerly recorded every word he spoke. I wondered whether the rest were memorizing his talk, or planned to crib their classmates' notes when they came out in the Loeb Classical edition.

Sensing that the Stagirite might prove helpful in my endeavors, I waved to him. The Greek master gave his charges a break and stopped to talk – a gracious gesture on the part of so busy a teacher.

Still lying on my lumpy mattress, I rolled onto my side and propped up on one elbow like a Roman at a banquet. I bade Mr. Aristotle welcome, then explained my earnest desire to proceed beyond the rather threadbare certainty of my doubt-induced existence. "If I'm ever to solve this mystery, I've got to find a way to move beyond that basic fact."

Mr. Aristotle's wiry frame seemed cramped in my little garret, and he paced back and forth. "Allow me to propose an old-school approach," he said. "The syllogism. Take a general fact that you already know, apply it to a specific case, and deduce a further fact."

I thought back to my undergrad Logic courses.

All philosophers are mortal.

Mr. Testascrittore was a philosopher.

Therefore, Mr. Testascrittore was mortal.

"Fine," I said. "The problem is, how do we know the first premise, except by induction? We only know that 'all philosophers are mortal' by making a complete inventory of all past, present, and future philosophers, and ascertaining that each of them has died or will die."

"That is incorrect," he said, striding back and forth across the room as if studying the problem from various angles. "We can also appeal to common sense and people's general awareness of the world. 'All humans will die' is not something I know by enumeration, but by an appeal to common experience. It's what I call an 'enthymeme' – an appeal to something everyone knows, even if we can't prove it."

"That's a problem," I said. "At the end of any chain of reasoning is not a proof, but an appeal to 'everyone knows.' Unless 'everyone knew' already that Mr. Testascrittore, as a human philosopher, was destined to die, we

couldn't know the major premise to begin with. All we're doing is taking a round-about route to deduce what we already know."

"Well," he said flatly, "I believe we could say that we are clarifying previously vague knowledge. Syllogisms can help sharpen our dialectic."

I nodded, recalling a favorite syllogism from my Berkeley days pertaining to the extra-curricular business interests of USB's alpha philosopher, Mr. Squirreley:

Not every philosopher is a greedy landlord.

Mr. Squirreley is not every philosopher.

Therefore, Mr. Squirreley is a greedy landlord.

Sure, it didn't tell me anything I didn't already know. But it certainly clarified my knowledge.

Still reclining on my futon, I looked up at Mr. Aristotle. "With all due respect, sir, my quest is not simply to clarify the facts but to discover the basic truths of reality. A method such as yours, which requires that I already know the truth before I start, won't get me very far."

He nodded slowly, as if making a few mental notes on how to address this objection in the future. His students were returning from their break. Bidding me farewell, Mr. Aristotle resumed his lecture and the roving class departed.

I dragged myself out of bed. As I dressed, I pondered my night-time vision of Descartes and my subsequent encounter with Mr. Aristotle.

Where exactly was all my hospitality getting me? Especially given that I wasn't getting any class credit for it. Two days into the semester, and I was already two days behind. Was all of this extracurricular investigating really the best use of my time and talents? I doubted it.

There I went, doubting again.

By Mr. Descartes' estimation, given how much I was doubting, I should be completely confident of my existence by now. But something was out of joint.

It was Mr. Sartre's doing, I thought as I descended from my garret to ground level and headed for Logico's.

The celebrated Parisian Existentialist, I had learned in my green undergraduate days, created a cottage industry out of explicating the nothingness he claimed to discover at the core of human consciousness.

Precisely how one distinguishes nothingness from simply not looking in the right direction wasn't quite evident. However, in the tightly-reasoned essay *Transcendence of the Ego* and in a series of Phenomenological studies that made up the bulk of his popular tome *Being and Nothingness*, Mr. Sartre described various ways in which we pitiful humans attempt to escape from or mask our awareness of this essential nothingness which we are.

Or was it an essential nothingness which we are-not? Or possibly an inessential nothingness which we neither are nor are-not, yet which haunts our very being? I was a bit confused on the details.

Whatever the case, Mr. Sartre apparently shattered the foundations of Cartesian self-certainty. Indeed, he was said to have thrown the existence of every human being into the profoundest of angst-ridden doubts via a series of best-selling novels and plays.

How exactly he undermined Mr. Descartes' skeptical method was not entirely clear and distinct to me, since doubting the validity of the Cartesian proof would still seem to carry you back to your doubt-induced foundations.

But given the current ascendancy of Sartrics I found it difficult to enjoy the security of Mr. Descartes' proof, even without grasping the details of Mr. Sartre's critique. I made a mental note to bone up on the debate in my spare time.

I found a seat at Logico's and scanned the breakfast offerings. Eggs Benedictine looked tempting, but the menu said they were served only at Terce, Midday, None, and Vespers.

Not wanting to wait till the proper hour, I opted for the Salade Positiviste, which promised seven iceberg lettuce leafs, three cherry tomatoes (sliced), five onion slices, six black olives (pitted), and 118 milliliters of low-fat creme dressing.

My salad arrived, but it didn't get my mind off epistemology. As I sampled the bland Positivist fare my stomach rumbled, and I felt a wave of anger at Mr. Sartre for undermining what little certitude I'd managed to achieve. "Thanks a lot for all your help," I muttered.

I might have known. Whether it was my near-miraculous powers of manifestation or a hallucination brought on by the drab food, I couldn't tell. But who should I see walking up the aisle? Mr. Sartre himself.

He was a short man, wreathed in smoke. His tie was loosened, and his

thick glasses were slightly askew.

He seemed on a mission. But wracked as I was by doubts as to the indubitability of my doubting, I knew I needed to confront my epistemological demons at the source.

"Bonjour, sir," I said in my best Rive Gauche accent. "Might I ask you a few questions concerning existence – specifically, your thoughts regarding Mr. Descartes' proof?"

Mr. Sartre waved my greeting off. "I'm late for an appointment with Ms. Beauvoir. Let's get to the point. Mr. Descartes' formulation, 'I doubt, therefore I am,' contains a serious ontological error."

He stubbed his cigarette on the side of the phone booth and lit another. Without taking a puff, he continued speaking, gesturing in the air with the smoldering white stick. "True, one cannot doubt that doubting is taking place. But that is the limit of what is Phenomenologically evident – doubting is all that actually appears to us. There is no direct evidence for the 'Self,' only for the doubting."

"*Someone* has to doubt," I said. "These kinds of things don't just happen."

"You might think so. But in fact, we never directly experience or perceive this alleged Self. It's inferred from the old metaphysical belief that there can be no action without an actor."

"It does seem rather likely, doesn't it?" I said.

"Perhaps. But if we truly wish to doubt everything possible, we need to doubt this 'I' as well, and get down to the core of what really is indubitable."

"Which is what?"

Mr. Sartre pointed at me with two fingers holding his cigarette. "We're left with nothing more than doubting itself, pure and simple. An empty, negating behavior as close to its own essential Nothingness as consciousness ever gets."

With his final words Mr. Sartre stubbed out his cigarette. Absently I thanked him for sharing his thoughts and watched him stroll away.

His words left me numb and dejected. As I picked at the soggy remnants of my Salade Positiviste, I felt mired in uncertainty regarding my own being. It was traumatic enough for a contemplative soul like myself to grapple with *who* I was. But having to prove *that* I was?

In a flash I saw to the depths of Mr. Testascrittore's search for a new proof of existence. Far from a mere intellectual exercise, my late sponsor had sought to restore the very foundation of the Self.

Previously, I had grasped the quest as a mere intellectual conundrum. Now it anchored itself in the core of my being.

More than my personal certainty was at stake in my quest to preserve the proof. I was acting on behalf of the Institute – nay, of all Western philosophy.

More even than capturing the murderer, I was fighting to preserve for the benefit of future generations Mr. Testascrittore's final legacy – a post-Sartrean proof of existence.

A proof which I suspected was inscribed in the pages of the second manuscript.

And if my deductions were correct, that manuscript was now in the possession of Mr. Zeitenschreiber.

Fate had arranged a rendezvous. Thanks to my newfound resolve to attend all my classes, I'd be seeing Mr. Zeitenschreiber in just a few hours.

4.

But first I needed to go to my Analytics class. I hustled across campus and slid into my back-row chair-desk just as the bell rang.

As usual – well, "usual" meaning two out of two days, which inductively speaking is about as close to usual as you could be, two days into the experiment – Mr. Denkenschnelle was chatting amiably with a few privileged students at the front of the hall.

The rest of us were expected to bide our valuable time, patiently awaiting the nuggets of wisdom that might fall from his lips once he deigned to begin his lecture. Oh, how privileged we were to wait in his presence!

I grimaced at my own negativity. Someone got up on the wrong side of the futon this morning. Of course, given that the other side rested against the wall, I didn't have a lot of choice. Maybe in the future I'd slither off the end and avoid moods like this.

I took a breath and forced myself to inventory my immediate goals. Opening my notebook to a fresh page I inscribed the first item.

Number one: "Show up for my Sartrean Analytics class." Goal met! I made

a big checkmark next to the item, then drew a line through the words for good measure.

Number two: "Don't skip out when Mr. Denkenschnelle writes on the board." That would be an ongoing challenge.

Number three: "Use Sartrean Analytics to bring some sense of order to my investigation of Mr. Testascrittore's demise."

When I stopped and considered matters, I'd actually figured a few things out. The problem was putting all the pieces together – never a strength of the Analytic tradition.

But the details were coming into focus. Four clues stood out:

(1) The missing second manuscript, whose contents might reveal who would kill to prevent publication.

(2) The blood-stained copy of Mr. Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, with its tell-tale red-brown smear on the opening page of the chapter on Time.

(3) Mr. Testascrittore's leg aimed at Mr. Copleston's *History*, apparently highlighting the volume on twentieth-century philosophy.

(4) The classical bust, which seemed to refer to the Ancients.

(4.1) Taking clues 3 and 4 together pointed to a twentieth century philosopher who grappled with the Ancients.

(4.2) Unless it was intended to indicate an Ancient philosopher who grappled with twentieth century thought.

(4.2.1) That such visionaries existed in a society so bold as Ancient Greece is quite likely.

(4.2.2) Sadly, their contemporaries judged them insane and didn't preserve their words.

(4.2.2.1) Which should stand as a warning to our benighted epoch, that the words of writers who are clearly ahead of their time (even if they are occasionally late to class) ought to be accorded equal stature with the quick-to-fade tomes of the "leading philosophers of the day."

(4.2.2.1.1) Be it noted that this diatribe is not directed against the late Mr. Testascrittore, whose stature is on the contrary destined to grow with time.

(4.2.2.1.2) Or at any specific philosopher alive or dead, regardless of my personal estimation as to the abiding value (or otherwise) of their thought.

(4.2.2.1.3) It is, rather, a broader point of general application.

(4.2.2.1.3.1) And, I might add, one whose validity can scarcely be contested.

(4.2.2.1.3.1.1) Well, you *could* contest it.

(4.2.2.1.3.1.2) But you'd be wrong.

Mr. Denkenschnelle rapped his knuckles on the wooden podium. A hush fell over the class.

"Language," the short man intoned in a stage whisper. "What is the 'essence' of language?"

Several hands went up. I suspected it was a trick question, and stayed silent.

"The essence of language is communication," said one woman.

"No, the essence is meaning," said a man in the front row.

"The essence is words," said another man. "The smallest units of language. Language is made up of the meanings of the component words."

As Mr. Denkenschnelle inscribed each idea on the lower half of the chalkboard, I weighed the last answer. Mr. Russell proposed something like that, as I recalled.

But I also remembered Mr. Socrates' joke about searching for meaning by analyzing language into its component words. "Why not go all the way and analyze it into letters? Would you be any closer to understanding meaning?"

If words are the essence of language, we're in trouble. As far as I could tell, you could do about anything you wanted with words. You could use different words to say the same thing, or the same words to say different things. You could lie, deceive, cheat, swindle, and – worst of all – make poetic metaphors.

Mr. Plato, as is well known, banished poets from his Republic.

Of course, Mr. Aristotle invited them back, and they've never stopped partying since.

Poets make a fine mess of language. According to the latest conjectural analyses, the proto-historic Urgrundians – primaeval instaurators of Western culture – labored assiduously to insure the purity of each word.

Each day, one new word was proposed. Where we have newspapers, our

ancestors relied on clay tablets. Each family unit would leave a fresh tablet outside their door at night, during which time couriers would race from hut to hut, scratching the new day's word into the wet clay.

In the morning, people would excitedly pronounce the new word and begin to employ it in various contexts, testing its possibilities. At the end of the day, a community meeting decided on the final meaning by consensus, with a fallback procedure allowing for a three-quarters vote in case of a deadlock.

By this arduous process, each word was assured of being assigned one and only one meaning, which was carefully recorded and stored in the inner sanctum of the Archive of the Sacred Logos.

For a time all was clear and unequivocal – a true Golden Age of the Logos. But inevitably, poets, lawyers, lovers, and other less-scrupulous types got hold of the new invention. Before you knew it, words were being lathered with myriad shades of meaning. The journey to Babel had begun.

This hypothesis, completely coherent in its own right, may like so many historical extrapolations turn out to be somewhat less than an entirely factual account of the origin of language. It might even one day resemble fiction.

But why, pray tell, disparage fiction? Who taught me more about life than Don Quixote, Hamlet, or the Hardy Boys?

Don Quixote may have been a fictional character. Yet his influence has been profound, not least on philosophers, who rank among the world's foremost tilters at windmills.

5. Pop Quiz

True or false – Don Quixote lived in central Spain.

While you're mulling over that puzzler, we bring you this brief commercial announcement.

Burdened by the ultimate meaninglessness of inescapable mundanity? Longing for a mission which would give purpose to your banal existence?

Pick up your phone today and call Sancho Panza Reality Abatement Associates!

End the bondage of quotidian servitude by registering today for our metamorphic seminars in wild imaginings, fantastic visionings, and all-

engrossing life purposes.

Sancho Panza Reality Abatement Associates specialize in pairing knights errant with damsels in distress, super-heroes with crime-ridden cities, and grammatologists with malapropistic philosophers.

Sidekick consulting provided at no extra charge. And ask about our special costume design deals!

And now, please pass your quiz paper to the front. The correct answer is: complicated.

One school holds that Don Quixote lived only between the covers of a book, rendering the proposition false.

Another sect, however, asserts that if Don Quixote lived in the imaginations of his creator's fellow Spaniards, then Don Quixote indeed lived – yea, continues to live – in Spain.

Thus our panel of experts rejects the Law of the Excluded Middle and holds the proposition to be both true and false.

6.

I started to turn my attention to Mr. Denkenschnelle's lecture, which I suspected might have some bearing on the examinational expectations which might be placed on me during the course of the semester.

But before I could pick up his thread, a rustling to my left caught my attention.

Mr. Russell, who was filling pages of yellow legal paper with calculations, stopped and looked at me. "The Law of the Excluded Middle holds for every clearly articulated proposition. No proposition can be both true and false."

"But we just did it with Don Quixote," I reminded him.

"Only by equivocating on the meaning of 'live.' You're giving the word two different shades of meaning which change the truth-value of the proposition."

"Yes, I suppose so," I said. "It's part of what we do with language, isn't it?"

His high forehead furrowed under his swept-back white hair. "We must insist on clarity and unequivocal meanings. Equivocation and fuzziness are the source of so many errors – logical, political, and social. If we were clearer about what we mean, and demanded unequivocal clarity from our

political leaders, we'd make more intelligent choices."

Mr. Russell's demands for political clarity and probity reminded me of Mr. Diogenes' quest. The same Mr. Diogenes who scorned Alexander of Macedon is even more famous for carrying a lantern around town in broad daylight, "looking for an honest man."

The Ancients neglect to tell us whether he ever found one. I think we should assume he didn't, or we'd have heard about it.

Of course, as a Cynic, he may have been a bit over-zealous. Was he searching for someone who was invariably honest? Or would he have accepted someone who was generally trustworthy?

How about someone who was honest when it was convenient?

It reminded me of the Cretan Liar paradox. "Everything I say is a lie – including this statement."

Paradoxes aside – at a practical level, if Cretans *always* lied there wouldn't be a problem. The difficulty arises because sometimes – perhaps most of the time – they find it convenient to tell the truth.

No wonder Mr. Diogenes felt cynical about the human prospect. And no wonder Mr. Russell held political discourse to such a high standard.

"I appreciate your lofty hopes," I said. "But logic doesn't have such a great track record as far as changing the world. Most people find it rather arcane."

"On the contrary," Mr. Russell answered, "we have everything to gain from increased logic and rationality. War and social injustice are completely irrational. Building a world of peace and justice is the most rational of tasks, an undertaking in the best interests of all humans. That's why I speak out so passionately against equivocation and sloppy logic."

With most people, you'd dismiss it as a flight of rhetoric. But this was a guy who was fired from a professorship at Cambridge and sentenced to six months in prison for anti-war organizing during the First World War, and who later served time in jail for anti-nuclear protests. Not your stereotypical ivory-tower philosopher.

"Still, sir," I said as politely as possible, "I think you're setting too high a standard. A bit of equivocation is inevitable, isn't it?"

"Not if you want to discover who killed Mr. Testascrittore."

7.

"How exactly is avoiding equivocation going to solve the mystery?" I asked.

Mr. Russell lit a tobacco pipe, coaxed a few puffs from it, then looked at me as he exhaled. "Let's consider the matter. You're trying to solve the mystery of Mr. Testascrittore's murder, are you not?"

I nodded. He took another puff, then resumed his train of thought.

"You've gathered several clues, and you're trying to pin down 'what the clues really mean.' Now if you assume that their meanings could be equivocal, shifting, or fuzzy – what good will they do you? If a clue means different things to different people on different days, or if the shades of meaning keep changing, how could the clue ever fulfill its function?"

"But that's inevitable. People interpret signs in different ways."

"But only one of those ways is the *correct* way. And that's what you're trying to figure out. If a clue is going to function correctly, it must have a single, consistent meaning, which it is your task to discover. Any equivocation is fatal to the enterprise."

I shook my head slowly. "I don't see how we can achieve that level of clarity. We're talking about the real world."

"Are we?" he said with a smile. "Language concerns concepts, not objects. A clue is a concept, and we try to match it up with our concept of the world. When the concepts 'correspond' or 'interlock' like puzzle pieces, we know we have found the correct interpretation of the clue. All thinking takes place at the level of concepts. And we can certainly insist on unequivocal concepts."

"I'm not so sure about this 'concept' thing," I said. "If I say, 'Mr. Zeitenschreiber stole Mr. Testascrittore's manuscript,' you believe that I'm speaking of the concepts 'Mr. Zeitenschreiber' and 'Mr. Testascrittore's manuscript,' and stating a conceptual relation between them?"

"That is correct," said Mr. Russell.

"But if the clues are conceptual, and my knowledge of the world is conceptual – was the murder conceptual as well?"

Mr. Russell shrugged and returned to his calculations. As his pencil scratched across the paper, I pictured Mr. Testascrittore's spread-eagled body with the annoying leg tucked under the other. Hardly what you'd expect from a conceptual corpse, particularly one of Mr. Testascrittore's stature.

If my words or thoughts refer only to concepts and not to the things themselves, how do I ever manage to connect the correct concepts to the actual things I believed I was speaking of?

How would I know which concepts applied to what objects, and that this relationship was consistent? I strained to grasp the conceptual problem. Which raised still more problems, since when I think about concepts, I'm using more concepts.

Is the concept of a concept a meta-concept? Or can concepts work on one another the way one hammer can hit another?

Are concepts simply tools for thought?

8. Reader Survey

If you were a tool, which tool would you be?

47 percent of respondents said, "a hammer."

21 percent said, "a philips-head screwdriver."

16 percent said, "a tape-measure."

9 percent said, "a roach-clip."

6 percent said, "one of those little S-shaped doohickies that you use to un-jam your garbage disposal."

.04 percent said, "a concept."

So unless someone is willing to do a lot of lobbying for "concepts as tools," I would suggest we try a different approach.

What *is* language, anyway?

And why do we let anyone with two years' experience on planet Earth start using it?

If people could drink beer when they were two years old, but had to wait till they were 21 to talk, I bet there'd be a lot more respect for language.

On the other hand, you'd see a lot of underage gabbing, binge jabbering, and talkaholism. Talking would be cited as the leading cause of automobile-related fatalities, and the number one destroyer of families.

A constitutional amendment bans talking altogether, but "speak-easies" circumvent the law, and in the end the ban is repealed in favor of a policy requiring talkers to carry licenses and proof of insurance, and to agree not to talk to anyone under age 21.

Around me, people were shuffling their papers. Class was ending. I could hardly believe it. I must be getting better at this – I'd made it through the entire class without looking at the clock once!

"...Read up to page 737," Mr. Denkenschnelle was saying as I tuned back in. "You won't be tested on this material, but remember – the proof of philosophy's value is not your grades, but its impact on your daily existence."

I sat bolt upright. Had I heard correctly? "Proof." "Existence." In the very same sentence!

I studied Mr. Denkenschnelle's countenance, wishing I'd sat closer to the front. Had he just committed a crucial slip and revealed his nefarious involvement in Mr. Testascrittore's death, the theft of the priceless second manuscript, or both?

Was this the break I'd been waiting for?

It should have thrilled me. But instead, the discovery rankled me. Just when I was certain the clues were pointing to Mr. Zeitenschreiber, along comes a seemingly innocent end-of-class announcement by Mr. Denkenschnelle to throw the entire enterprise into confusion.

Why did I have to pay attention right then? When was I going to learn to leave well enough alone and stick to a single suspect for a while?

I could only hope that my class with Mr. Zeitenschreiber would provide fresh evidence of his complicity and clear the matter up once and for all.

9.

The bell rang sharply. I bolted out the rear door, gulping in the fresh air in the hallway.

I had a couple of hours till my class with Mr. Zeitenschreiber. Would he have the audacity to speak again of Mr. Heidegger's theories of truth and disclosure, when he himself might be dwelling in concealment concerning the truth about Mr. Testascrittore's missing manuscript?

Maybe I should sit in the front row and level my most penetrating stare at him. Under the relentless pressure of my unbending determination, he might well crack and confess everything.

Of course, under that sort of pressure, I might crack myself. And who knows what sordid secrets might come spewing out?

Once more I wondered – was it impossible that I had killed Mr. Testascrittore? I could have done it before the orientation lecture, then innocently taken my seat and acted as shocked as the rest. Could I reconstruct my day? Were there witnesses?

It seemed far-fetched, but I made a mental note to compile an exhaustive inventory of my movements and encounters up to the moment the body was discovered just to be sure.

I wanted to get something to eat, but first I should go to the library and get some studying done. I was already getting behind on my reading.

But wait. I could use this time to stop by Johann's and get a clearer sense of his relation to Mr. Testascrittore and his whereabouts on the day of the killing. I suspected he knew more than he was telling, although his loyalties were inscrutable.

There'd be time to do homework later.

When I arrived at his quarters, Johann was leaning back in the old recliner watching television. "Come on in – it's just starting."

TV ranked low on my list of pastimes. And if the show was just starting, it'd be a while before I could question him. But his attention was already turned back to the set, and I knew it would be rude not to sit down for a few minutes.

I pulled up an old plastic lawn chair and accepted the bong from him. "What's on?"

"Philosophy Court," he said without taking his eyes off the screen.

"So there really is a Philosophy Court?"

"Oh, yeah – it's the highest-rated show on the local Metaphysical Channel."

10.

Johann clicked the volume a notch higher. Did he think I was hard of hearing? Or was he compensating for the portion of sound waves I was absorbing?

The theme music started up. "And now we bring you Philosophy Court, starring Albert Camus as Judge Penitent, with special guest Saint Thomas Aquinas and a jury of celebrity philosophers."

The bailiff stepped in front of the camera. "Your honor, today's defendant is charged with Ontological Harassment, penal code section 1292.45(d)(2),

with an Early Modern enhancement."

The jury is sworn in, and the prosecutor – Mr. Aquinas in an Armani robe, the crown of his head fresh-shaven and polished – details the charges:

"Defendant did willfully, with epistemic knowledge aforethought, condense Mr. Descartes' proof of existence via systematic doubt to a single, pithy paragraph, and did further accost complete strangers on the street, haranguing said strangers with Mr. Descartes' proof and forcing them to recognize the indubitable evidence of their own existence."

Witnesses are called, and recount their experiences with the alleged ontological harasser.

Some told how they wept uncontrollably for days. Others sank into soul-numbing horror. A fair percentage skulked away in deep and morbid shame that clung to them still, while a very few broke into wild public dancing and urged the defendant to do a series of personal growth workshops should he be acquitted.

At last, with the outcome hanging in the balance – the defendant's ontological rights versus the parade of ruined lives and shattered psyches – the defendant was brought to the stand.

Defense counsel drew from him a wretched tale of his own lack of proper epistemological upbringing, and his subsequent resolution to bring ontological awareness into the world regardless of the consequences.

But the prosecution had the final word. With the defendant showing signs of fatigue, Mr. Aquinas whirled on him. "When you committed this heinous, nearly unspeakable act of which you so justly stand accused, you *knew* the likely outcome of unleashing this proof on unsuspecting souls, did you not? From your own bitter experience you knew the devastation that a recognition of one's own existence could wreak. And yet you did not spare your victims."

With a loud shriek, the defendant rent his shirt and pounded on his chest, which thanks to skillful make-up or personal genetics resembled a biblical hairshirt, so that the effect was considerably enhanced.

"Ah, me! Errant sinner that I am! Yes! Long have I suffered the ceaseless lash of self-certitude, and I plotted revenge on the accursed human race that burdened me with such knowledge!"

Mr. Aquinas slowly turned to the spellbound jury. "And now his pathetic victims are saddled with that awful self-knowledge as well. Esteemed

philosophers of the jury, is there one of you who has not known this torment? Do not your hearts cry out for justice?"

Mr. Aquinas rested the state's case. The camera panned the room. "And now," said the announcer, "for our viewers who are playing along at home, it's time to fill out your scorecards!"

11. Play Along at Home!

Fill out this simple scorecard. Answers will be announced after a short commercial break.

(1) Granted that it is a serious social impropriety to accost complete strangers concerning their ontological status – if defendant can support the assertion of existence with a *proof*, is said defendant entitled to the "defense of truth," as someone charged with libel would be?

(2) Should victims be required to prove that before the encounter they had absolutely no knowledge of their own existence? Or is defendant guilty of harassment regardless of the victim's prior auto-ontological awareness?

(3) Assuming that the defendant *is* found guilty (which they almost always are in these sorts of cases, the trial being more a demonstration of the superiority of philosophy than an assessment of the culpability of the suspect – although it must be added that cases have been known where defendants were found, if not not-guilty, at least somewhat less guilty than anticipated) – assuming the defendant is found guilty, what sort of restitution might the court order defendant to make to the victims?

(4) Remember to assess points for:

• dramatic performance

• grooming and costume

• classical and biblical allusions

And now, we pause for these important commercial announcements.

Hey, kids! Be the hit of any philosophical gathering with the party game that's sweeping the Western world!

That's right, we're talking about Summa Shots. This rousing Medieval game, still wildly popular at Dominican seminaries, can now be played in the comfort of your own rumpus room!

Players draw cards stating a Latin heresy, and must give three refutations sanctioned by Mr. Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* within thirty seconds.

Those who fail take a shot. Those who succeed take two shots.

Comes with over 2000 heresy cards, tonsure clippers, antique vodka carafe, and a Latin-English lexicon. Deluxe edition includes four shot glasses and a gallon of vodka.

Order now and receive this handy booklet of Epistemological Icebreakers – get any socio-ontological interaction off to a great start with these classic pick-up lines:

"Did you know that Simone De Beauvoir slept with Jean-Paul Sartre?"

"Did you know that Socrates slept with his students?"

"Did you know that Bertrand Russell slept with his socks on?"

Or, when all else fails, try Mr. Fichte's dialectical approach: "I thesis, you antithesis – we make synthesis."

Summa Shots and Epistemological Icebreakers are available at all finer philosophical supply outlets.

"And now," said the announcer, "we return you to our regularly-scheduled program. But first, this important announcement:

"Coming up tonight on the Philosophy Channel: 'Marvin Farber and the Foundations of Phenomenology,' the heart-rending tale of the man whose attempt to bring Phenomenology to the English-speaking world foundered when his English paraphrase of Edmund Husserl's *Logical Investigations* proved even more incomprehensible than the untranslated German.

"And now, back to Philosophy Court, starring Albert Camus as Judge Penitent, with a special appearance by Saint Thomas Aquinas as the prosecutor."

The camera panned across the courtroom and came to rest on the high bench. "Without further ado," said Mr. Camus in his role as Judge Penitent, "it's time to render our verdict. May I have the envelopes, please?"

The judge ripped open the first envelope:

"Question Number One: In cases of Ontological Harassment, should the defense of 'truth' be allowed? Yes! According to canon law, you can traduce the Lord Himself if you can back it up with a solid proof.

"Question Number Two: Should the victims' prior mental state be a factor? Yes! If victims did not establish that they suffered ontological damage solely or primarily from defendant, we must decide for defendant.

"Question Number Three: Concerning restitution – since the court ruled for defendant on the first two issues, restitution will be limited to an abject public apology, along with a solemn promise that in the future defendant will employ proofs of existence solely for the benefit of humanity."

Polite applause from the audience, which had hoped for blood.

The moderator ripped open the final envelope. "The style award goes to defendant for his confessional histrionics. Grooming kudos go to the fastidious Mr. Aquinas. And the trophy for best classical/biblical allusion goes to the narrator for his 'hairshirt' reference."

The audience applauded as the cameras panned back to encompass all of the participants, who came out and took a collective bow.

"Wow," I said. "Great show."

"Yeah, the Judge Penitent role is perfect for Mr. Camus. You should've seen the episode where Mr. Derrida was the prosecutor and Mr. Gadamer starred for the defense."

"Who won?"

"Well, it was unclear, although so far as I could discern they disagreed on the meaning of meaning, meaning that the meanings that one meant were called into question by the other, whose questioning was in turn questioned concerning the meaning of the question of its meaning, until the meanings that each questioned were inextricably entangled in a meaning-laden web of questions."

"Sounds fascinating," I said. I was hoping to lead our conversation around to the issue of Mr. Testascrittore's manuscript. But Johann picked up the remote and started flipping through the channels, pausing just long enough to offer pithy critiques of the offerings.

Doubtless it would have been quite a cultural education, akin to going on a road trip with pre-teens and letting them choose the music. I decided to pass.

He kept channel-flipping. Was Johann using the TV to fend off my interrogatories, or was he simply suffering a mid-life logonomical crisis that only the drone of the Philosophy Channel could alleviate?

12.

Whatever was behind Johann's television fixation, my afternoon class was looming and my stomach demanded satisfaction. I bid Johann farewell and headed for the Historic Latin Quarter Preservation District.

Maybe I should have lunch at the Paradox Café and test my philosophical mettle against the prevaricating staff. Although if the cabbie's assessment was correct, my chance of getting a sandwich before my next class was slim.

It sounded like a challenge for Johann's Paralogic curriculum. What more convincing argument for the value of the program than speeding up service at a local café? If it worked there, you could get funding to expand the project to include post office lines and transit systems.

Lacking a certificate in Paralogic, I opted to visit my usual haunt. The lunch crowd at Logico's was at a peak. I ordered Sardines a la Schopenhauer, then put a dime in the Latin jukebox and gave a punk-polka version of Leonin's early polyphonic hit "Haec Dies" a whirl.

There were no empty booths, and the crowd dancing around the jukebox made standing there impossible. I tried the space between the phone booth and the stairs. By hunching my shoulders, I would have fit if it weren't for sharing the nook with cultural critic Jean Baudrillard.

Not with Mr. Baudrillard in the flesh, but with a life-sized cardboard advertising display for Similitudes breath mints which was wedged into the space.

I squeezed in next to him, painfully aware of the failure of my efforts whenever a waiter had to pass. Uncomfortable as my situation was, I had to admit it provided ironic evidence for Mr. Baudrillard's theory that signs and objects were ultimately interchangeable – and that the "self" was little more than a sign.

Mr. Baudrillard was one of the new breed of End-of-Philosophy philosophers whose metier was to chronicle the moribundicity of their very field of study.

Some cultural critics considered it ironic and perhaps just a tad contradictory that End-of-Philosophy philosophers still wrote books about philosophy.

Then again, the books seemed to be getting progressively shorter. Perhaps like Mr. Engels' post-revolutionary dictatorship, philosophy was withering away.

As I waited for my meal something deeper gnawed at me. The previous evening I'd had a personal audience with the renowned Mr. Descartes, who probably doesn't go around visiting just anyone in the middle of the night. He vouchsafed to me an abridged version of his famous proof of existence, and although his ghostly appearance left me filled with doubts, the more I doubted, the more I ought to be sure I existed.

In the back of my mind, though, I knew the harsh truth: Mr. Sartre and his epigones had undercut the celebrated Cartesian proof, leaving a gaping nothingness at the core of our being.

So where did that leave me and my hard-earned doubts? An empty, negating behavior. An essential nothingness.

Was that all I was? Was I only a hollow non-entity in the end? Was there not the slightest shred of being?

As I reeled from the Sartrean critique, I grasped again the redemptory hopes that so many had placed in Mr. Testascrittore's proof of existence. How ironic that Mr. Testascrittore, the arch-Sartrean himself, offered transcendent affirmation that self-certitude was indeed susceptible of logical demonstration.

Had he achieved his desideratum? Had he supplied the foundation so long dreamt by the West?

How could we know? The only extant version of the proof was apparently in the hands of that devious Heideggerian, Mr. Zeitenschreiber. Who knew what he planned to do with it?

I pondered my own sorry prospects. Lacking a proof, I was, so far as I could demonstrate beyond a reasonable doubt, naught but a void, an empty, negating non-self. Just the thought made me famished.

I was further unsettled when my Sardines a la Schopenhauer arrived.

The makings looked superb – deep green organic kale from restored wetlands along the banks of the Wabash, fresh-grated parmesan cheese from local dairies owned by Emilianese families with strong ties to the old country, and a thick puree of black olives imported from Valencia.

Topping the ensemble was a tight row of sardines, shoulder to shoulder just like in the tin – each with one little eyeball staring up at me. Together they conveyed a relentlessly Schopenhauerian message of melancholic futility.

Or was it a collective political outcry?

Were the sardines mutely accusing me of culinary complicity in their murder, of having them executed on my behalf?

But it wasn't like I hired the guy who did the dirty work. The sardine butcher could never have known that I would buy this dish and benefit from the deaths of these specific sardines. The stares frozen on the faces of the little fryers, accusing though they might be, were in no way intended for me.

Or were they? Perhaps the sardines believed in Fate and took every act to be pre-determined, fixed immutably by the clock-like workings of a mechanical universe. If so, I could be regarded as having been complicit in the murder of these sardines for all eternity, long before they or I ever came to Earthly incarnation.

Yet in this case, an unbiased observer (i.e., a non-sardine) must admit that I could hardly be said to have willed or chosen their deaths. I simply lived out the fate that was ordained from the start. As did my sardine compatriots. Blame could hardly be affixed on such a basis.

I knew I should feel better. But still the eyeballs stared.

The manager, who was said to be a third-nephew-in-law of a friend of the great-grandson of Mr. Hume himself, was walking around the floor asking people how their food was. I couldn't take a chance on him catching me scraping the sardines off. I settled for crowding them to one side and covering them with a leaf of lettuce.

But the lettuce kept slipping, exposing me to the pitiless stares of the little creatures, who looked even more reproachful all heaped to the side.

Finally I couldn't take it any longer. I wrapped the sardines "to go," ducked out of Logico's, and gave the package to the first panhandler I saw, trusting that he could enjoy them free of existential angst.

The clocktower tolled 1:58 – time to get to class. I had a scant two minutes to make it across the Quad to Alcuin Hall.

Remembering Mr. Zeitenschreiber's ridicule when I was late the previous day, and particularly the ignominy it brought on Mr. Testascrittore's memory, I broke into a gallop. I reached the building with thirty seconds to go. Students less fastidious in the exactitude of their commitments dodged out of my way as I took the stairs two at a time.

Knowing I was right at the buzzer, I ditched my plan to sit up front and made a beeline for the rear door. I could study Mr. Zeitenschreiber better

from a discreet distance, anyway.

Just as he looked up from his lectern, I dropped into a back-row seat. Catching my breath, I eyed the likely manuscript thief from afar.

Suddenly a jarring thought struck me – if Mr. Zeitenschreiber had purloined Mr. Testascrittore's revised manuscript, maybe he planned to appropriate the proof of existence as his own!

13.

Had Mr. Zeitenschreiber stolen Mr. Testascrittore's manuscript not from economic motives but so he could claim the fabled existential proof as his own creation?

Already he might have woven the passage into an essay with an eye to quick publication. This might be my final opportunity to unmask him before he claimed the proof of existence as his own.

I had to be alert for every opportunity.

The opportunity that presented itself was so unexpected that I had no time to be alert. Before Mr. Zeitenschreiber could even begin to betray his likely involvement in the possible crime, the classroom door opened and Perkins strode in. The pencil-shaped grad assistant carried a briefcase in one hand and a large cup of coffee in the other.

Perkins stepped in front of Mr. Zeitenschreiber, nodded to the professor, then turned to face us.

"As you may have heard," Perkins said crisply, "Mr. Grosskase will be working a reduced schedule due to health issues. However, he will be available for time-sensitive matters. I have been appointed to manage his health care team. If anyone needs to contact the Rector, they are to speak to me first. Are there any questions?"

Yes! I had a few questions – such as who exactly appointed this dweeb the guardian of access to Mr. Grosskase? But I knew this was not the time to confront the always-agitated Perkins on his credentials.

Seeming satisfied with the lack of overt response, Perkins nodded sharply to no one in particular, then turned and strode out the door.

Mr. Zeitenschreiber watched him go with an irritated expression, then surveyed the class, his bony face blanched by the fluorescent lights.

"Your assignment from yesterday was to read Mr. Heidegger's *Being*

and Time," he said. "Any questions before we move on to more difficult material?"

I'd forgotten all about the assignment. Luckily, I'd skimmed the *Cliff Notes* at USB, so I knew that Mr. Heidegger's famous screed was about being and time, plus something called "Asking the Question of Being."

Exactly what was meant by this euphonious phrase was not entirely clear, but I imagined that it looked rather like an ontological version of "popping the question."

Picture Mr. Heidegger down on bended knee, thinning hair slicked back like a 1930s gangster, neatly-trimmed mustache fluttering like a shadow over thin lips. "O wondrous Being, you whose ownmost being is such that it has an understanding of that being and who maintains itself as if its being has already been interpreted in some manner – O beautiful Being, be mine!"

Being, demur as always, hides behind the cloak of appearances.

Mr. Zeitenschreiber's lecture was getting underway. Pretty soon he was going on about modes of existence.

As he waxed on, I could see why Mr. Zeitenschreiber might wish to appropriate Mr. Testascrittore's proof of existence. I mean, what good does it do you to understand a bunch of modes if it turns out you don't exist in the first place?

My attention might have drifted on to more important topics, had I not noticed an odd quirk Mr. Zeitenschreiber was developing. Whenever he said the word "inauthentic" – which you apparently wind up saying quite a bit if you lecture about Mr. Heidegger – he would pause ever-so-slightly, as if something were nagging at him.

It wasn't all that prominent, a mere micro-belch of the sort you'd expect in a post-lunchtime lecture. Probably no one besides me even noticed.

Knowing the strong possibility of his likely theft of the manuscript, though, I had to wonder – was he unconsciously confessing his part in his colleague's demise? I'd seen something like that in a movie once. The killer got so pent up with guilt that he was practically leaking clues. So I knew it could happen.

But maybe my imagination was running away again. Even if the nervous tic wasn't gas, it might be genetic. Was I concocting a murder plot based on a speech impediment?

But what if my first intuition was correct, and it really was a tell-tale sign of Mr. Zeitenschreiber's involvement in Mr. Testascrittore's death?

My head spun in a semiotic swirl. If I knew Mr. Zeitenschreiber's tic was a sign, I had a pretty good idea what it meant. But it might not be a sign at all, in which case I'd look pretty foolish going to the police and claiming incontrovertible evidence of Mr. Zeitenschreiber's possible involvement in Mr. Testascrittore's alleged murder, all on the basis of a touch of indigestion – and I, the putative expert in gastro-intestinal Phenomenology! I might never live down such a blunder. I had to be certain before I made my move.

Was Mr. Zeitenschreiber's hesitation a sign, or just a tantalizing non-signifier? How was I supposed to tell? I needed some sign to reassure me.

What is the sign that a sign is a sign?

14.

Suppose Mr. Zeitenschreiber's slight pause at the word "inauthentic" *was* a sign. A clue.

"Inauthentic." What exactly did it point to? The manuscript. He must be planning to publish it as his own – hence, "inauthentic." Such a sign provided evidence of the manuscript's existence as well as Mr. Zeitenschreiber's possession of it.

But could I convince the police? What was the crime in Mr. Zeitenschreiber having Mr. Testascrittore's manuscript? What was more benign – in the public eye, at least – than believing that Mr. Testascrittore himself had delivered his text to his esteemed fellow professor for collegial feedback? Wasn't this in keeping with the highest ideals of Western academia?

The police would demand more evidence. The manuscript wasn't sufficient proof on its own. By itself it was just another clue.

I traced the sequence further. The manuscript had been in the villa, and Mr. Zeitenschreiber had broken into the villa, which I deduced based on yet another clue, namely, the mud on his shoe. That combination suggested theft, not collegiality.

Suppose this train of reasoning held up under the critical scrutiny of the authorities. Even if I could convince them that Mr. Zeitenschreiber had stolen the manuscript from the villa — did this prove his involvement in Mr. Testascrittore's murder? Not remotely. The theft of the manuscript was

merely one more clue in an endless chain.

Mr. Derrida poked his head in, his hawk-like face surveying the room. "Each clue leads to another clue," he said, "never to any final payoff."

"I know," I said. "It's frustrating. But logically, if I follow them far enough, there has to be a payoff at the end. No matter how long the series of clues, there must be solid evidence at the end of the chain."

Mr. Derrida smiled sadly. "A worthy goal. But never to be realized. Your clues are signs, are they not? The referent of a sign is always another sign. There is no 'final signified object' which is not itself a sign. The supposed 'final payoff' that signs seem to promise is simply one more sign in an endless chain."

I scowled at the idea that signs pointed only to other signs. What if it caught on? Picture it on the freeway:

1 mile to Park Ave turnoff sign

5 miles to gasoline sign

2 miles to next sign

Then again, consider the literary possibilities. How about a Derridrean sequel to Mr. Sartre's *No Exit*, where the characters escape from the post mortem waiting room and go wandering down these long, twisting hallways. At the end of every passage is an Exit sign. But all it ever leads to is another Exit sign.

I shook my head. "My concern, sir, is that such flagrant flaunting of the infra-referential possibilities inherent in signs will bring *all* signs into a general disrepute. If signs point only to other signs, it's a cheapening of the commodity, so to speak."

"I'm well aware of that danger," said Mr. Derrida. "That's why I've unloaded my stock in Final Signified Unlimited."

I pondered his investment strategy. Sure, it was paying dividends today. But if I had any savings, I would plow them into Final Signified. One day scientists might discover a final signified, the big payoff promised by every chain of signs – a foundation, in a word.

Not only would I make a killing on my investment. Those of us with the vision and courage to invest in ultimate realities would become legendary heroes of the new age of epistemological certitude.

15.

The Search for the Final Signified – An Endless Mini-Series

Dazzling deductions! Exhilarating inferences! Thrill to the adventures of hard-boiled private eye "Dagger" Derrida and his wise-cracking sidekick "Hawk" Harrison as they pursue the elusive Final Signified through a lurid underground of semio-contextual signifiers, each promising to point to the "object itself." Starring Humphrey Bogart as Hans-Georg Gadamer, Julie Andrews as Martin Heidegger, and Marlon Brando as the corpse of Late-Medieval Nominalist Nicholas of Cusa.

"It might make a good movie," Mr. Derrida said charitably. "Especially with me in the lead role. But it doesn't change the fact that no matter what 'final signified object' you think you've uncovered, it will invariably turn out to be another sign, always pointing to yet another..."

I scowled. "Somewhere there has to be a final meaning, a definite foundation on which signs can find their basis. Otherwise all meaning just drifts away."

"Fine," said Mr. Derrida. "Show me a 'final signified object.' Show me one object that is sufficient in itself."

"Okay," I said, taking his challenge at face value. "Take a common word-sign like 'manuscript.' I would say that the 'manuscript itself,' the stack of papers covered with words, is the ultimate signified, the object to which the sign points – it is the 'real object' which gives the word 'manuscript' its meaning. What could be more obvious?"

He looked at me for a moment, as if savoring his response. "Nice try. But isn't the manuscript itself a sign? When we look at a manuscript and wonder what's inside – is your object not a sign of 'hidden' content? And what if this book refers to others? Aren't the notes and the bibliography a collection of signs?"

"Well, yes," I said. "I suppose it is, in those ways."

"Case closed," said Mr. Derrida.

I didn't have a ready answer, even though I was still skeptical about the practical value of an endless chain of signs that never reach their final goal.

Class was wrapping up, and I had learned precious little. In fact, the only sign I'd gotten concerning Mr. Zeitenschreiber's involvement in L'Affair D'Testascrittore – his nearly infinitesimal pause when pronouncing the

word "inauthentic" – had proven of dubious semiotic, let alone legal, value.

I considered sticking around afterward and asking Mr. Zeitenschreiber a few more questions. But what good would his answers do me if I had no certainty of their value as signs? If I couldn't count on that much, why tip him off as to my suspicions?

Get back to basics. Stick to what I knew for sure – I'd seen a man running away from Mr. Testascrittore's villa at the very time the break-in occurred. Later, I'd seen a splash of mud on Mr. Zeitenschreiber's shoe that seemed the same color as the mud from the villa on my own shoes and socks.

Most of all, it was clear that Mr. Zeitenschreiber had a motive for stealing the second manuscript – the appropriation of Mr. Testascrittore's proof of existence, which he would be especially well-situated to incorporate into his own Existentialist writings.

Surely, with all this in my favor, I could persuade the police to investigate. Difficult as it might be to establish the reality behind any one of the clues, their combined weight would surely sway the authorities.

In all likelihood, the police would be so struck by the power of my reasoning that they would take me into their confidence. Private sessions would be scheduled with top brass.

The Chief points me to a leather chair, but I prefer standing. Pacing around the room, which is draped in blue velvet that has a musty smell, I share my theory that the break-in and murder are related. The police remain skeptical, but impressed by my methodical cool they agree to bring Mr. Zeitenschreiber in for questioning.

The Institute and the entire city are shocked. An outcry of public indignation lashes me for my charges against the popular Mr. Zeitenschreiber. But I stand fast, refusing to retract my stunning accusation.

After hours of fruitless grilling, frustrated in all attempts to cajole or coerce the truth from the suspect, the authorities call me into the interrogation chamber. Mr. Zeitenschreiber is seated in the center of the room on a stiff-backed wooden chair. The single bare lightbulb casts an eerie umbra. Slowly I circle the suspect, studying his repressed agitation at my relentless pursuit.

"Do we find ourselves," I ask with the slightest touch of a German accent, "in that mode in which the potential for authenticity or for inauthenticity

has not yet been differentiated against a horizon of temporality?"

He screws his neck around trying to follow me, but refuses to respond.

Suddenly I whirl to face him. "On the day that Mr. Testascrittore died," I spat out, "were you not aware that Being attests not by making something known in an undifferentiated manner, but by summoning us to (I pause almost imperceptibly) authenticity?"

At my final word, Mr. Zeitenschreiber crumbles to his knees and a pitiful confession comes spilling out. Accomplices are arrested. Following a civic reception and numerous rather redundant and tedious press conferences, negotiations are opened for docu-drama rights...

The classroom had emptied of students. I gathered my papers and walked to the door, then turned and took a final look at the professor.

He stared coldly back.

A shiver ran up my spine. Was I risking my life by the mere act of suspecting Mr. Zeitenschreiber of murder?

I was getting in too deep. It was time to go to the police.

16.

The sun glared in my eyes as I made my way across the Quad toward the police substation.

That I could cross campus at this hour surprised me. Then I remembered that the Math Department Soprano Choir was performing excerpts from "The Square Root of Negative Pi," one of Randolph J. Morgenstern's greatest numbers. No wonder the Quad was deserted.

I was sorry to miss such a transcendental occasion. But I had more immediate concerns.

If I went to the authorities, what exactly was I going to tell them? That Mr. Zeitenschreiber was the murderer? That he had stolen the manuscript?

Or simply that I believed I had seen him at the villa on the day of the break-in?

How could I say that I'd seen him without incriminating myself? No – all I could safely tell the police was to look for traces of greenish mud on Mr. Zeitenschreiber's shoes, and to match it against other mud in the vicinity of Mr. Testascrittore's villa. That would surely inspire them to launch an investigation.

And the manuscript – I could suggest that a manuscript was probably stolen from the villa, and that it might well be found in Mr. Zeitenschreiber's possession.

Surely the overwhelming weight of these revelations would spur even the most fainthearted police department into action. I was practically handing them the keys to the entire mystery.

But suppose the police pursued the clues. What exactly would they find? The murderer? Or just more clues?

I was still disturbed at Mr. Derrida's notion that signs could only point to other signs. If clues were signs, then each one pointed to the next, to the next, to the next... until you came full circle to the first.

Even if I discovered more clues, they would just be filling gaps in an infinite series.

On that sobering note, I stepped through the portico of the St. Thomas Aquinas Substation and entered the cool, shadowy nave. Shafts of afternoon sunlight filtered down from the clerestory windows, casting patterns on the beige partitions subdividing the chapels along the central aisle.

I made my way down the nave. Where on the previous visit I'd seen makeshift paper signs, engraved bronze plaques were now affixed next to openings between partitions. I read them as I walked slowly down the corridor:

Office of First Causes

Office of Omniscience

Office of Omnipotence

Office of the Active Intellect

Office of Teleology

None of them seemed quite right. I tried the Pub. Aff. office I'd found on my previous visit, but although it too had a new bronze sign it was closed for the day.

You'd think if the authorities wanted people to take an active part in campus life and help prevent murders of professors, there'd be something like an Office of Citizen Investigations where industrious amateur detectives could bring the results of their most determined research.

A clerk made his way up the hall, his head buried in a thick folder of notes.

"Excuse me," I said. "Can you point me toward the Office of Citizen Investigations?"

He jumped at my voice. His eyes darted with fright. "Are you under investigation? Oh my God, don't let them see you talking to me!" He clutched the folder to his chest and hustled off down the hall.

I sucked in a breath. Maybe I shouldn't be quite so candid about my quest.

A search of the cubicles in the north transept turned up nothing. But I spotted a line at the end of the south transept and guessed by the concerned looks on people's faces that I'd come to the right place.

There were a dozen people ahead of me, even before the line disappeared between two partitions. No matter. I took my place. The die was cast. I was about to unleash my accusation against Mr. Zeitenschreiber.

17.

Waiting to see the police, I crossed my arms and looked around. The transept was not as elaborate as the central nave. Tall, glossy white walls had yellowed somewhat over the years, making the space feel like a 1950s high school hallway.

I moved to where I could check out the cubicle. A guard in a grey uniform partly obstructed my view. He seemed irritated that I was trying to look past him. I refused to be intimidated into giving up what must surely be my right to look where I wanted.

Beyond the guard the line approached a single teller-window. The window was covered in iron grating, and the person talking to the teller had to lean forward to make herself heard.

The guard gave me another hard look. I got the hint and called my attention back out of the cubicle to the hallway where I waited.

The outside of the partition doubled as a bulletin board. I scanned the rag-tag assortment of notices, flyers, and pleas for assistance.

"Hegelian vegetarian activist household seeks new member. No pets, smokers, or Kierkegaardians."

"Confronting Syllogistophobia – overcome your fear of deduction in six easy lessons!"

"Auditions for the musical version of Plato's *Symposium* – Tuesday in the Greek theater."

A carefully-lettered sign advertised a whole roster of like-new Kantian paraphernalia:

"*The Portable Kant* with retractable 2-wheel cart. $199."

"Immanuel Kant Audiobooks: *Critique of Pure Reason*, *Critique of Practical Reason*, *Critique of Impractical Reason*, and *Critique of Critical Critiquing*. Just $999 for the 287-CD set."

"Complete set of Kantian Ideas, barely used. $299 or best offer."

Not a bad price. If I understood the concept correctly, there wasn't a lot of wear and tear on Kantian ideas.

Truthfully, although I'd always liked the ring of the phrase, I had only a vague notion of what Kantian Ideas were. Something about capital letter words like Truth, Beauty, Justice. The sort of Ideas that exist only as ideals. Democracy. Freedom. Love.

"Good," came a thin voice from behind me.

Startled, I turned to see a slightly-built man in a smartly-fitting black coat and a powdered grey wig. He looked at me with an air of benign reserve, and I knew in an instant it must be the celebrated Mr. Kant.

"Oh, hi." Immediately I regretted my familiarity, and made a sort of half-bow, rolling my hand forward to indicate obeisance.

He fluttered his hand in return as if dispensing with formalities. "That's a good start. Truth. Beauty. Freedom. But a word like 'Self' is also a Kantian Idea. Although it seems required as the core of the various experiences which I call 'mine,' the Self is an entity that we never actually experience."

I nodded slowly, thinking of Mr. Testascrittore's quest. "That makes proving the existence of the Self even more complicated."

"Yes, that would seem to be the case," he said. He paused for a moment, then looked at me. "And what about your notion of a 'Clue'? That's a Kantian Idea if I ever saw one."

"Clue?" I said. "What's a Kantian Clue?"

"I'd say it's a 'Clue' that is completely fleshed out, that stands before us in its fullness – one which unravels the mystery in a single flash. It's an ideal that real-world clues only approximate. Real clues are murky, suggestive, frustrating – even when we think we see their meanings, there's always a shadowy zone where we're less than certain. So a Kantian Clue would be one that existed in all its fullness and clearness of meaning."

"Like at the end of a detective novel, where the author wraps everything up nice and neat."

"Precisely. But with a real-world mystery like you're facing, you'll never have that luxury."

"So Kantian Clues don't actually exist?"

"They exist the way all Kantian Ideas exist – as ideals. They exist as the ideal toward which our mundane world strives. Toward Beauty. Toward Love. Toward Truth."

"But we never actually achieve the ideals."

"Perhaps not. But without the ideal, we would lack any sense of direction, of purpose. The ideals illuminate our quest for meaning. As such, they certainly exist."

I mulled over his response. Mr. Kant pulled out his gold-plated pocketwatch.

"Am I keeping you from something?" I asked.

He held the watch at arm's length. "No, I'm still two and a half minutes ahead of schedule."

"Great," I said. "There's something else I've wanted to ask you."

"Yes?" He arched his eyebrows, as if daring me to give him a tough question.

"Well, sir," I said, "I was wondering how you went about getting 'Kantian Ideas' named after you. If I may confide, it's one of my fondest dreams to have a philosophical principle named after me. Not just some dinky little equation, but something important. I figured if you could get ideas like Truth and Eternity named after you, you might be able to offer a few pointers to a young thinker aspiring to immortality."

He looked into the distance and stroked his clean-shaven chin. "You know, it's mainly luck and timing. I didn't do anything special. Just went about my business of writing critiques, and one day I look up and Truth and Beauty are being assigned to me."

Disappointment crossed my face. Mr. Kant shrugged apologetically. "Ask Mr. Plato. He got 'Platonic Love' named after him." Mr. Kant laughed quietly, as if at a private joke, or perhaps one that he shared with some people, but not with me. Or maybe I just didn't get it, and I was embarrassing him by making him laugh alone. I forced a chuckle.

Actually, though, I suspected that Mr. Plato had the last laugh. After all, Mr. Kant's Ideas were just imaginary constructs, while if I understood the concept correctly, Mr. Plato's Ideal Forms are more real than the physical world itself.

I had almost reached the front of the line. The security guard regulated the approach to the windows. When the person ahead of me finished, the guard held up his white-gloved hand to prevent my stepping forward until the previous person was completely out of the alcove. Then he waved crisply, as if I were dragging my feet.

The curved iron bars over the teller window were arranged in a filigree pattern that made a decorative virtue out of the apparent necessity of protecting the clerk from the public. The clerk herself sat about four feet behind the grating, chewing gum and leafing through an old copy of *Popular Hermeneutics*.

I leaned up to the window. "I've come to see the inspector working on Mr. Testascrittore's case."

"Of course. Right away. Just take a number, and we'll call you."

Take a number? After I'd just waited in line?

Besides, it made me uneasy. What if I took a number and forgot to return it? I'd have the entire math department down my throat. I'd heard of people being denied enrollment because of overdue library books. I hated to think of the penalties if you forgot to return a number.

But I couldn't turn back now. The clock was ticking. I needed to talk to one of the investigators about the villa break-in and the likely theft of the second manuscript. If they were sympathetic, I could hint that the theft was related to Mr. Testascrittore's death. Assuming they followed my logic, I could drop my bombshell – Mr. Zeitenschreiber's link to the murder of his colleague.

I took a number from the dispenser. "117-2/3," I read aloud.

The clerk jumped up from her chair. "117-2/3? My God, you're late!" She disappeared from behind the window and reappeared a moment later between two partitions. "Come in, come in," she said, waving me through.

18.

As the secretary ushered me past the partition, another functionary squeezed past, struggling with a thick, overflowing folder. He bumped

into me, and some papers fell from his folder. On the corner of one document was attached a photo of a scruffy, brown-haired man – was it my own picture?

"Wait! Can I see that?" But the man scooped up the documents and scurried out.

Should I chase him? But I'd already waited in line to see the detective. Just stay on target.

I was shown into the detective's office, a partition-demarcated cubicle that reminded me of the office I'd seen on my prior visit. The desk, file cabinets, copy machine – all identical.

I'd have practically sworn it was the same place, and even more so when I saw the detective seated behind her desk – the same burly woman I'd met on the first visit.

Was it actually the same woman? As her glazed eyes met mine, she showed no spark of recognition.

On what grounds did I assert that she was the "same"? Her appearance? She could be a twin, a cousin, a doppelganger.

Or my mind, overtaxed by clues and suspects, might be playing tricks on me. After all, I couldn't go back and re-see the first time. I relied on memory – yet extensive research has shown the constructed, evolving nature of memories.

Intuition told me it was the same person. But without a Wittgensteinian criterion for confirming the intuition, it got me nowhere but a spiral of Hermeneutic circles.

I could ask her – but I'd have to trust her understanding of my question as well as the integrity of her response.

Maybe it was better not to tip my hand that we'd already met. We hadn't exactly bonded around a common interpretation of Western philosophy. Reminding her of the exchange risked re-opening a whole can of Scholastic worms.

Seizing the mythical bull by the metaphorical horns, I strode purposefully up to the detective's desk.

"Yes," she drawled without looking up. "Have a seat. What are you guilty of?"

I sat down in a stiff metal chair facing the desk. "Excuse me, ma'am, but

you misunderstand. I'm not guilty of anything."

The detective smiled with no humor. "Oh, you're guilty of something – you all are. We're just not sure what it is yet. At the very least you are guilty of being suspected."

I took a breath. "Ma'am, I've come here concerning the break-in at Professor Testascrittore's house."

"At his villa, I believe you mean," she said. "We've closed that matter already."

I nodded. "But I believe I have some new information that might interest you."

She set down her pen and looked across the big desk at me. "You're a presumptuous one, aren't you? How on God's green Earth could you possibly know what might interest me? And supposing you had some remote inkling as to what I want to hear – why do you think you are in the least competent to fulfill my slightest desire?"

The detective stood up. She was taller and beefier than I remembered. "How can you imagine that you could know another human being's desires? What sort of 'empathetic' theory are you propounding, that you walk into the office of a total stranger, interrupt her work, and then declare that you have come to satisfy her desires?" She glared at me as if expecting to hear my theoretical foundations.

Never one to shy away from the joustings of intellectual agonistics, I straightened up in my seat. "Well, ma'am," I said, "I start from the premise that we are fellow-creatures. My long and quite varied experience tells me that other humans have feelings similar to mine. Or so their behavior suggests. Thus, upon meeting you –"

"Get this straight," she said so coldly that I stopped in mid-sentence, "we have *not* met. In my eyes, you are an intruder. I think you'd best state your purpose and be on your way."

I took a deep breath and chose my words carefully. "Ma'am, I've heard that you were involved in the investigation of the burglary at Mr. Testascrittore's villa. I have some information on what the thief might have been seeking."

She threw back her head and shook as if laughing uproariously. But not a sound came from her lips. At length she settled herself and looked at me again. "Oh, marvelous! We – the constituted authorities responsible for

all criminal investigations in the greater campus area – the agency who above all others would be expected, nay even required, to know all that could possibly be known about any criminal activity in our jurisdiction – we freely admit that we do not yet know the identity, motives, or mode of entry of those who perpetrated this act. I – the police official charged with knowing all that is to be known about this particular matter – admit my stupefaction."

She came out from behind her desk and loomed over me. "And now you – a mere student! – have the audacity to tell me that you have information on this matter?"

I clenched my teeth. "Ma'am, I've come to let you know that in all likelihood a thief has stolen a precious manuscript from Mr. Testascrittore's house, a manuscript which may very well contain his final philosophical testament." I leaned forward in the chair for emphasis. "A man is dead, and a priceless manuscript is missing!"

The detective's mien changed. She looked more annoyed than angry. "You say there's a missing manuscript?"

"Exactly," I said, relieved that she was finally seeing my point.

She shook her head emphatically as she resumed her seat behind the desk. "We made a complete inventory of every last item in the villa, and I can categorically state that there was no missing manuscript."

"That's the point!"

She held her palms up. "Okay, then we're agreed. No missing manuscript."

"No, no – there *is* a missing manuscript. It's just not in the villa."

"Then what missing manuscript are you talking about? Can't you see I have work to do?"

"Look," I said, forcing myself to speak slowly. "There *was* a manuscript in the house. Thieves broke in, and now, as you have so carefully explained, the manuscript is *not* in the house."

"I must say," she said, "your logic is peculiar. Presently there is no manuscript in the house – so you deduce that formerly there was one in the house which was stolen? That would be like concluding that because there are no unicorns alive today, there must have been some which died out in the past. You're deducing being from nothingness."

Refusing to be sidetracked by her ontological gambit, I gritted my teeth. "Ma'am – I have a proposal. Perhaps we could call the police officer who

investigated the professor's murder, and mention the possible connection of this burglary to him."

"What? What could that officer possibly know about this matter? He works out of homicide, for God's sake! This is a clear-cut residential burglary."

"Ma'am, if we could just mention the burglary to the investigator – "

Her face grew purple, and her eyes nearly popped out. "Are you questioning my judgment? Out! Out, I say! Out!"

As I stumbled out of her cubicle, a wave of anger rose in me. How dare she dismiss me! She must be covering something up. I should demand an investigation.

Right. Demand that the police investigate themselves? Wasn't that like demanding that dogs clean up their own droppings?

I was done wasting my time trying to persuade the authorities to act. If Mr. Testascrittore's murder was going to get solved, it was up to me.

19.

I stepped around a partition, expecting to be back in the main nave. I found myself instead in a conference room where some sort of legal deposition seemed to be taking place. I excused myself and slipped between the partitions on the other side.

This landed me in the lobby of a small theater, where ticket sellers accosted me offering half-price seats for a cafeteria-staff production called In Praise of Erasmus.

I declined on the grounds that my class studies were too demanding for such follies. The vendors retreated, muttering under their breath about the lack of concern for the humanities among today's career-oriented philosophers.

I passed through the theater and tried the rear exit, which led to a balcony overlooking the central nave. Seeing no other way down, I took hold of the draperies and lowered myself to ground level, where a tourist snapped my photo. I tried to strike a dignified pose, then walked as quickly as I could to the exit at the far end.

Just as I reached the doors, a row of cheaply-xeroxed posters caught my eye:

Wanted for Negligent Footnotes

Wanted for Involuntary Arson

Wanted for Hermeneutic Fraud

Wanted for Abuse of Library Privileges

Wanted for Breaking and Entering

The last poster sported a crudely hand-drawn artist's rendition of a scruffy ne'er-do-well. For a moment I thought I knew the guy from back in California. Then I realized why he looked so familiar – he was wearing a Berkeley sweatshirt.

What a coincidence – I'd been wearing my Berkeley sweatshirt only the day before. What were the odds of that? I read the fine print: Wanted for breaking, entering, grand larceny, and littering at Professor Testascrittore's villa.

Slowly it dawned on me. I studied the drawing – well, at least they got the unshaven part right. And the Berkeley sweatshirt. For the rest, it didn't look a bit like me.

But the implication was unmistakable – I was the leading suspect in the break-in at Mr. Testascrittore's villa!

The gardener – whether a henchman of the actual thief or an unwitting dupe who jumped to conclusions after seeing me in the yard – had ratted me out.

The complete lack of resemblance in the details was a relief. The gardener's description must have been the underlying basis. But the artist obviously filled in the details with his projection of what such a desperate character must look like.

I figured I'd better get away from the police station. The last thing I needed right now was to get hauled in for interrogation.

But what of the Berkeley sweatshirt? Thank goodness I'd changed clothes! I better not wear it any more. Best to get rid of it altogether.

How, though? If I threw it in the trash, some amateur Sherlock Holmes might stumble across it and call the police. DNA scans would eventually tie it to me, and I'd have a lot of explaining to do.

It had to be destroyed. Burned. That was the only way. I needed to locate an incinerator. No, there might be security cameras. I had to find a place to build a fire without drawing attention.

I needed help. Someone who knew the town and campus well enough to

suggest a surreptitious spot.

Johann. It all came back to Johann. Could I trust him?

Well, could I afford *not* to trust him? A renowned philosopher had been murdered. His final testament to humankind was missing or stolen.

And now I found myself accused of complicity.

I needed someone to confide in, someone to help me unravel this whole mess before it was too late.

20.

When I stopped by his boiler-room digs, Johann was re-wiring the remote control for the flagpole.

"It's been a real drag having to raise and lower the flag by hand every day," he said. "I had it on a timer so it went up and down automatically, with a special setting for half-mast. But it went haywire last week and the flag was running up and down the pole all day before I discovered it."

"Listen," I said, leaning over his shoulder. "I need your help with something. It's kind of a strange request."

Johann kept fiddling with the wiring. "Okay, what?"

"I went to the police department today, regarding the break-in at Mr. Testascrittore's villa. On the way out I saw a 'Wanted' poster for the break-in – and it's me they're looking for."

He stopped his work. "Why would they be looking for you?"

I weighed just how much to reveal. "I was sight-seeing down on mansion row and got lost. I ran into the gardener and he chased me off the property. It was just a coincidence that it happened the same day as the burglary."

"But they don't know your name."

"No, and the drawing doesn't look a thing like me. The only give-away is that the drawing shows my Berkeley sweatshirt. So I have to get rid of it, fast."

"Why don't you just throw it out?"

"Because the cops may go through the university trash looking for evidence."

"Good point. You need to destroy it altogether." He was quiet for a

moment. "You should burn it and bury the ashes. It's the only sure way."

"Exactly. But where am I going to burn it without attracting even more attention?"

"Down by the river."

The scenic Wabash River ran along the west edge of town, separating the thriving urban core of Terre Haute proper from the upper-class suburb of West Terre Haute. Much of the waterfront was built up with factories and warehouses known as the Index District that bustled night and day. I suspected that finding a secluded spot would be a challenge.

"Down by the river, huh?" I let my voice convey my hesitation. "I don't exactly know my way around."

He stopped his wiring and studied me. Finally he spoke. "Get the sweatshirt and meet me in front of the building at seven o'clock."

I thanked him and started to leave, figuring he had important work to do in the interim if the Institute was to continue functioning at the finely-tuned level to which we had all grown accustomed.

But Johann called me back. "Take a look at this before you go."

He reached across the workbench and picked up a pink velvet jewelry case. Inside was a small carved-glass box.

"Nice box," I said. "What's it for?"

"It's a Leibniz Box," he said. "Look what's inside."

I bent over and squinted at the box. But all I could see was the inside of the glass walls. "What's in there?"

He smiled proudly. "A Monad. I just got it today."

I looked again. "I guess my eyes aren't what they used to be. I can't see it."

"Yeah," he said. "Neither can I. But the salesperson explained that for Mr. Leibniz, each Monad is a unique and irreducible window into all of being, with every moment of being consisting of one or more Monads. So logically there must be at least one Monad in a Leibniz Box."

"Good point," I said. "Where'd you buy it?"

"The Society for the Preservation of Out-of-Fashion Philosophies had a big garage sale. They had an Inquisition indictment form signed by Mr. Aquinas, several equations that Mr. Russell edited out of the *Principia*, and a set of lenses that Mr. Spinoza polished while deducing the *Ethics*."

"Pretty amazing," I said admiringly.

"But the big-ticket item was a vial of mud from Plato's Cave."

"Who won the bidding for that?"

"Yale's Metaphysics Department. They've felt inferior ever since Harvard snagged the arch-supports from the sandals Mr. Aristotle wore while he was lecturing on the *Metaphysics*. This was Yale's chance to show they're truly committed to the Western philosophical heritage."

"Well, it's certainly a convincing argument," I said. I glanced at the clock. "I better get going if I'm meeting you at seven. See you out front."

"Good," he said. "Be sure to bring the sweatshirt."

21.

As I stood waiting outside the Albertus Magnus Empirical Metaphysics Building with the telltale sweatshirt in hand, doubts began to nag at me. Was Johann planning to feather his own nest by turning me over to the police?

I stepped back into the shadows to see if he arrived alone. But what would that prove? He could still have set a trap down by the waterfront.

Yet without his help, what were my options? I had to destroy the sweatshirt. And that meant taking the risk of trusting someone.

Johann emerged from the building right on time, apparently alone. I fell in step, and without a word we set out across campus toward the Wabash River. From time to time I checked over my shoulder, but no one seemed to be following us.

We crossed Highway 41 and made our way into the Index District. The district, which I knew from tourist maps, stretched for a mile or more along the river, six to eight blocks wide at the center, narrower at the ends.

The Index District, at least the area close to downtown, was built on a much grander scale than I'd imagined. While some buildings were stark and functionalist, looking more like grain warehouses than academic offices, others were ornamented with classical and art-nouveau motifs.

"So all of these buildings are involved in publishing indexes for philosophy books?" I asked.

"Pretty much," he said. "There are a few companies on the south side which specialize in tables of contents, but indexes are Terre Haute's

leading philosophical industry."

"I always thought of New York and Chicago as the textbook-publishing centers."

"They are. But philosophy books are useless if they don't have an index. And indexes are our niche. Even at this late hour these buildings are filled with cubicled workers laboring at breakneck speed to create and catalog the indexes required by the philosophy industry. By controlling this crucial element of production, we've assured Terre Haute's place in the broader philosophical economy."

"I can see how important they must be," I said.

"Oh, you can't imagine," Johann said with pride. "The 1922 fire that gutted the Index District practically shut down Western philosophy. Luckily, intellectual capital poured in, and the District was rebuilt on an even grander scale."

One building, modeled on a French Gothic church, looked especially grand. I gazed at the ornamented spire that soared above the flying buttresses.

"That's the Museum of Indexes," Johann said. "They collect, curate, and preserve a copy of every index produced in Terre Haute, along with ephemera such as the original texts to which they were appended."

I studied the tall stone building. "So you can read any index ever produced?"

"Well, no," Johann said matter of factly, "The documents are stored in airtight vaults and only occasionally displayed in sealed glass cases. But they've created a master index of all the indexes, so you can get an idea of the astounding range of books that have been indexed over the decades."

As we reached the corner, my eyes played up and down the pointed arches over the entrance to the Gothic building. "It looks like a monastery," I said.

"It is," Johann replied "The Index District actually got its name from its connection to the Catholic Church. Back when Terre Haute was a French colony, the Inquisition decided to update their list of prohibited books, known as The Index.

"Pontifical officials drew up the new and greatly expanded list of banned books, then engaged the monks of Santo Domingo de Sabado to create a summary of the huge document. The monks produced a synopsis known

as the Index of the Index. Even that proved unwieldy, so the monks here in Terre Haute drafted an alphabetical list of key words, which became the well-known Index to the Index of the Index."

Further from downtown, the Index District lost some of its luster, looking like many another ageing warehouse district in America. Even at this late hour, railroad cars were being unloaded on the local spurs along the faceless shoebox-shaped buildings and razor-wired parking lots. Some of the buildings were of corrugated metal, others of wood with peeling paint. Higher up were banks of small metal-framed windows that illuminated the interiors by day. Random panes were cracked or broken.

As we approached the riverside docks, the shouts of the stevedores filled the air with dozens of languages. Were there any two workers who could understand one another's speech? I wondered how anything ever got communicated with such a variety of tongues.

Mr. Heidegger, dressed in his habitual fresh-off-the-rack Black Forest woodsman outfit, fell in step. "Simple," he said. "The stevedores share a common 'know-how' that is prior to language."

I glanced at Mr. Heidegger, whose eyes were glued to the ground. As he spoke, his little black moustache fluttered above a tight mouth. I wondered if anyone had given him the memo that the Hitler look had gone out of fashion.

Maybe I should suggest that Mr. Heidegger try my personal style, the Late 1960s Easy Rider Fu Manchu with mandatory three-day stubble. But somehow I doubted it would suit him very well.

"You use the word 'knowledge' as if it has but a single meaning," he continued. "It's important to recognize that we use the word to encompass several types of engagement with Being. There's 'knowing a fact' and 'knowing a person.' But there's also 'knowing how,' which is in many ways the most fundamental. After all, what does it avail us to know a fact if we don't know how and when to apply it?"

"But how does that help people communicate?"

"Those who share a common 'know-how' can communicate with a minimal use of language," he said, "because they already know most of what is going to be communicated. Even in a 'foreign' language, a mere inflection of the voice can convey an entire chain of commands to experienced workers. It's much the same as the communication between a mother and infant. The baby's lack of language skills doesn't impede

communication in the least."

"Why would we ever develop language, if it's that easy?" I asked.

"If only it stayed that easy!" answered Mr. Heidegger. "When we try to communicate with people who do *not* share this sort of intuitive connection – when we try to communicate in situations in which the 'know-how' is not shared – we fall back on mere words. The deficiency of this mode is seen by the frequency of miscommunication."

I nodded, recognizing that this complicated matters. "So you're saying that just learning facts, such as who killed Mr. Testascrittore, is insufficient."

"Why are you learning it?" he asked. "What is the larger project of which this knowledge is part? We must not forget to frame this context – and ultimately to ask the deeper question of Being."

My ears perked up at the sound of his famous phrase. "I'm unclear, sir. What exactly is the question of Being?"

"It's simple," he said, "although the question has been nearly forgotten since the time of Socrates, and has lain buried for over 2000 years. The question is: What is the Being of beings?"

My forehead wrinkled. "I see. And what *is* the Being of beings?"

Mr. Heidegger frowned. "You miss the point. It's not a quiz question. It's a question each of us must ask for ourselves, and then listen. Philosophy is not about studying and regurgitating summaries of the history of Western thought, but responding to the question of Being. The history of philosophy is unthinking, thoughtless. It must be dismantled and broken down, so we can rescue the occasional passages and moments when the Being of beings is touched on."

I couldn't help noticing that he hadn't actually answered my question about the being of the Question of Being. "Your exposition is all well and good, sir, but if you are going to capitalize the word, I'd expect that we'd have a little more clarity about what exactly Being is."

His lips tightened under his thin moustache. "You fail to understand. We seek not an answer but a call which is our ownmost. The call is not to 'learn about philosophy' or to correctly repeat test answers, but to personally and authentically listen and respond to the Being of the beings with which we are engaged. Knowing is not about 'grasping,' as is so often said. To authentically know something is to allow it to disclose itself in its own unique way. It's like a musical tuning, a harmonic accord between

human consciousness and its object. We are called to listen and respond, to 'take response-ibility' for Being."

"That's it?"

He blinked. "Yes. In such wonder begins all philosophy."

His verbiage spun round in my head. I liked the part about disclosing the Being of truth by engaging with musical harmonies. But until I had immersed myself in Mr. Heidegger's voluminous works for a few more decades, I felt unequal to pursuing the matter further.

I made a mental note to brush up on the *Cliff Notes* in case we crossed paths again, and to do some thinking about the Being of beings, particularly as regards being the Being that beings might be in the event that their Being could be said to be part of the beings being questioned as to the question of their Being.

Mr. Heidegger wandered off. The warehouses were thinning out, replaced by weed-grown lots littered with semi-trailers and rusty machinery. Johann steered us northward, and soon we were walking down a two-lane country road illuminated only by the moon. I remained on guard for unusual lights or sounds. In a pinch, I could make a break and try to lose myself in the Index District.

I cast a sidelong glance at my guide. Who was Johann, anyway? What did I really know about him? That he had washed out of academia and now worked as a custodian. That he had good taste in philosophical relics. That in unguarded moments he claimed for himself a perhaps-exaggerated role in the welfare of the Institute.

Most of all – that he had good reason to blame Mr. Testascrittore and Mr. Grosskase for his lowly position in life. That was the key fact.

I needed to pry some information out of him. As casually as I could, I turned the conversation to that end. "I hear that Mr. Grosskase isn't doing so well," I said. "Do you think he'll have to retire on account of Mr. Testascrittore's death?"

"Oh, no," Johann said. "I can't imagine it. He won't leave until there's a new Rector whom he trusts to preserve unity in his stead."

"That's a worthy cause," I said.

"It is," he said, then fell silent. When he spoke again, it was in an apologetic tone. "Listen, if I said anything negative about Mr. Grosskase, don't pay attention. Whatever my personal gripes with him, no one doubts his

dedication to the Institute. He's getting old, and he's sick a lot. But he was a brilliant man in his prime, the leading Sartrean of his generation. When he lectured, you felt like you were in the presence of experience itself, not a bunch of arid words."

I nodded. "What about Mr. Testascrittore? Would Mr. Grosskase have trusted him to hold the Institute together?"

Johann snorted. "Testascrittore? No way. He was an alpha philosopher, a celebrity bringing prestige to the Institute and boosting donations. But Testascrittore was no mediator. He was entirely invested in Trans-Hermeneutic Phenomenological Methodologism. For all his fame and popularity outside the Institute, a lot of insiders weren't enamored of his high-handed ways. They would never have allowed him to become Rector."

And what better way to prevent it than murder, I thought.

22.

We came to an unmarked crossroads and swung left toward the river. The moon gave enough light to stay on the gravel road, but little more. A decrepit wooden fence ran along the lefthand side. We came to a break in the fence, and Johann steered me onto a narrow footpath. Fifty feet later we were bushwhacking through thick undergrowth. Although we hadn't set eyes on the river, the pungent smell of over-ripe fish told me the Wabash must be close.

I wanted to press Johann further on his relationship with Mr. Testascrittore, but if he were in fact involved in the murder, mentioning it again would tip him off as to my suspicions. I had to take a more round-about approach.

Just keep him talking about himself. Something might slip out.

"So," I said, "are your parents from Terre Haute?"

"No. They arrived here nine months before I was born. My father was a colonel in the Swiss Navy. My mother taught Russian Literature on a Dutch pirate ship. Terre Haute being the thriving international port that it was in those days, the two of them met on shore-leave, at Deadhand Dreiser's Bar and Bagels – one of the original Thousand Taverns, not one of your latter-day touristic knock-offs. They jumped ship, took advantage of Vigo County's lenient fugitive laws, and made Terre Haute their home.

"Of course, they were very poor, my father having few marketable skills beyond pacing around town with a parrot on his shoulder yelling 'Ahoy, ye scurvy dogs!' It was my dear mother who scraped together our monthly rent teaching the Dutch pirates of Terre Haute to read Russian."

He wiped his cheek. "It was a loving family, and it wasn't so bad being poor. I grew up on the fringe of the Historic Latin Quarter Preservation District, and I like to think that I absorbed some of its esoteric aura. When I was young, I was in love with a guy who could recite Silver Age poetry in a voice to die for."

"A perfect Forum accent, eh?"

"No, his accent was atrocious – he sounded like he was straight out of Trastevere. But oh, what a voice!"

"I see." I looked sideways at him, trying to study his face in the dim light. "Who was this guy you were in love with?"

"Mortimer McIntosh," Johann said wistfully. "The man of my dreams. Mortimer was the recording secretary of the Institute – his job was to keep the music collection properly catalogued. He epitomized all that is best about Terre Haute – the spirit, the vitality, the taste for the exotic. Oh, how I pined for him when I was a student! After I dropped out and began my present career, I bucked up my courage and asked him for a date, figuring that even rejection was preferable to the torments of repressed desire."

"And he broke your heart?"

"No, not at all," Johann said wistfully. He tilted back his head and studied the moonlit sky. "I wound up breaking his. We weren't epistemologically compatible. He turned out to be a raging Popperite who would not stop trying to falsify everything I said."

"Why would he do that?"

"It was a matter of philosophical principle. He said that only when he had failed to falsify my words could he rest assured that they were true."

"Doesn't seem like a great basis for a relationship."

"Well, he's happily married to a Post-Kantian Transcendental Objectivist – I guess you just have to find your perfect match."

A few yards further, Johann came to a halt. "Right here. We're about as far from civilization as you could ask. We can build a fire, burn the sweatshirt, and bury the ashes."

We scavenged kindling by the moonlight filtering through the sparse trees. Johann wadded up some paper he'd brought and got the fire started. I pulled the sweatshirt out of my daypack and gave it one last fond look. Farewell, Berkeley.

I cast the shirt into the flames, using a long stick to poke the remnants into the fire. Soon it was consumed, and we let the embers burn down. I used my stick to scrape a shallow grave, then shoveled the ashes in and covered them over.

"That should do it," Johann said. "Now if we can just find our way out of here..."

"I assumed we could go back the same way we came."

"Fine – any idea which way that is?"

Great, I thought. I didn't need Johann's help to get lost. He pointed to a moonlit clearing between two rows of trees. "I think that will get us back to the road."

Half an hour later, we hadn't found a road. Or any sign that any human had ever set foot in these woods before. I was tempted to turn back – but I had no idea which way back was. All we could do was keep floundering.

Considering how committed I was to studying for my classes, I was a bit annoyed to be wasting my time exploring the river front. But look on the bright side – I was rid of the telltale sweatshirt, and I'd confirmed Johann's loyalty.

Or had I? At that moment we emerged from the woods into a large clearing. Bright lights flickered in the distance. A car's headlamps raked across us. I put my hand up to shield my eyes. A gruff voice called out.

"Stop right there!"

23.

Johann and I stood on the edge of a big parking lot filled with late-model cars. In front of us was a limo stand, where several stretch-limos stood idling. The car which had stopped in front of us emptied. The passengers, laughing drunkenly, headed toward a neon-shrouded building across the lot, while the valet who had ordered them to stop parked their car.

"By God," exclaimed Johann. "It's Club Pascal!"

"Club Pascal," I repeated, reading the flashing sign over the doorway. My

instinct was to duck back into the woods and not be seen in the vicinity. But Johann took my arm and practically dragged me across the parking lot.

"I've heard of this place all my life," he said, "but I always thought it was an urban legend. I've never believed it till this moment."

"It looks like it belongs in Las Vegas."

"Supposedly it's the biggest gambling casino between Vegas and Atlantic City. And doing quite a business, it looks like."

He started for the door, but I held back. "I didn't know gambling was legal in Indiana."

"It's not," he said. "That's why the casino is hidden down here by the river."

I jogged after him and took his arm. "I think we should get out of here before someone sees us and asks what we're doing out in the middle of nowhere without a car, and our clothes all dirty to boot."

"No, come on," he said, pulling me along with him. "If we don't stop in, people are going to wonder why we're down here if we're *not* going to Club Pascal."

"If we don't go in, no one will notice we weren't here."

"It's not that simple," he said, pushing me through the door. "You can't prove a negative proposition. You could never prove that no one missed you. Only that no one admitted it."

He had a point. He also offered to buy a round, which clinched the deal. "Two Backwash Stouts and a bowl of hash," he called out. He pulled out a small clay pipe and set it on the bar.

The bartender, whose rippling arms were tattooed with scenes from Mr. More's *Utopia*, set the beers down hard enough to make them foam out the neck. Reaching under the counter she produced a dark brown lump of hash the size of her fist. She pulled a double-bladed knife from her belt and started shaving off slivers in front of Johann. "Say when."

Johann loaded up the pipe, then set an equivalent amount aside. He passed it to me for the first toke, which made my head spin.

"Direct from Brazil, " the tattooed bartender said, pronouncing the word "Bray-zil."

"Brazil?" I said, imagining the beaches of Rio.

"Yep, right up the road in Brazil, Indiana." She took a hit and passed it to

Johann. "So what brings you folks down here by the river tonight? Got some business in these parts?"

I choked, then faked a coughing fit to cover my shock. Johann improvised. "You know, we hear all the time about the Thousand Taverns of Terre Haute. But most of the time, we go to the same thirty or forty and never see the rest. So tonight we set out to broaden our horizons. Why not start with the best?"

The flattery worked, and the waiter launched into a rendition of the long and colorful history of the casino.

"It wasn't actually founded by Blaise Pascal," she said. "Just named in his honor, as the patron saint of gamblers."

I laughed. "I guess they have a saint for everything."

"Well, Mr. Pascal is ours," she said. "And an appropriate choice he was. He made a wager that God existed. He told people, 'It's the best bet you can make. If you lose, all you've wasted is one lifetime. But if you win, you've gained eternity.'"

"Smart," I said.

"Seems so today," she said. "But during the Enlightenment, Mr. Pascal found many a taker for his wager. Betting against God became a badge of cultivated society, and Mr. Pascal was the butt of endless jokes over his one wasted life. But he had the last laugh when the Romantic era turned the game in his favor. He cashed out at quite a windfall, making him the hero of steady, play-the-long-odds gamblers."

She raised her beer-glass. "A toast to Mr. Pascal!" Around me, steins were raised, and I joined in the appreciation of the astute Mr. Pascal.

I looked around the crowded club. Opposite the bar was a large stage, where the Lefty Lyotard & the Postmodern Condition were deconstructing standards for a rambunctious audience. Off to my left, an elderly woman scored three Engels in a row on a slot machine. She jumped up and did a dialectical dance as the payoff came cascading out of the machine.

Johann sat down at a machine and started feeding it quarters. I watched for a moment, but slot machines didn't hold my interest. If I was going to gamble, I wanted a game of skill.

24.

Making my way among the flashing machines and glitzy decor of Club Pascal, I exchanged a crumpled wad of bills for chips. I walked past the roulette wheel and the blackjack tables. Philosopher's Poker was my game. I found an empty chair at a five-card draw table and placed my chips on the table.

For the first half-hour my best hand was a Historical Materialist flush, which won a small pot over three Semioticists. I watched my pile of chips dwindle. It looked to be a short night at the old gambling table.

Then, just as the band wrapped up their demolition of "The Differend," it happened – the cards I'd been waiting for. Not perfect, but two pair. I opened the betting at five dollars.

I looked over my hand – Hegel, Fichte, Bonaventure, Augustine, and Diderot. It was a no-brainer to discard the French Encyclopedist. If I could pick up either an Idealist or an Early Medieval, I'd have a full house.

Tightening my jaw to keep from betraying my emotions, I placed Diderot face-down onto the discard pile. The dealer slid me a new card. I turned it up – Schelling! I slid him in next to his fellow Idealists, clamped my jaw tighter, and tossed another ten into the pot.

Around the table, other players folded. All except one. A man with slicked-back hair and a pale green loan-shark suit studied me, then slowly looked back at his cards. He laid two cards on the discard pile and picked up his new ones, sorting them meticulously in his hand. Then he matched my ten and raised me twenty.

I hesitated. My full house was strong, but not invulnerable. He could have four Early Moderns. Or a straight flush of Logical Positivists.

But what if he was sitting on a pair of lowly Greeks? Was I going to give up a hundred-dollar pot because I couldn't see through a bluff?

"See it or fold," the dealer said. I looked at my cards again as if expecting them to advise me. Augustine stared back, and I felt a bit guilty for squandering my time gambling when I should be studying. I made a mental note to spend some of my winnings on a good fountain pen, which would doubtless inspire me to study more. With a deep breath, I tossed my last twenty into the pot. "I call."

Shark-suit tilted his head slightly, then fanned his cards out. "Full house, Existentialists on top."

Ah! So close! I slapped my full house down on the table, knowing that his Existentialists trumped my Idealists. I watched grimly as he raked in my hard-earned cash. I still had a few dollars in my pocket, but I figured I better save it for the ride home. I pushed my chair away from the table.

Johann was glued to the slot machine where I'd left him. "I'm getting the system down," he said without looking at me. "I've been keeping count, and I'm due for a payoff in just 89 more quarters."

"How much money do you have now?"

He counted his quarters. "Twenty-two dollars, exactly."

"Come on," I said, taking his arm and hoisting him to his feet. "We need it for a cab back to town."

"My odds!" He flung his arms out toward the machine as I dragged him away. "Just 89 more plays and I'd have it!"

25.

Johann didn't physically resist as I pulled him away from the slot machine. Instead he contorted his face, wringing his hands and casting his tormented gaze back toward the machine in apparent hope that I would relent out of sheer embarrassment.

I shook my head and waved goodbye to the bartender, who smiled sadly. "Don't forget your pipe," she called out to Johann.

At the sight of his clay pipe, Johann snapped out of his trance. "Right, thanks," he said as he accepted it from her. "See you next time."

He led the way out the door as if nothing had happened. "Nice place, eh?" He reached in his pocket and pulled out a fistful of quarters. "Glad I saved these," he said. "Let's get a cab."

We were silent on the ride home. I reckoned my losses, while Johann hummed the love theme from *Abelard & Heloise*. The cab dropped us at the edge of campus near the police substation.

"Want to get a late dinner?" I said. "I was thinking I might walk over to Logico's."

"No, I've got some things I need to do," he said.

"Come on, we'll grab a quick meal and call it a day. I need to do some studying, anyway."

But as he had the evening before, Johann demurred, citing vague obligations. I studied his downcast face, wondering what was behind his obfuscation. A secret love-tryst? Or something more sinister? Was he avoiding Logico's? Was I missing something here?

Well, clearly I was missing *something*. Like the solution to the mystery, among other things. And I couldn't ignore Johann's possible role. Just because he'd lent me a hand with burning the telltale sweatshirt, I couldn't eliminate him as a suspect in Mr. Testascrittore's death.

Yet circumstances just as easily pointed to several others. Mr. Denkenschnelle had certainly been acting oddly. Mr. Dascapitali had an obvious motive. And what about other professors? I hadn't even met some of them.

Then there was the inscrutable Perkins, who'd gotten himself appointed to manage Mr. Grosskase's live-in healthcare team.

Was I the only one concerned about Perkins' motivation in securing the position at such a sensitive moment? What did he know about health care management?

And the police? They'd been awfully eager to declare Mr. Testascrittore's death an "accident" and close the case. Look how agitated the detective got today when I so much as broached the topic. We could be looking at a cover-up.

Were they all in it together? Was it a giant conspiracy of the entire faculty and custodial staff and police department?

Or was I getting lost in the possibilities?

I needed to apply Ockham's Razor – to seek the simplest explanation that required the fewest unprovable assumptions. Let go of all the wild possibilities and focus on the simplest theory.

Of course, as Mr. Ockham well knew, the simplest theory wasn't necessarily correct – but it was a sensible place to begin.

While I was at it, I could apply my own recently-minted principle of intellectual economy, Harrison's Toenail Clipper, which I might modestly note has achieved the most significant advance in Scholastic methodology since Mr. Ockham first used his intellectual razor to shave away Gothic excesses in the fourteenth century.

Harrison's Toenail Clipper, simply put, is an Analytic device for paring away moribund excrescences from older theories.

And what better moment than now for clipping away the moribund toenails of my theories about who murdered Mr. Testascrittore?

I thought over the list of suspects. Were they all dead toenails? Wasn't I getting distracted? Just a few hours ago, I'd been sure the clues were pointing to Mr. Zeitenschreiber.

After all, it seemed little short of certain that he was the intruder at the villa, and therefore quite possible that he had found and appropriated the second manuscript.

Even more, as a fellow Existentialist – albeit a dyed-in-the-Alpine-wool Heideggerian – he above all others seemed positioned to adopt Mr. Testascrittore's proof of existence as his own creation.

Quite plausible. But the entire chain of reasoning rested on one assumption – that he was in fact in possession of the second manuscript.

I had to find some way to get that information out of him. Face it, dinner and studying were going to have to wait. Even though it was approaching midnight, I needed to find Mr. Zeitenschreiber and have a little chat.

26.

My destination was The Vienna in the Historic Latin Quarter Preservation District, where Mr. Zeitenschreiber had held court the previous evening. If he wasn't there, they might know where he could be found.

Not that I planned to confront him directly. I didn't have sufficient evidence for an accusation.

But with circumstantial clues pointing toward him, I had to act quickly. If Mr. Zeitenschreiber was in possession of the revised manuscript, nothing would stop him from publishing the proof as his own creation. His fame would skyrocket, and like Mr. Testascrittore before him, he would become the pride (and primary fundraiser) of the Institute.

If, following his apotheosis, I stepped forward and charged him with the break-in and manuscript theft, he could mobilize the immense resources of the Institute to crush me. I'd probably be arrested myself, based on the Wanted posters. And that could ultimately lead to charges of murder, which I might well find impossible to refute.

The noose was tightening. The moment to act was now, before Mr. Zeitenschreiber had a chance to perpetrate the fraud.

Even more than the manuscript question, I needed to get clear whether Mr. Zeitenschreiber was the killer, or simply the lucky beneficiary of an unexpected turn of events. My first instinct was to believe the thief to be the murderer. But did I have any evidence to back that up?

I reviewed what little I knew, looking for some sign pointing to either Mr. Zeitenschreiber or to Mr. Heidegger, his mentor. The foot pointing to Mr. Copleston's *History* indicated the final volume, which included Mr. Heidegger. But it covered dozens of other thinkers and tendencies as well – a virtual potpourri of contemporary philosophers..

What about the other clue – the bloodstained copy of *Being and Nothingness*? Of course, I had no proof that this had anything whatsoever to do with the killer. Maybe Mr. Testascrittore was simply holding the book when he was killed. It could be a giant red herring.

But what if it wasn't? The book lay open to the chapter on "Time," in which Mr. Sartre made the unusual suggestion that the "present" was actually Nothingness – the present was a "moment of Nothingness" between the past and the future, each of which was a plenum of being.

Thus we could say, "the past *was* such and such, or the future *will be* thus and so." But all that could be said of the present was negative – the present is not an extension of time, it does not endure, etc.

Very clever. And very derivative. Mr. Heidegger's *Being and Time* laid out much the same idea in characteristically turgid German fifteen years prior to Mr. Sartre's publication of the eminently readable *Being and Nothingness*.

Was this the motive for Mr. Testascrittore's murder? Did the bloodstained book mutely accuse Mr. Zeitenschreiber of perpetrating the crime in a fit of pique at the Sartrean appropriation of Mr. Heidegger's conception of Time?

Was this the final clue I'd been seeking?

A block ahead, I saw the The Vienna.

The moment had come for a showdown.

27.

As I crossed the street, an unexpected obstacle confronted me. Halfway up the block, authorities from the Temple of Logic had set up a check point. Was a procession coming through, or was this an encroachment of

Temple security into the Historic Latin Quarter Preservation District?

Given my status as a wanted fugitive, I figured I'd better steer clear in either case.

Ahead of me, a young woman tried to get past the roadblock. Apparently she lacked the proper credentials. A guard in Temple regalia shoved her with his truncheon: "Get away from here, and don't let me catch you prowling again!"

She protested that she had simply forgotten her ID card, but the guard lifted his riot club. She backed away, muttering about notifying city authorities. The guard slid his baton back into his belt and laughed derisively. "Come back when you've got proper identification."

Thinking ahead to the day when I might visit the Temple of Logic, I was tempted to query the guard as to what sort of credentials would be acceptable. But I figured it was best not to interact with security personnel.

I headed back around the block and soon arrived at The Vienna.

The place was packed. But unlike the previous night the mood was somber, almost funereal. No music was playing, and the pool table was idle. People sat or stood in little clumps talking quietly. A man near me wiped a tear from his eye.

I stepped up to the circular bar. "What's going on?" I asked.

"Haven't you heard?" the bartender said. "Mr. Zeitenschreiber is dead."

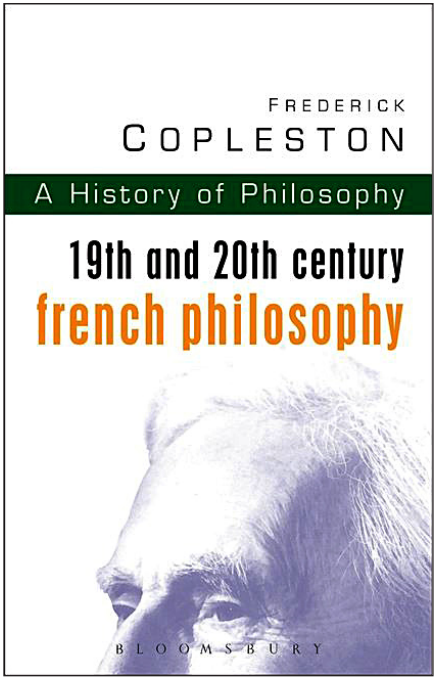
"No..."

"Yes – he was found with his skull crushed by the *Oxford One-Volume Encyclopedia of Philosophy*."

"My God, that's terrible," I said. My knees felt weak, and I leaned onto the bar for support. "When did it happen?"

"His body was found an hour ago – in Mr. Testascrittore's office."

Q.E.D.



Copleston's history series repackaged for a regional market.

Chapter Four

1.

Mr. Zeitenschreiber's untimely death occupied my troubled yet inquisitive mind as I stirred up a big glass of Ovaltine that evening.

The police were calling Mr. Zeitenschreiber's death an accident, but I knew better. He died in precisely the same place as Mr. Testascrittore. Both victims were deeply concerned with questions of existence. And in each case, the skull had been crushed by a heavy, blunt object.

My first instinct was to suspect a serial murderer.

But on closer consideration I realized that the modus operandi were entirely different. Whereas Mr. Testascrittore had been killed by the *Cambridge Compleat Dictionary of Philosophy (Unabridged)*, Mr. Zeitenschreiber met his fate at the hands of the *Oxford One-Volume Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Given the centuries of bitter philosophical enmity between the schools, two more disparate instruments of death could hardly be imagined. A nuanced reading of the clues virtually ruled out a serial killer.

Then it struck me – Mr. Zeitenschreiber might have killed Mr. Testascrittore, and then been snuffed in a revenge killing. Had he been caught in the crossfire of a philosophical turf war?

The history of philosophy is a sorry tale of factional rivalries resulting in

sackings, exile, and even death.

Thomism was the intellectual Mafia of its day, and Mr. Aquinas's Dominican cadre exercised the full power of the Holy Inquisition in later times. Disagreeing with the Thomists on a point of logic was not a mere academic dispute.

The very name of Mr. Hegel, a leading university professor whose system formed the backbone of academic philosophy in nineteenth-century Germany, struck terror into the hearts of generations of philosophy students.

Or take Mr. Aristotle, founder of Greece's leading philosophical academy. So dominant was his thought that many works attributed to him are probably lecture notes transcribed by students, who took his word as truth and preserved every scrap, including such statements as: "The heavier an object, the faster it will fall."

Two thousand years later, Mr. Galileo questioned that assertion, along with the Aristotelean "fact" that the Earth was the center of the universe.

His inquiry ran afoul of the Inquisition and he was placed on trial for his life. Mr. Aquinas's descendants prevailed, Mr. Galileo recanted, and the Earth resumed its rightful place at the center of all being and meaning, where it has remained to this day.

Yes, the Institutional Team boasts an imposing line-up, augmented by the likes of Mr. Bonaventure, Mr. Skinner, and of course the versatile Mr. Kant. All wielded institutional means for compelling conformity with their views.

But the opera's not over until everyone regardless of gender or body type completes their final aria. Leading off for the home team we have Mr. Rousseau, vagabond critic of society and culture. He had not a single student, and was persecuted intermittently by the established authorities and incessantly by his own conscience.

Mr. Voltaire's conscience gave him greater liberty, but the authorities so harassed him that he lived his later years a short gallop from the Swiss border lest the King of France renew his offer of state accommodations in the Bastille.

Mr. Spinoza comes to mind, the geometry-intoxicated Dutchman who declined university positions and labored as a lens-grinder to maintain his philosophical independence.

And lest we forget – Mr. Socrates – badgered by the Sophists and other professional philosophers of Athens and finally put to death by the authorities for his ceaseless questioning of society and religion.

Down through Western history, certain philosophers have wielded an enforcement division. Whether state, church, or the imposing edifice of academia, powerful institutions have buttressed their definition of reality.

Other thinkers were free agents, relying on the power of truth and the clarity of their ideas to carry the day.

Had Mr. Zeitenschreiber gotten caught in the feuding? How could I even begin to unravel this new twist? I'd need to understand every interpersonal dynamic in the entire Institute.

I could only think of two people I could turn to – Mr. Grosskase and Johann. And neither was beyond suspicion – at this point, no one was.

Not even me. I couldn't shake my nagging doubts. I'd been in town a week, and two of my professors had died mysteriously.

Not to mention the Berkeley sweatshirt on the Wanted poster. Who wouldn't be suspicious? Face it, if I knew what I knew about myself, I'd certainly be suspicious of me.

But was I supposed to take the accusations lying down? Even though I wasn't certain of my innocence, I owed it to the Kantian Ideas of Truth and Justice to mount the strongest possible defense.

And the best defense was a solid offense. Apprehending the murderer would be the surest way to clear my own name.

The revised manuscript. Was that the key? Maybe someone besides me wanted the second manuscript and killed Mr. Zeitenschreiber to get it.

But why was the body found in Mr. Testascrittore's office? Why would Mr. Zeitenschreiber have gone back there, except to continue the search? Maybe he'd never found the second manuscript after all...

If he didn't have it, where could it be? A safe-deposit box didn't make sense – Mr. Testascrittore would have needed his latest version handy for editing. It must be at either the villa or his office.

I'd examined Mr. Testascrittore's office, and Mr. Zeitenschreiber had apparently searched it twice, with no evident result.

That threw the onus back on the villa. In between classes the next day, I needed to pay another visit.

2.

Once in bed I tossed and turned, plagued by the Sartrean doubt planted earlier in the day. Considering that in the present I was supposed to be a sheer nothingness, I sure felt weighed down by the world.

A cold breeze stirred through the garret. I started to close the window, when a spectre floating across the room sent me diving back beneath the covers.

Over near the doorframe a vaporous tableau took shape – a well-dressed man of the Victorian era and an old grey draft-horse. The man appeared to be talking intimately to the animal, patting it affectionately and sharing a quiet laugh.

"Begging your pardon," I called in a shaky voice, hoping to ward off the apparition. "This is not a stable. I pay rent for this garret, and I think I deserve a bit of consideration."

My ethereal visitor left the horse and made his way over toward my futon. A droopy black moustache covered his mouth. Rings beneath his dark eyes bespoke untimely meditations that transcended philosophy.

"Mr. Nietzsche?"

"'Tis I," he said in a voice that wavered uneasily between levity and despair. "I stand and wait, surrounded by broken tablets half-covered with writing. When will my hour come? First the signs must come: the laughing lion with the flock of doves. Meanwhile I talk to myself. Nobody tells me anything new. So I tell myself."

I nodded to reassure the beleaguered spirit. "I often find that talking to myself leads to the most interesting conversations."

He didn't seem to notice my words. "When I came here, I found people laboring under the old conceit that they have long known what is good and evil. Whoever wants to sleep well talks of good and evil before going to bed."

"Not me," I said. "In fact, I often listen to audio recordings of your books and they put me right to sleep. You should try it."

Mr. Nietzsche hovered over the foot of the bed. I wished he would hold still. But I figured it was better not to mention it on our first encounter. I'd heard that he was a bit unstable, and I didn't want to set him off.

"Is there something I can help you with?" I asked, hoping he might take the hint and move along. "Otherwise, I need to get some sleep, if it's okay

with you and your horse."

He wailed. The grey nag thrashed about. Mr. Nietzsche hurried over and soothed the animal, stroking its head and whispering gentle nothings in its ear.

I was tempted to suggest that the horse might not want to remain cooped up in a narrow garret. But before I could decide, Mr. Nietzsche floated back over by my futon.

"I bade them overthrow their academic chairs wherever that old conceit of good and evil prevailed. I bade them laugh at their great masters of virtue and at their gloomy sages. I sat down in the cemetery among cadavers and vultures, and I laughed at their history and its rotting, decaying glory."

I spoke slowly, trying to sound sympathetic. "You know, sir, it's interesting points you make, but talking to total strangers in the middle of the night about rotted corpses, particularly when their academic sponsor may have in all likelihood so recently been brutally murdered, is not generally recognized as a good opening line. It's sort of off-putting."

He drifted close, staring past me. "Ah me! I fly to distant futures which no dream has yet seen, where gods in their dances are ashamed of clothes – to speak in parables and to limp and stagger like a poet. And verily, I am ashamed that I must still be a poet."

I reached out to pat him on the shoulder, but my hand met only vapor. "Hey, no one's perfect," I said, pulling my hand back and trying not to appear disconcerted.

The apparition began to recede, drifting back toward the horse and growing fainter. Suddenly I realized Mr. Nietzsche might have come to me with a message. "Wait! Don't you have something more to tell me?"

To my relief, he floated back toward me: "You must strive to go under. You are a bridge and not an end. You are something that is to be overcome. Like the sun, you must go under."

"But the sun rises again," I said. "Is that your point?"

"Searching for a 'point' must go under."

"This is getting really complicated," I said.

Mr. Nietzsche leveled his harrowed eyes at me. "I strive constantly to make philosophy more complicated," he said. "I leave it to the professors to make philosophy simple and easy to comprehend – a Sunday afternoon

pastime. Only that which is difficult is worthy of our admiration."

He drifted back toward the horse and began adjusting its halter, taking care to calm the animal. Knowing our time was short, I called anxiously after him: "What am I supposed to do? I'm trying to solve a murder that everyone else thinks was an accident. And now my top suspect turns up dead. What should I do?"

Taking the horse's lead rope, he turned back to me. "Proclaim yourself blessed in the evening, as the path to a new dawn."

3.

I felt anything but blessed as I woke to the alarm clock. Sitting up, I looked out the window at the dingy concrete wall of the adjacent building.

I slapped the doze button and laid back in bed. Another school day here in Terre Haute. How my heart longed for Berkeley, for sunny strolls down Telegraph Avenue and quiet afternoons playing guitar along Strawberry Creek. Did anyone in Terre Haute schedule time for such frivolities?

A mouse scurried across my garret floor. I made a mental note to find a cat. Maybe there was a stray that I could condition to climb up to the top floor and perform rodent-control functions.

My Behaviorist experiments with Watson, my Berkeley timeshare, had convinced me that such conditioning was a mutual benefit. Not only did the cat get free handouts just for stopping by and doing mouse patrol. I also taught my feline familiar some valuable lifetime skills.

When I left Berkeley, the new tenant inherited my share of the cat. Last I heard, it was working out well – the new tenant had quit their job and dropped all their classes to devote full attention to Watson's every need.

Such an outcome, while laudable from the vantage point of animal rights, goes a long way toward explaining why Mr. Skinner chose to work with pigeons instead of cats.

I pulled myself out of bed and splashed water on my face. Fifteen minutes to get to class. I hadn't done any of the reading – I wasn't even sure what the assignment was – but I figured I better show up and get back in stride.

The memory of talking with Mr. Nietzsche rattled around the edges of my mind. What had come over me that I was spending my precious sleep time talking with philosophers and their horses?

Too much stress. What with uprooting myself from my quiet California home and stepping into the maelstrom of Terre Haute, acclimating to a far more demanding academic schedule – and then having my philosophical mentor die violently within days after my arrival – no wonder I was feeling stressed.

I considered making an appointment at the campus health clinic. But my history with the medical profession was not such as to inspire the highest regard.

Back during my days at dear old USB, they had a student health-care program which mainly involved not getting sick and/or exercising autonomous self-care as training for a lifetime in the gritty modern world.

However, to ensure that they didn't get a bunch of malingerers, they made you take a basic exam before you qualified for the treatment plan.

I showed up at the office a bit winded from climbing seventeen flights of stairs but otherwise in the pink of health.

Or so I thought. The doctor took my pulse, temperature, and eye-movement quotient. He stuck one of those pointy light things in my ears, then made me gag a few times. He looked at me, then studied the charts.

"According to my calculations, you're running a dangerously high fever."

I put my palm on my forehead. "I don't feel a fever."

"No – it appears that your circulation is so bad that it's balancing out to a perfect 98.6."

I gulped. "Do you think I'm going to be okay?"

"Only time will tell," the doctor said. "As long as you don't die, I think you'll make it."

To make a long story short, I apparently didn't die, and now here I was in Terre Haute, facing a daunting academic schedule.

I should focus on my own responsibilities – getting to class and keeping up on my assignments. Where had all my sleuthing gotten me, anyway? My most diligent efforts weren't going to bring Mr. Testascrittore back from the grave.

Of course, with Mr. Zeitenschreiber also dead and the killer still at large, it was difficult to relax and focus on epistemology. I'd never had the greatest concentration in the first place, and a couple of murders threw me completely off stride.

I had little choice. If I wanted to get my focus back on my schoolwork, I needed to clear up the mystery first.

But before that, I actually needed to get to class first.

My head spun round. Grasping for an anchor, I felt a sudden urge to immerse myself in the noble strains of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony – considered by musicologists to be, along with Rainbow Connection, one of the two greatest works in Western musical history.

With class looming there was no way I could sit down and listen to the renowned symphony.

Fortunately during my years at USB I audited a course in Contemporary Sonic Access which taught us the latest techniques for dealing with the vast profusion of music in today's cluttered aural world.

With the explosion of recorded works in the new millennium, musical frustration was rising to desperate levels. Critics listening 24 hours a day to a constantly changing playlist could sample no more than a tiny fraction of the available releases, rendering their annual "Best Of" lists utterly useless.

In response to the crisis, the Musicanomological Department at USB developed a set of protocols known as Multiple Source Manipulation which allowed even amateur listeners to take in not one song every three minutes, but hundreds of songs within a minute.

Techniques included playing up to a thousand songs at the same time (popular at freestyle dance parties), medleys consisting of snippets of one song after another, and my personal favorite, signitive listening.

Signitive listening – following a suggestion of Mr. Husserl – involved experiencing music as the barest of signs, not as a full, nuanced sequence of sonic micro-events.

Signitive listening required that one already have heard and responded to a piece of music, so that a mere "sign" could call back the work in its entirety. In advanced practitioners, merely glancing at an old vinyl album cover might be sufficient to reawaken all of the music contained therein.

Lacking the time for a proper old-school listen to Beethoven's Fifth, I decided to give it a quick signitive spin.

Drawing a breath, I settled my weight evenly on my feet, stretching my backbone tall. On a second breath, I pronounced the invocation: "Beethoven's Fifth – be here now!"

On a third inhale, my breast swelled and flowed with the myriad emotions stirred by the famed opus.

With a final exhale I released the symphony and felt the closing chord of the fourth movement echoing in my soul as I departed for class.

Refreshed, I headed across campus at a brisk clip, contemplating my next move. With the number one suspect now the number two victim, I needed a fresh strategy.

And I needed it fast. Regardless of who was responsible for the first two murders – whether it was a single killer or a back-and-forth blood feud – death could strike again at any moment.

4.

As I approached the Albertus Magnus Empirical Metaphysics Building, I formulated my plan: drop in on my Analytics class and see if Mr. Denkenschnelle was behaving suspiciously. Then visit Johann and find a subtle way to question him on his recent whereabouts. Then head for the villa and search for the second manuscript.

When I got to class, Mr. Denkenschnelle was nowhere to be seen. The students were clustered in little groups, talking in loud whispers about Mr. Zeitenschreiber's death. Everyone seemed to have a theory, mostly involving a fugitive from the Terre Haute Hospital for the Heuristically Impaired.

Campus scuttlebutt whispered that an inmate had escaped a few days earlier and had been spotted lurking around the Institute. No one could actually give a description of the fugitive, which compounded the general fear and malaise.

As I took a seat at the back of the classroom, people's heads turned my direction. As quickly as I made eye contact, they would look away. Their muttering got lower, and finally I felt compelled to stand and declare that I had only recently come to Terre Haute, and had never even set foot in the state hospital.

I employed my most eloquent voice, augmenting it with elaborate gestures and culminating in a long sigh to indicate an essential weariness of the burden of my peers' suspicions.

When I sat down again, even more people were staring.

Not that it was the first time people had thought I was a bit daft. My poor distracted mother led that parade, reckoning me a lunatic for moving away from our hometown.

But so far as I knew, she had never suspected me of being an insane serial murderer.

Speaking of hometowns and death, how did Athens get this great reputation as the home of Western philosophy? A city that executed Mr. Socrates and drove Mr. Aristotle into exile? Some home!

The door of the classroom opened. Who should step in but Perkins, followed by a police officer. "We've come to share some sad news," Perkins said in a voice that cracked with tension. "I suppose all of you have heard by now that Mr. Zeitenschreiber died last night. I want to introduce Officer Narckenstein, who has a few words for you."

Officer Narckenstein cleared his throat. "First, I offer my sincerest condolences. I'm here to assuage any concerns that this tragedy was the result of foul play. My department has investigated the matter thoroughly, and it is our definitive conclusion that the death was accidental. Apparently Mr. Zeitenschreiber was pulling the *Oxford Encyclopedia* from a shelf in Mr. Testascrittore's office and met his tragic fate when the book tumbled down and crushed his skull."

Students gasped at the graphic recounting. Officer Narckenstein raised his hand for silence. "One of the top construction firms in the tri-county area has already been engaged to make necessary adjustments to the shelves. I want to assure you that every effort is being taken to insure the safety of faculty and staff at the Institute, and that soon you will be able to approach any shelf in search of any dictionary with complete assurance that your skull will not be crushed."

Perkins stepped in front of the officer. "So you see, there is nothing to worry about. Classes will proceed as usual, and the date for a memorial service and the unveiling of Mr. Zeitenschreiber's plaque will be announced next week."

He spun on his heels and marched out of the room, followed by Officer Narckenstein. Conversations resumed, but I noticed that fewer glances were directed my way.

Had people swallowed it? Did anyone believe for a moment that Mr. Zeitenschreiber's death was accidental? I pictured Perkins standing smugly alongside Officer Narckenstein. Were he and the police in on a

massive cover-up?

Or had Perkins pulled the wool over the police's eyes?

Was Perkins the mastermind of the epistemological murders? Behind the slow-witted face was a serial killer's brain lurking?

5.

As Perkins and the officer exited, Mr. Denkenschnelle entered. The short, rotund man strode to the front of the room and with much fanfare inscribed *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* across the lower portion of the chalkboard.

At first I was surprised that Mr. Denkenschnelle so avidly plunged ahead with class in the wake of the tragic death of another of his colleagues.

But I could see the reasoning – if classes were cancelled whenever a faculty member died, we'd have professors getting bumped off every time someone hadn't adequately prepared for an exam.

I wondered if surviving faculty would be especially tough on us in the aftermath of the two deaths. Kind of like mass aversion therapy. Probably not a bad idea.

Still the vehemence with which Mr. Denkenschnelle announced the day's discussion surprised me.

"Please open your *Tractatus* to paragraph 6.431!"

Wouldn't you know it, I'd forgotten to bring my copy.

Luckily, I'd memorized the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* one summer when I worked at a camp for kids from broken homes. We taught them basic plumbing, sheet-rocking, and a spot of welding, then sent them back to fix their homes.

It was a rigorous program run by dissident Cartesian nuns, and we were allowed to bring just one book. Most of the staff naturally chose annotated versions of Mr. Descartes' *Meditations*, but I wanted to travel lighter, so I selected Mr. Early Wittgenstein's 74-page classic.

Perhaps I felt a tad guilty about neglecting Mr. Descartes, the progenitor of modern rationalism. I recalled a solemn pledge I'd made that long-ago summer, poring over the *Tractatus* – if ever I got the opportunity to actually take a class on Mr. Early Wittgenstein, I would spend at least half of my time reading Mr. Descartes.

Satisfied that the majority of people had found the correct page, Mr. Denkenschnelle began a dramatic rendition:

"Paragraph 6.431: Death is not an event in life. We do not live to experience death."

I sat bolt upright. Was "death" the usual starting place for grasping Mr. Wittgenstein's thought?

Even if it was, the philosophical aspects of the matter were less than entirely clear and distinct. How could you be sure you wouldn't experience your own death if it hadn't yet happened? It hardly seemed like consistent empiricism.

As Mr. Denkenschnelle expanded on his opening remarks, the frustration continued to gnaw at me. I hated to interrupt him so early in his lecture, but neither did I want to repress my innate intellectual curiosity.

"Excuse me, sir," I said, half-raising my hand to indicate that I was not actually interrupting, but posing a clarifying question. "How can I, who have never yet died, know that those who *have* died did not experience their deaths? Where would I get that knowledge?"

Mr. Denkenschnelle looked dumbfounded. "Why, right here in the *Tractatus*."

"But if you've never experienced death, by what means will you verify that proposition?"

"Because 'experiencing death' is logically impossible, given the meaning of the words. If one has 'died,' then by definition you no longer have any experiences."

"But you're assuming that you know what death means and entails," I said. "How could anyone know the meaning of 'death' until they go through it?"

"I'm discussing the meaning of death for us, the living."

"What value can that have?" I threw my arms wide, palms upward, to emphasize the magnitude of my question. "For those of us who have never died, death is a phantom, a scarecrow, a grim joke." I clutched my chest with one hand, elevating the other as I continued. "How can we mere proto-mortals possibly believe that our puny meanings compare with the grandeur of the truly dead?"

Several people were taking notes on what I'd said, although it was probably less a compliment than a compulsion. But most of the class seemed unsympathetic.

Still, I felt constrained by the interests of academic claritude to pursue the point a bit further. I couldn't ignore the thematic connection of the lecture to recent events. Was Mr. Denkenschnelle simply taking advantage of people's momentary interest in death to spice up his lecture, or was he involuntarily telegraphing his involvement in his colleagues' murders?

"Suppose that experience is the font of all knowledge," I said, then paused dramatically. "How then can we claim to know anything at all about death? How can we even talk about it?"

Mr. Denkenschnelle cocked his head. "We learn to use this word like we do any other – by observation. We see other beings die, and from that infer our own eventual death. The fact that we have a word for it shows that we have experienced death."

"We have words for plenty of other things that we've never experienced," I said.

"Yes," he said as he turned back to his lecture notes, "and that propensity of language gets us in trouble all the time." He winked at the front row, which let loose with a round of appreciative laughter.

I wanted to respond, but my classmates seemed restless for more of the Denkenschnellegian discourse, so I reluctantly took my seat.

As the lecture resumed, I scowled to myself. "It's a cheap shot against language," I muttered under my breath. "When no other argument holds water, slander language."

"It's not so cut and dried," came a voice from my left. I turned to see Mr. Later Wittgenstein slouching back in the desk-chair filing his nails. Had his words not seemed to respond to mine, I would have thought he didn't notice me.

Up front, oblivious to Mr. Later Wittgenstein, Mr. Denkenschnelle settled into his lecture on the spirit's Early avatar.

My guest yawned as if he'd heard it all before. He looked over at me, hard eyes perched beneath wavy brown hair.

"Language is hardly innocent," Mr. Later Wittgenstein said. "It can clarify, but it also deludes. Philosophical analysis is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language."

His phrases were so euphonious that I was tempted to nod along. But something didn't sit right. "With all respect, sir, that's an *argumentarius self-contradictarius*. You're using language to communicate your denial of

language's ability to communicate."

He studied his nails, then looked me in the eye. "I'm not saying we can never communicate. But language often strays from reality without giving us any signal. The classic problems of philosophy arise when language takes an unannounced vacation."

I frowned. If what Mr. Later Wittgenstein said was true, why was I spending my time analyzing what the various suspects were saying?

If language was so unreliable, what about clues that were expressed in language? And what chance would I have of communicating my discoveries to the reluctant authorities?

How could I afford *not* to trust language?

6.

Seated in the back row of my Analytics class I looked over at Mr. Later Wittgenstein. "I still think you're scapegoating language," I said. "When reality and language clash, how do we know that it's language taking the vacation? Surely reality could use a little vacation now and then. Imagine having to be 'real' all the time. It would wear the best of us down."

My visitor continued his filing, using a violin-bow movement to round off the thumbnail. "Reality can't be mistaken. It is what it is, a collection of facts which hold true regardless of whether we know them or not. Philosophical problems stem from our clumsy attempts to capture this given reality in words. If we clarify our use of language, the 'perennial questions of philosophy' will wither away."

I sucked in a breath, my mind racing just ahead of my tongue. "Reality can't be reduced to a single, precise expression. It's always complicated. Meaning is inherently nuanced – which is to say, nuances are inherently meaningful. Or rather, inherences are meaningfully nuanced. Wait, I had it..."

Seeing me tying myself up in knots, Mr. Later Wittgenstein put away his nail file and stood to leave. If I were to salvage the dignity of language I had to act fast.

"Help, Mr. Copleston! Help me!"

In a flash my mentor was there. Behind him followed Mr. Gadamer, leaning hard on a cane. He was wearing a black beret and a loose-fitting

white jacket. He paused for a moment to catch his breath, then addressed Mr. Later Wittgenstein.

"I challenge the assumption underlying your view, sir – that the world is a collection of basic, pre-given 'atomic facts.' Facts are not 'given.' Facts are discovered only within a particular paradigm or framework. No fact can be perceived apart from its context, its background. The reason we can see *any* facts, and the reason we see particular facts, is that we are employing a framework, a paradigm, that discloses them. And language is part of this framework. The language with which we frame our search will determine which facts are disclosed."

"If facts are dependent on theories," said Mr. Later Wittgenstein, "and then we use those facts to substantiate the theories, we're in a vicious circle."

"Or a Hermeneutical circle," Mr. Gadamer said with a twinkle in his eye.

"You're in a circle just the same," Mr. Later Wittgenstein said bluntly.

"Better a circle than a box, sir."

Mr. Later Wittgenstein bristled. If I wanted to get any clarity, I was going to have to intervene.

"Mr. Gadamer," I said, "I'd like you to address Mr. Later Wittgenstein's point concerning a vicious circle, which I find has direct bearing on my investigations. Your Hermeneutics seem to imply that the clues I discover are being framed by my expectations that I will find precisely such clues. If 'facts' are a product of our viewpoint, how do we escape the loop?"

Mr. Gadamer shook his head. "Facts are not a 'product' of a viewpoint. Theories and viewpoints don't create facts – they *disclose* them. Facts have no meaning until we become consciousness of them, until we disclose them. The function of a paradigm or a theory is to help us to see what is in front of us. How best to disclose these truths is the Hermeneutical challenge."

"What's Hermeneutical about it?" I asked, never averse to adding a polysyllabic word to my active vocabulary.

He took a breath. "Hermeneutics is the way we approach any problem in life, whether it's a mystery to be solved or an ancient text to be unraveled. When you disclose facts – let's say for example clues about a possible murder – discovering these facts is not a result of a random search that excavates an assortment of unconnected data, which we then stack together like building blocks to create our theories."

"We see connections because the given reality itself is connected," Mr. Later Wittgenstein said. "We're simply seeing what is there."

"It's not that simple," said Mr. Gadamer. "We often have to learn how to see or hear certain things, certain nuances. We have to learn where to look. The ability to see particular aspects of reality is shaped by our paradigms, by our points of view. The disclosure of particular facts results from our theories 'shining a light in that direction.'"

Mr. Later Wittgenstein crossed his arms. "But then the 'facts' you discover are simply corroborating the theory that you already held."

"Not necessarily," said Mr. Gadamer brightly. "If we're lucky, reality comes crashing in, and what we discover is completely at odds with our pre-existing theory."

I couldn't help laughing. "That doesn't sound very lucky to me."

"Oh, but it is!" A slight smile played across Mr. Gadamer's lips. "It's how we gain new knowledge. Consider what happened when Columbus sailed westward from Spain, bound for India. Without a basic theory that the Earth was round and that India could be reached by sailing west, he and his crew never would have embarked on the expedition. But when he landed in the Caribbean, no amount of theorizing could make those islands be part of India. So following the theory disclosed the truth – and the truth forced a change in the theory. There you have it," he concluded. "Hermeneutics 101!"

"Bravo, great example," I said. Apparently I spoke the words aloud, because my classmates turned and looked at me. Mr. Denkenschnelle, for his part, seemed rather pleased with my outburst.

Mr. Gadamer doffed his beret to me. Mr. Later Wittgenstein ignored my farewell as they departed, deep in conversation.

The clock showed seven minutes till the bell. Having inadvertently ingratiated myself with Mr. Denkenschnelle, I was now uncomfortably aware that he was casting furtive glances my way, apparently in hopes that he might elicit a further exclamation.

Knowing I was on the spot, I made myself pay attention to his closing remarks, in which he restated the theme of his lecture.

"We learn of death by witnessing it in others," he said. "We see that others die, that no living being escapes its clutches – and we infer that we, too, will die."

I raised my hand slowly, not without a certain sense of drama. "I don't believe, sir, that we 'infer' death. Death is a purely personal, inner experience." I struck my fist on my breast for emphasis. "We know of death only by becoming aware of finitude in our own lives – by experiencing suffering and loss. As we slowly grasp the meaning of suffering and loss, we extend it to encompass death, the ultimate loss – not by inference, but by intuition."

Mr. Denkenschnelle's lips curled in a sneer. "Intuition? I believe that theory has been discredited." He turned to the chalkboard and began scrawling an elaborate equation which he insisted proved that the experience of death could not be intuitive, but must be inferential.

Around me, people diligently copied the equation into their notebooks. I started to raise the objection that in order to understand the anti-intuitive equation, you'd still need to intuit that the two sides of the equation actually were equal, and also that the equation validly applied to the current situation. No equation can prove itself true and valid.

Or could it? That would certainly be handy, if along with a proof you could certify that the proof had validly applied itself.

The problem seemed to stem from Mr. Aristotle's recognition that sooner or later, any chain of reasoning has to go back to an unprovable assumption. Any rational sequence ultimately rests on enthymemes – on statements of the form, "everyone agrees that..."

Unfortunately for Mr. Aristotle and all subsequent generations, "everyone agrees" has covered a stupendous amount of nonsense ranging from bogus physics to outright racism. As the sordid history of social logic has shown, starting from oppressive assumptions leads inexorably to oppressive conclusions.

So how would we go about constructing a chain of reasoning which does *not* depend on unproven assumptions? Various approaches have been tried.

Mr. Augustine and his followers held that it was a beneficent and omnipotent deity who guaranteed the validity of reason, and that God had granted the boon of rationality exclusively to humans so we could prosper in our divinely-appointed task of dominating the rest of creation.

The ongoing failure of humans to outwit cats long since disproved this theory.

Mr. Descartes, Mr. Spinoza, and the Early Moderns took great pains to

establish airtight logical sandcastles in which even our doubts returned to verify our proofs. Sadly, Mr. Sartre and the Existentialists washed away their foundations by questioning the existence of a doubting subject, and the rationalist castles collapsed.

Mr. Hegel postulated that all history and all human thought followed a dialectical path toward Absolute Truth, insight into which was guaranteed by philosophy's participation in the movement of Absolute Spirit. This magnificent machinery endured for barely a generation before Mr. Kierkegaard and Mr. Nietzsche conspired to hurl their wooden shoes into the gears.

In our epoch, the generous-spirited Mr. Russell and co-author Mr. Whitehead believed they had laid out once and for all the solid if somewhat arbitrary foundations of logic and human knowledge in their *Principia Mathematica*, only to find their handiwork demolished within a decade by the probing questions of Mr. Godel, who asked in essence: How can we ever be certain we have not overlooked something?

No, at the end of the day, no matter how extensive your proof, the final step requires a leap of intuition that endorses the validity and applicability of the proof. Whether it's 2 + 2 = 4 or the meaning of life, the final step must be intuitive.

At that moment, the bell rang. I sprang from my chair, slightly embarrassed to be the only person to rise. As I headed for the door, the rest of the class scribbled the final terms of Mr. Denkenschnelle's grand anti-intuitive equation.

I knew there was a risk we'd be tested on the material. But I couldn't bring myself to take it seriously. Understanding death by inference? Calculating our grasp of reality? What an absurd notion. Still, even as I pushed Mr. Denkenschnelle's Analytics out of my mind, I reminded myself of the topic of his lecture: Death.

The last professor I'd heard lecture on Death went on to experience it firsthand.

Was Mr. Denkenschnelle flirting with disaster?

Did the exponent of the coldest Analytic philosophy secretly harbor a Neo-Romantic death wish?

7.

Mr. Denkenschnelle's lecture on death made me anxious to visit Mr. Testascrittore's villa. Unfortunately, my applied metaphysics class came first. I gritted my teeth and climbed the stairs to the penthouse lab.

Our grades from the previous day's quiz were posted. Most people got between 75 and 90 percent correct. My name, however, had only an asterisk in the grade column. "See instructor."

Well, no wonder – I'd made up my answers. I sought out the lab assistant, preparing my contrite explanation.

She informed me that my results were one hundred percent correct – an outcome so statistically improbable that I was suspected of using loaded rune stones. She issued me a new set with an unbroken seal, and warned me that my future results would be carefully scrutinized.

I pursed my lips and said nothing, vowing to pay better attention from that point on. If I were charged with cheating on my metaphysical statistics, they'd run a warrant check which might connect me to the Wanted poster. One little slip-up and I could find myself in a beaker-full of hot water.

Paying attention during the interminable lab was difficult, but I had to stay with it. Skipping out would put me way behind. It was hard enough to catch up on missed lectures without trying to make up a three-hour lab session.

Back at dear old USB I mainly avoided lab classes. The notion of working three hours for one hour of credit aggravated my latent Marxian tendencies.

Who was appropriating the two hours of surplus labor? Didn't the student proletariat deserve the full fruits of our intellectual efforts?

One semester, though, I couldn't avoid it. I was majoring in Competitive Religions, where we examined various spiritual traditions to see which one would win in a fair fight.

The program commenced with a biblical studies course that included a mandatory lab component. Although the course was required, you got to choose between Old and New Testament studies.

The Old Testament textbook was massive, since you had to master not only the entire Hebrew canon, but also all relevant Talmudic commentaries plus the magical Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses.

Jesus, on the other hand, tended toward pithy pronouncements such as "Love thy neighbor," "Turn the other cheek," and "Don't eat meat on Fridays." Further, He authored no extant books on celestial magic or demonic invocations.

Christ's brevity has long endeared Him to those with better things to do than read textbooks, and nearly clinched the issue.

The only hitch was New Testament Practicum, which included a Martyrdom Intensive.

It wasn't as gruesome as it sounds. You didn't actually have to get crucified or ripped apart by circus animals, although that was the surest way to get an A.

But the alternative – interning as a galley slave – took several years to complete, and I was anxious to move ahead with my education.

So I cleared my schedule and pitched into the Old Testament curriculum, suffering through Constitutional Decalogics, Extrapolatory Nomonomics, and Pentateuchal Numerosophy (where you analyze the chapter and verse numbers, ignoring the cumbersome words around them).

Sacred Mountain Climbing and Stone Tablet Smashing were more enjoyable, and Prophetic Public Speaking proved invaluable, particularly the prophetic gesturing exercises, which I have subsequently found many occasions to employ.

Old Testament Practicum taught the best way to kill a fatted calf, how properly to gird one's loins, and key survival skills for wandering in the desert for years on end.

The most tantalizing aspect was the final exam, which required you to know a classmate in the biblical sense.

Some of my fellow students dedicated the entire semester to preparatory research, but I followed my usual pattern of last-minute cramming, dropping by the Bacchian Orgies right before finals in hopes of scoring a good grade.

Sadly, my social skills were a tad rusty, and despite my most ardent efforts, I wound up taking an Incomplete in the class.

8.

The rest of the lab was uneventful. I was a bit distracted by my upcoming investigations, and I wasn't entirely certain of the purpose of the experiment. Thankfully my partners seemed competent, and I was content to sign off on their results.

Finally the bell rang out our freedom. Now to get down to the real work.

The villa was first on my list. I needed to go right away if I was to make it back in time for my Hermeneutics class.

Recalling the vicious Anaximander, I grabbed a box of deluxe dog biscuits, then hurried down South Sixth, leaving the shopping district behind as I entered mansion row.

On my previous visit I was too focused to appreciate the neighboring architecture. Now, even as I picked up my step, I couldn't help admiring the buildings: a baroque chateau, a faux-Medieval castle with moat and drawbridge, a thatch-roofed cottage with an operating windmill. Mr. Testascrittore's Roman villa blended right in.

As I approached the villa, I surveyed the grounds through the cast-iron fence. No sign of Anaximander or the gardener. My pebble was still in the gate-latch, which opened freely. I wondered whether the gardener would recognize me. At least I'd gotten rid of my tell-tale Berkeley sweatshirt.

First, I had to be sure no one was home. That brought me to a standstill. If I'd learned anything in the past few days, it was that I couldn't prove that something didn't exist – only that I hadn't found it. The chances of proving the house's emptiness seemed nil. I was going to have to devise a pragmatic test to satisfy my skepticism.

After intense thought, I settled on a plan. I rang the bell, then pounded frantically on the door as if trying to rouse the victims of a fire. I figured at the very least they'd peak out from behind a curtain. But I saw nothing.

I walked around back and tried the same tactic. Nothing. So far, so good. Even if someone was inside, they'd probably hide from an intruder out of sheer social embarrassment at not having answered the door.

The door was locked. I tried opening the porch window with no luck. Time to take more drastic measures. I found a fist-sized rock and cracked a windowpane on the back door. Reaching through I unbolted it and stepped in.

The interior surprised me. The spartan modern decor clashed with the

classical exterior architecture. Track lighting and tubular furniture dotted the large rooms, where Mr. Testascrittore reportedly had lived alone.

I made my way through the villa as if traversing a dreamscape: an exercise room, a small movie theater, an massage studio, a bowling alley. All were sparsely furnished and meticulously maintained. Nowhere did I see anything so out-of-place as a stack of papers. I checked cupboards and drawers, but they were nearly empty. Even a search under the mattress turned up nothing more exciting than a few well-thumbed books of Archaic Greek nudes.

At the end of a long hallway I found what appeared to be Mr. Testascrittore's office. All of the clutter in the entire house seemed to have coalesced in this one room. Papers were strewn everywhere. Most were covered with Mr. Testascrittore's nearly-illegible scrawl, making collation next to impossible.

Mr. Zeitenschreiber must have been here on his visit, I realized, and given the place a thorough going-over. How was I going to find the manuscript if it was lost in this mess?

If Mr. Zeitenschreiber had thrown the papers around like this, he must have been pretty sure they weren't part of the manuscript. But I had to take a look for myself. I started at the far side of the room, sifting through scattered stacks of paper, notepads, and folders in search of telltale phrases.

I'd made it halfway across the room without finding anything more interesting than a Phenomenological description of a case of athlete's foot when I heard a rustling outside the door. I jumped to my feet, ready to bolt.

There was nowhere to run. Standing four-square in the doorway loomed Anaximander. The pekingese-pitbull glared at me, a squeaky growl rising from its throat.

Avoiding sudden moves. I eased my hand into my pocket and produced a doggie-snack. I held it aloft, then tossed it gently across the room.

The biscuit landed right at his feet. Anaximander's growl stopped. He bent his neck down and sniffed the treat. Then he snatched the biscuit up and crushed it.

As he masticated, my eyes roved around the rest of the office. If Mr. Zeitenschreiber hadn't found the manuscript, what were my chances of turning it up?

Of course, if I failed to find anything, it didn't prove the manuscript wasn't at the villa. But maybe I didn't need proof. If I could establish a reasonably pragmatic probability that the manuscript was in all likelihood not here, I'd reckon my time was better spent elsewhere.

A hacking sound jerked my attention back to Anaximander. With a guttural snarl the miniature mutt spewed the biscuit back onto the carpet, then leapt across the room and lunged at my throat.

I swatted at him with a folder. He skidded across the floor, spun back to his feet, and charged again. This time he came in low, and I was defenseless. I felt his teeth rake across my ankle. But his jaws were too small to get a grip. With a ferocious snap he dug his teeth into my sock.

I kicked my leg frantically, trying to dislodge the savage animal. But nothing could shake him loose. At last I stopped fighting and stood still, looking down at the tiny dog fastened firmly to my sock. His snarls turned into long, throaty growls.

Threatening as he was, he wasn't big enough to impede me. I saw no alternative but to deal with my new appendage. The gardener or another servant could show up at any moment. I had to get back to work.

My eyes were by now quite accustomed to Mr. Testascrittore's scrawl. Judging from the papers I was perusing, my late mentor's interests had ranged far and wide, from ontology to ethics to aesthetics and back again.

I flipped through one sheaf after another, but didn't come across anything resembling the epistemological manuscript I was seeking.

My eyes were growing bleary when suddenly I heard a door open.

9.

Stranded amid the chaos in Mr. Testacrittore's home office, I ducked behind the office door, dragging the dog with me. Anaximander stopped growling but didn't turn loose of my sock.

Footsteps came down the hallway. I peeked through the crack between the door and the frame. Legs came into view, then a torso – the gardener!

I held my breath. Thankfully Anaximander remained silent. I had no good excuse for being in the ransacked office, and the gardener would surely call the police if he saw me.

As his footsteps padded down the hall, I crept from behind the door with

Anaximander still affixed to my sock. I looked over the disarray on the office floor. Further searching was pointless. However messy the office was, I was pretty sure that a 700-page manuscript was not hidden among the clutter.

Now I needed to get out without alerting the gardener. I considered abandoning the sock to Anaximander. But his teeth had drawn blood. With my DNA all over the sock, I knew that leaving it behind was a mistake.

Quickly I assessed my options. If I had a crowbar and/or a tank of nitrous oxide, I could coax the mutt loose. But neither was handy.

Down the hallway I could hear the gardener on the phone. Suddenly I remembered the window I'd broken. He might be calling the police that very instant. I had to move fast.

I dragged my leg around the room searching for a tool, with Anaximander thrashing my sock the whole while. By chance I crossed a cooling vent on the floor. The gentle stream of air made the part-pekingese's hair stand on end, and the little creature expanded like a puff-fish. Despite my desperate predicament, I couldn't resist turning and dragging him across the vent again to admire the effect.

As his hair fluffed to enormous proportions, an inspiration seized me. I looked around the walls and spotted the thermostat. Dragging the dog across the floor, I switched the fan to high. Air rushed through the vent. I lurched back across the room and planted my foot so Anaximander was centered over the jet of cool air.

The dog's hair fluffed wildly. His rear end floated upward. Only his teeth, tethered to my sock, kept him anchored. If I could make him let go for just an instant, my plan would work. I looked around the room, searching for something I could use as a crowbar.

Then I remembered the dog biscuits. They hadn't exactly been a raging culinary sensation. But given the predictable limits of canine memory, they might serve a momentary purpose.

I pulled out a biscuit, scratched the surface to activate the aroma, and held it under Anaximander's nose. He emitted a low growl, then snapped. As his mouth opened, the air jet caught hold and lifted him several feet off the ground.

The growl died in his throat, replaced by a bewildered whimpering. He hovered three feet over the vent, rotating slowly counter-clockwise.

There was no time to appreciate the spectacle. As soon as the dog barked, the equal-and-opposite reaction would push him out of the air-jet and he'd tumble to the ground. I sprinted out of the office and down the hall.

Anaximander howled, and a moment later I heard him clunk to the floor. I knew he'd be hot on my tail, more vicious than ever. In seconds I was out the front door and racing across the lawn.

Sirens wailed in the distance. The gate was too risky. I darted across the side yard and headed for the wall.

Anaximander sailed off the front porch, snapping at my heels. Frantically I clawed my way up the stone wall, dropping unceremoniously into a drainage ditch on the other side. My shoes got soaked, but I ignored the discomfort and hurried along Seventh Street with my head down.

Behind me, the sirens halted on the distant side of the villa and a bullhorn screeched: "Come out with your hands up! We have you surrounded!"

They could wish! The bullhorn and Anaximander's yapping faded as I hurried on toward campus.

Back on the Quad, I stopped and took off my wet shoes, then examined the sock Anaximander had attacked. It was shredded beyond repair. I'd risked both arrest and physical mutilation.

And for what? Not a trace of the missing manuscript. For all my risks, I hadn't accomplished a thing.

Not quite true. Despite my physical discomfiture, I'd come as close as empirical verification protocols allowed to inductively ascertaining that the second manuscript – if it existed at all – was not at the villa.

Had Mr. Zeitenschreiber found it after all? What if the manuscript was in his office? Maybe he'd found it, then been murdered before he could dispose of it.

Was this the insight I'd been missing? I'd been focusing on Mr. Testascrittore's office and home. But maybe Mr. Zeitenschreiber's office was where I needed to be looking. Manuscript or no manuscript, I might turn up a clue to his sudden demise.

10.

If I was going to make my Hermeneutics class, I needed to grab my books and get over to Schleiermacher Hall. But my feet had different ideas, and

I found myself steering toward Mr. Zeitenschreiber's office on the second floor of the Albertus Magnus Empirical Metaphysics Building.

What did I expect to discover? Even if Mr. Zeitenschreiber had found the manuscript, whoever killed him may have stolen it. But if I was going to be thorough I had to explore every lead, despite the disturbing fact that it meant missing a class and ruining my chance at a personal record.

Maybe the search wouldn't take that long, and I could enter unnoticed at the break.

Then again, attendance quite likely was counted at the start of class, and showing up for the second half was tantamount to missing altogether. I wondered if there was some way to find out before I wasted my time sitting through the second half.

I looked quickly up the hallway, which was deserted as the new period commenced. The door to Mr. Zeitenschreiber's office was ajar. I knocked lightly, then slipped in, leaving the door slightly open so I could hear anyone approaching.

Books and stacks of papers were piled everywhere. Floppy disks, cassette tapes, and other archaic media littered his desk and floor. Fortunately, Mr. Zeitenschreiber used a computer. If Mr. Testascrittore's handwritten manuscript was here, it should stand out.

A quick search convinced me that the missing manuscript wasn't in the office unless it was well hidden.

But what about Mr. Zeitenschreiber's own work? Might it contain a clue to his demise? What was he working on when he died? Anything connected to Mr. Testascrittore's research?

I leaned over his desk, trying to see the papers without touching anything. I found nothing pertinent except a scathing essay accusing Mr. Sartre of tiresome word-play on the concept of "reflection."

The essay was certainly a stinging rebuke. But I was skeptical that Mr. Zeitenschreiber had been killed for criticizing Existentialist puns.

Suddenly I heard footsteps in the hall. I jumped away from the desk, realizing I hadn't concocted an alibi for being in Mr. Zeitenschreiber's office. On impulse I grabbed the wastebasket.

The door swung open, and I stood face to face with a startled Perkins. "What are you doing here?" he demanded. "This is a private office."

"Just tidying up a bit," I improvised. "Johann is busy with repairs and I

thought I'd help out a bit."

Perkins said nothing. He circled around the desk, as if trying to determine whether anything had been moved. "This office is off limits to anyone except authorized departmental personnel," he said. "I must demand that you leave at once."

"Yes, sir!" I gave a crisp salute and set the wastebasket down. "Empty your own trash."

I turned on my heels and headed out the door. For a moment I thought of going to my Hermeneutics class.

But what was the point? I'd just be calling attention to my tardiness by showing up late. With a sigh I went down the stairs and headed for the Quad, resolving to take extra efforts to make a good impression next time.

It was only when I was outside that I stopped and wondered why Perkins had been in Mr. Zeitenschreiber's office. He'd been Mr. Testascrittore's assistant, not Mr. Zeitenschreiber's. He might have no more right than anyone else to be in that office. Was he on the same quest as I?

Should I go back and confront him? No, that would just tip him off as to my suspicions. Better to lull him into a false sense of security by obeying his order.

Besides, I needed to find Johann and be sure that he was in the boiler room and not upstairs cleaning offices, where Perkins might see him and ask whether I was actually helping out.

Speaking of Johann – wasn't it about time to get clear about his role in this whole business? Maybe this was the moment for a few subtle yet probing questions about his whereabouts the past few days. If he could provide airtight alibis, I'd have one person I could trust.

And if not? Maybe I'd have a new prime suspect. Now that Mr. Zeitenschreiber was dead, Johann was as likely a culprit as anyone.

11.

When I got to the boiler room, Johann was once again glued to the Metaphysical Channel. He was watching Peripatetic High, starring Mr. Aristotle as a no-nonsense logic teacher at an inner-city philosophical academy. The school was so poor that they couldn't afford desks and chairs, so courses were taught while strolling around the 'hood.

"You just missed a great episode," Johann told me. "Mr. Carnap guest-starred as the founder of a zero-tolerance anti-drug program. He was tossing kids into jail right and left, until Mr. Aristotle proved via syllogistic deductions from first principles that the zero-tolerance program was simply driving drug-use underground, while Mr. Epicurus's pilot program providing free marijuana to students dramatically lowered their use of harder drugs. Then at the end, the anti-drug guy was arrested for embezzling confiscated cocaine."

"Wow, sounds pretty realistic," I said. I was hoping Johann would turn the TV off so I could ask him a few questions, but as luck would have it, Hermeneutical Jeopardy was coming up next.

"And after that comes Leibniz of Scotland Yard." Johann gestured toward the screen. "Mr. Liebniz solves the cases by applying his insight that every Monad – every moment of being – is actually a window into the whole. Last week he broke up a Logical Positivist ring by demonstrating that Mr. Early Wittgenstein's contention that all basic facts are independent is itself a dependent fact, and is part of a unified world view explicable only on Monadistic grounds."

"Pretty clever," I said, although I couldn't really get excited about it. Philosophical TV lost its fascination for me the year Plato's Cave, featuring hyper-realistic portrayal of the Forms of Truth balanced with the shadowy depiction of mundane reality, was cancelled.

Cruelly schooled in the transitory nature of Earthly pleasures, I found the endless rehashes of Situationist comedies and Deconstructionist dramas tedious.

Worse yet was the new craze of made-for-TV "reality" philosophies, world-views tailored to fit precisely into half-hour television time-slots. Each episode presented bite-sized nuggets of Western wisdom, with none of the annoying indeterminacies or loose ends of pre-television philosophy.

The validity of the various schools of philosophy was assessed by their respective Nielsen ratings, and those with sagging ratings were always in danger of being canceled – a fate that had recently befallen the entire British Idealist school.

As Hermeneutical Jeopardy got underway, Johann cranked the volume higher. "I was almost a contestant one time," he said. "But my final test covered philosophers' favorite desserts, which I hadn't studied well enough."

"Too bad," I said.

"Yeah, if it had been breakfast treats, I would have nailed it."

The game's host reviewed the rules, emphasizing Jeopardy's "the answer must be phrased as a question" stipulation. Johann drew a grid on his notepad, preparing to play along.

The simpler categories, such as Philosophers' Hairstyles and Epistemology of Table Manners, went quickly. Seeking to pad her bankroll, the leading contestant took a shot at Ontological Proofs for $500.

"In this proof, God's existence is proved by assuming that existing is better than not existing."

Bzzzz. "'What is Mr. Augustine's proof?'"

"No, sorry," said the host. "The correct answer is, 'What is Mr. Anselm's Proof?'"

With the game down to the wire, one of the trailing contestants took a shot at Nietzschean Ramblings for $300.

The announcer read the answer: "Sex, the lust to rule, and selfishness."

The contestant frantically pressed his buzzer. "What are the three best-cursed things in the world?"

"Correct! Mr. Nietzsche cited this triad in his famous comedy, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*."

"Nietzschean Ramblings for $400."

"'This makes us stronger,'" read the announcer.

"'What doesn't kill us?'" shouted the contestant. "Nietzschean Ramblings for $500."

The announcer paused and let the drama build. "If you get this right, you will be the leader of the first round! Are you ready?"

The contestant gripped the lectern with both hands and nodded sharply.

"The answer is: 'How wretched, how shadowy and flighty, how aimless and arbitrary this appears.'"

The contestant slammed his fist down on his buzzer. "What is the human intellect?'"

"Yes!" declared the announcer as the audience went wild. "Now it's time for Ultimate Jeopardy, where our contestants wager some or all of their bankroll on one final challenge!"

While the three contestants pondered their stakes, the show broke for a commercial.

"Feeling the heat during your metaphysics final? Grappling with section 43 of the *Principia*? It's time for Scholasti-Guard – worn by leading metaphysicians everywhere." Mr. Aquinas strolled onscreen, casually faced the camera, and held up a can of Scholasti-Guard. "When I was defending the *Summa Theologica* against all comers in Paris, I worked up a righteous sweat! I'd have had some devilish stains under the sleeves of my robe if it hadn't been for Scholasti-Guard – now in spray, roll-on, or the handy Summa-Stick!"

When the cameras returned to Ultimate Jeopardy, the three contestants had already jotted down their responses to the final challenge. The host swept his arm dramatically toward the big board as he read aloud.

"The answer is, 'The Socratic Method.' Contestant Number One, what is your question?"

The first contestant revealed his response: "What is skepticism?"

A harsh buzzer sounded. "No, sorry," said the host. "Socrates, although he raised many questions, was not a skeptic, but an ardent believer in the eternal truth of the Divine Forms."

He turned to the second player. "Contestant Number Two: 'The Socratic Method.'"

"What is Dialectical Idealism?"

Again the buzzer sounded. "No," said the host. "While Socrates' biographer Plato has been accused of fostering Idealism, Socrates' views would best be described as Metaphysical Realism, since he seems to have believed in the ultimate reality of the Forms and their efficacy in our daily lives."

The host turned to the final contestant. "A correct answer would make you the new champion of Hermeneutical Jeopardy. Contestant Number Three: 'The Socratic Method.'"

A hush fell over the studio audience. Johann leaned forward in his chair, eyes wide. The contestant took a moment to review his written response, then spoke slowly and deliberately. "What is the origin of Hermeneutical Jeopardy's 'the answer must be phrased as a question' format?"

"Correct!" The audience exploded in cheering. When it faded, the host spoke again. "It was Socrates' practice of responding to statements or assertions with a question that gave Hermeneutical Jeopardy's creators

their inspiration!"

The audience applauded, and the theme music faded in. Johann picked up the remote and turned the volume down. I knew I had just a few minutes till Leibniz of Scotland Yard came on. If I was going to query Johann on his whereabouts at the time of Mr. Testascrittore's death, I better get going.

But how exactly do you introduce a topic like that? I couldn't just casually toss it into the conversation. It would take a little preparation. I groped for an ice-breaker. "So, how's the Paralogic project coming along?"

"Good." Johann pointed to a pipe on the edge of the workbench. I lit it and took a toke as he continued. "I've been sketching a plan for a one-semester certificate program to get paralogicians on the streets as quickly as possible. With this basic training, they could intervene in situations involving faulty inference, inappropriate use of inductive reasoning, or mistaking tautologies and truisms for statements about the real world. We'd see changes instantly."

I handed him the pipe. "You'll put ad agencies out of business," I said.

He took a hit and passed it back. "If I were head of the Epistemology Department," he said after exhaling, "we'd do things differently around here. We're graduating people who are brilliant in their paragraphs of expertise – but when it comes to correcting faulty logic at the dinner table, they're helpless. We need to get philosophy out of the laboratory and into people's daily lives."

The next show was about to start. It was now or never.

But I couldn't bring myself to raise the issue of Mr. Testascrittore. What was the point, anyway? Presumably Johann had an alibi.

Sure, I could put my sleuthing skills to work and check it out. But suppose I found evidence one way or the other – how would I know I could trust *that*?

In the end, no matter how much evidence you gather, it finally comes down to intuition. I was going to have to trust my gut sense of what was true. So why not cut to the chase and ask myself what my intuition told me about Johann in the first place?

I hadn't quite made up my mind what I was intuiting when the theme song for Leibniz of Scotland Yard started up. Johann settled back in his chair. Too late to ask any more questions.

If the show was starting, my history class must be starting as well. Having

already missed one class, I was doubly committed to attending my next one. I leapt up, waved a quick goodbye to Johann, and headed out of the boiler room.

12.

I hastened across the Quad on a beeline for my history class in Herodotus Hall, a sprawling building which was less an architectural unit than a melange of details taken uncritically from every age and epoch.

Starting up the stairway, I realized I hadn't done any of the reading. By the time I reached the fifth floor, my enthusiasm for attending the lecture, which quite possibly would heavily reference the readings, had considerably waned.

If I hadn't done my homework, was I really going to get much out of the lecture? I made a mental note to catch up on my reading and show up early the next time.

I turned and headed back down to ground level. Didn't I have more pressing concerns, anyway? With my most recent suspect ensconced in a coffin, the need to check up on the others was more pressing than ever.

But how exactly was I supposed to proceed? I still hadn't come up with a way to interrogate the suspects, as was shown by my feeble attempt to question Johann. Without that, what chance did I have of getting to the truth?

"This is a task for Phenomenology!" Mr. Husserl materialized on the landing next to me.

"Good to see you again, sir," I said as we went down the stairs and out to the Quad. "But what exactly does Phenomenology have to do with my investigations?"

He held up his palms as if summoning reality. "Everything. Apply your observational skills. If you can't interrogate people, then interrogate the situation."

It took a moment to realize he wasn't joking. "What exactly are you suggesting?"

"Go back to the things themselves and question them," he said. He ticked off the points on his fingers. "You know where the murder took place, and how it was done. Go back and ask more questions."

"Good idea," I said, picking up his drift. "I'll go back to Mr. Testascrittore's office and interrogate it. But what if it refuses to answer? What threat can I hold over the office's head if it won't cooperate? 'Talk, or I'll mess you up but good!' 'Confess, or we'll turn you into the student lounge!' But suppose the office still refuses to divulge its secrets?"

He shielded his eyes from the mid-afternoon sun. "You can't just play rough. Think like Sam Spade. Sometimes you play tough. Then you turn around and sweeten them up. You lay back, act sympathetic, inviting things to present themselves exactly as they are. If you carefully observe, the clues you're missing just might present themselves."

I stopped in the shade of a tall hedge along one side of the Quad. "I like the idea," I said. "But suppose I notice something new. How can I be certain of what I'm seeing? What if it's my imagination, or wishful thinking?"

"That's always a danger," Mr. Husserl said. "All you can do is systematically reduce your doubts."

Doubt Reduction. The phrase had a promising ring. Maybe it could be part of Johann's Paralogic program: doubt-reduction counseling, including emergency doubt-control intervention.

And what about Doubt Consolidation? I imagined the infomercial:

"Tired of an endless barrage of doubts plaguing you night and day? Changed jobs, addresses, and partners, but your doubts still find you?

"Don't despair! Here at Montaignean Doubt Consolidation Services, skilled technicians are standing by to help manage your doubts. End harassment, extortionate demands on your attention, and the nagging fear that friends or co-workers might find out.

"This is *not* moral bankruptcy! Montaignean Doubt Consolidation Services will combine all of your concerns into one easy-to-manage monthly episode. No longer will you live in anxiety and fear lest the demons of doubt catch you unaware. You'll be able to plan your life and know that your doubts are being taken care of.

"Call today! Operators are standing by!"

Mr. Husserl looked at his watch. "I have an appointment with Mr. Derrida," he said. "I don't want to be late, or he'll start deconstructing something."

I had to focus quickly or I'd lose him. "Reducing doubt is a noble goal, sir," I said. "But how long will the situation last? Fresh doubts pop into my head all the time. My understanding constantly comes up with new ways to

undermine itself. It seems like that's a fatal flaw in human knowledge."

"It's not a flaw," he said, his eyes twinkling. "It's a feature! The flux you describe is reflective of how the world actually reveals itself. Situations and people grow and change. If the world is in flux, how can 'the facts' stay the same?"

"Okay," I said. "So I go to Mr. Testascrittore's office to interrogate it, as you suggest. How exactly do I get started with this Phenomenological questioning thing?"

Mr. Husserl gazed past me. "Start with whatever information you have – you believe that there might be a missing manuscript, or that Mr. Testascrittore's killer may have left a clue in the office."

"Those are just conjectures."

"You have to start somewhere – why not start with your best conjecture? After all, you've been doing this all along. When you began searching for Mr. Testascrittore's killer, you weren't just stabbing in the dark. You started off with some grasp of where to look, some idea of which horizon to explore."

I nodded. Mr. Husserl continued: "You knew the killer was probably connected with the Institute. You also assumed that there was a clear motive, and that uncovering the motive would point to the killer. All of this you 'knew' before you ever got started. Based on this, you were able to begin gathering evidence."

"What if it's all wishful thinking, and I simply see what I want to see?"

My guest smiled. "Entirely possible. That's a constant question: how do we break the spell of our own expectations? That's where Phenomenology comes in – the art of observation. We keep searching for ways to test our findings, to let things and situations speak for themselves. You have to be ready to revise your notions at any point, and to discard fruitless projections. But still, in order to search for answers, you must first 'project' the general expectation of what you think will be found.

"I was doing that – I projected Mr. Zeitenschreiber as the killer. I was sure I had my man, and all I needed to do was gather the proof. Next thing I know, my top suspect is dead. I'd say my search came up empty."

"And yet on account of that search, you know more than you did before. You've eliminated one suspect, and gained a more nuanced picture of the terrain."

I tossed up my hands. "Great – I'm marginally less confused. Now what?"

"As my student Mr. Gadamer might say, you start the Hermeneutic cycle again," Mr. Husserl said. "You take what you've learned, project new expectations, and go out in the field and start testing them against your lived experiences."

"I see," I said, sinking into thought. "How exactly is that different from just muddling through?"

Mr. Husserl shrugged. "It's an ongoing process."

As my guest bade me auf wedersehen, I'd arrived at my destination. I headed into the Albertus Magnus Empirical Metaphysics Building and started up the stairs toward Mr. Testascrittore's office. A few students were scurrying to classes, but otherwise the halls were deserted.

As I approached the office, I pulled out my spare key, hoping the locks hadn't been changed.

But the key was unnecessary. The door stood wide open.

13.

I gaped into Mr. Testascrittore's office. Books and papers were thrown everywhere. Desk-drawers were dumped on the floor and then smashed against the wall. A potted plant was completely unpotted. The trophy for Greatest Living American Philosopher was knocked askew. Even the classical bust was dethroned, lying on its left ear in front of the desk.

As I approached the doorway, Mr. Grosskase emerged, shaking his head. He saw me and nodded. "I already called the police," Mr. Grosskase said.

"The police?" I couldn't keep from laughing aloud. "What are they going to say? 'Wow, another accident!'"

He nodded glumly. "Look at this mess. It must have happened last night."

The manuscript – someone must have turned the place upside down looking for it! And judging from the drawers smashed against the wall, it had been a fruitless visit.

Mr. Grosskase called to me in a hoarse whisper. "They're coming!"

I nodded and stepped out of the office as the police arrived. It was the same officers as before, plus an academic investigations squad. I watched from the doorway as they photographed and jotted notes about one item after another, snickering among themselves as they thumbed through a Late Byzantine lingerie catalogue.

At last they finished and came out into the hallway. They motioned Mr. Grosskase over. I remained at a discreet distance, close enough to eavesdrop. The break-in, they said, exactly fit the modus operandi of a notorious international textbook ring which specialized in stealing autographed first editions of mid-century Continental Existentialists.

Mr. Grosskase absent-mindedly nodded along as the inspector described how the thieves rapidly and methodically searched books for inscriptions. When they found one, they verified the signature, then recorded the publishing and copyright information with a handheld scanning device. Only after checking their exhaustive database of signed first editions did they bother to steal a book.

One anomaly stood out in this case, the police added. Ordinarily the thieves reshelved unstolen books, even replacing misfiled volumes in their proper order. But this time they must have been in a hurry, leaving the office a shambles.

The police concluded their account of the break-in and produced a written copy of the report. Without reading it, Mr. Grosskase scrawled his initials at the end and waved them away.

Once the officers were gone, I went back into the office. Mr. Grosskase followed, and began randomly stacking fallen books onto the shelves.

I started to say something about preserving evidence. But obviously the police considered the case closed. Might as well clean up. I scooped up a bunch of Logic texts and piled them on a top shelf. Hermeneutics took up a shelf, and Existential Ontology most of another.

Working my way down, I reached the bottom shelf, which I knew well from my earlier visits – Mr. Copleston's *History of Philosophy*.

I gathered the fallen volumes. They weren't imposing books. Mr. Copleston's magnum opus consisted of nine paperback volumes of about 500 pages each, easy to carry around and read in spare moments.

I fondly remembered immersing myself in Mr. Bacon on the bus, Mr. Bentham in a bank line, and Mr. Schopenhauer at the laundromat.

The only drawback was that every time I smelled fabric softener, I became convinced that the entire world was the product of my will and representation. I took to carrying a pocket edition of Mr. Kierkegaard as an emergency antidote.

I arranged five of the Copleston books in chronological order and set

them onto the shelf, which wobbled. I stacked the other four next to them, but the whole row fell over. I placed a dictionary on the other end to secure the shelf, then straightened the row of Coplestons so their titles lined up.

I leaned back and admired the sequence: Greeks to Romans to Medievals to Moderns to Idealists to Positivists.

I thought back to my visit to the Gallery of Philosophers, and how in Mr. Copleston's Hegelian-inflected estimation philosophy was a cumulative, ongoing quest for truth and meaning.

It made sense. Western philosophy didn't merely "have" a history. I was seeing that the essence of our tradition *was* its history.

It was this tradition to which I dedicated my life when I chose the philosopher's lonely, meandering path. Seeing the precious Copleston volumes lined up on my late mentor's shelf, I felt a surge of confidence in my career choice.

How thankful I felt that my distinguished forebears had blazed the path of truth and enlightenment! Suppose philosophy had never been invented. What would I do then?

And what would the great thinkers of yore have done with their lives?

I pictured Mr. Plato as an award-winning high school drama teacher. Mr. Aristotle would be an investment banker. Mr. Diogenes would still loll about making pithy pronouncements to passing generals.

Mr. Augustine would be one of those pesky panhandlers who try to tell you their entire life story every time they ask for change.

Mr. Heidegger would be a ski instructor, Mr. Sartre a theoretical physicist. Ms. Beauvoir would likely be a cocktail chanteuse whose career blossomed in her later years.

I'm thinking Mr. Kant would be a department store manager, Mr. Spinoza an accountant, and Mr. Leibniz a sales associate proming you the best of all possible deals.

Mr. Socrates I see bagging groceries at the health food store and asking the sorts of questions that make you think you'd bought the wrong brand of exfoliating gel. He'd be no more popular today than he was in his own lifetime.

Mr. Camus would be a Superior Court judge, while Mr. Skinner would run for prosecutor and Mr. Voltaire for public defender.

Only Mr. Aquinas comes to a bad end. Deprived of the opportunity to redefine reality according to a rigid, legalistic schema which claims to articulate God's word when in fact its primary purpose is to uphold the power of institutional church and secular authority, Mr. Aquinas drifts from job to job seeking an outlet for his unusual skills, winding up managing a pest extermination company.

As I placed the last of the fallen Copleston books back on the bottom shelf, I looked around Mr. Testascrittore's office. I still needed to Phenomenologically interrogate the space. But I couldn't very well do it in front of Mr. Grosskase.

Although I wished I could confide in the Rector, I was resolved not to trust anyone until they were proven innocent. I'd have to wait until I was sure he'd left the building before I returned and did a more thorough investigation.

Johann – did he know about the office-trashing? I wondered how often he made the rounds of his domain.

Surely it wasn't he who tore the place apart. Or was it?

14.

I headed to the basement to find Johann, following the familiar overhead pipes to the boiler room. I framed my greeting – a quick statement that the office had been trashed, then watch his reaction.

The door was closed and my knock produced no result. I knocked again, harder. Nothing.

Well, he had to work sometimes. Maybe he was around the building. I went upstairs. There was no sign of him on the first floor. On the second floor, where Mr. Testascrittore's office was located, I spotted Mr. Denkenschnelle. I started toward him to ask if he'd seen Johann. But he turned away as if he hadn't seen me and hurried down the stairs.

"Mr. Denkenschnelle!" I called. "Could I have a word –"

By the time I reached the top of the stairs, I could hear the door closing below. Was the Analytics professor simply running late? Or was he fleeing from my interrogatories? I went to the window at the end of the hallway and pressed my face against it, hoping to catch a glimpse of Mr. Denkenschnelle's direction of flight. But there was no sign of him.

Wait – how could I be so sure? What exactly would constitute a "sign of him"? How would I know whether I was seeing a "sign of him," or actually seeing "him?"

"It's all signs." Mr. Eco, the eminent linguist, stopped en route to a graduate seminar on monastic library cataloguing systems to offer his view. He joined me at the window. "Everything that has meaning is a sign. There is no distinction between seeing a sign and seeing an object."

"Really? I'm looking down at the Quad now, and I see a woman walking a dog. I don't see the 'sign of a dog.' I see the dog, pure and simple."

"No," he said, pointing out the window. "Literally, you see signs – you see the curly white coat, you see the slobber coming out of the mouth, you see the wagging tail – and you infer, 'dog.'"

I looked again, and still saw the dog. "I'm not 'inferring' the dog – I'm seeing it."

"Pray tell, what is the difference?"

"Well," I said, stroking my stubbly chin as a sign of my careful consideration of his question, "when I see a pile of fresh dog-droppings, that's a sign. I infer that a dog was present. But when I see the dog itself, I don't 'infer' anything – I experience it."

He crossed his arms. "Are you so certain of this difference?"

"Quite," I said. "When I see the dog-droppings, I intuitively steer away, whereas when I see the actual dog, I go over and pet it. If you can't tell the difference, I'd rather not shake your hand!"

Mr. Eco groused about being the butt of a semiotic joke, but I explained that time was of the essence, and promised to say a word in his favor if he would allow me to move on in my quest for truth.

Gratuitous word in favor of Mr. Eco: *Name of the Rose* is a very entertaining novel, although I would have preferred some gay sex scenes. I mean, it's set in a monastery, for crying out loud! Let's have some realism.

Monks had sex. Monkesses had sex. Most philosophers, on the other hand, are not recorded as having done so. The Medieval logician Mr. Abelard is a notorious exception, sleeping with his student Heloise.

Of course, he paid dearly for it. The moral of the story is, don't have sex with philosophy students unless you are prepared to take a vow of celibacy.

By the way – was it a coincidence that Mr. Abelard became so enamored

of logic after his calamity?

I, on the other hand, had no such excuse.

From down the second-floor hallway a silhouette advanced toward me. I called out, asking if he'd seen Johann, before I realized who it was – Perkins.

"Why are you asking?"

"I need to report a leaky pipe," I improvised warily.

"Where's the leak?" Perkins demanded.

"Uh, in the bathroom."

"Show me. We should take a look right away."

I stood my ground. "No, I'll just report it to Johann."

"That won't do you a lot of good," he said with a supercilious smile. "Unless you want to haul the leaky pipe down to the jail."

"The jail? What's going on?"

"Johann was arrested. A SWAT team dragged him out of the boiler room in handcuffs. It was quite a commotion."

"What did they arrest him for?"

"Who knows? But whatever it was, I'm sure he did it. The guy was a walking time-bomb."

Johann in jail? My mind reeled. He must have been arrested right after I left him.

Had the police arrested him for the murders? However much I'd tried to see Johann as a suspect, I never truly believed that he was involved. But now the police had taken him into custody.

Had they known all along that it was a case of murder? Had the police said "accident" merely to lull the killer into a false sense of security while the net tightened?

Surely he'd be interrogated. Under questioning, who knew what he might say? He might start spewing names just to get attention off himself. My name might get dragged through the mud along with all the rest.

I needed to find out what was going on – to talk to Johann if possible. But how could I get near the police station, with my face adorning a Wanted poster at the front door?

It was time for a disguise, a completely new look. My clothes rack,

monocrop that it was, would be no help. It was time to do some serious shopping. And what better place than the vintage philosophical shops of the Historic Latin Quarter Preservation District?

15.

On the fringes of the Historic Latin Quarter Preservation District a street carnival closed a couple of blocks to traffic. I got a baton of pink cotton candy and wandered along the midway.

The Witch Hunt Dunking Booth proved popular, as local witches, magicians, and assorted oddball types lined up to take a shot at dunking priests and bishops.

For five dollars you got three baseballs. If you hit the target, the crimson-robed holy man would plunge into a vat of ice water. Most people took their best aim at the target, but a few latter-day witches fired their hardballs directly at the priests.

The Spinoza Cakewalk featured a life-sized Monopoly-type layout, with each square offering a pastry prize. Contestants circled the board as a Motown ensemble performed choral readings from Mr. Spinoza's *Ethics*.

When the passage ended and the singers harmonized the ultimate "Q.E.D.," everyone received the prize from the square on which they stood. Some won delicious chocolate eclairs or thick slices of marbled cheesecake. Others came away with stale donuts or year-old fruitcakes.

At the far end of the midway stood a beanbag toss crowned by a flashing sign: The Oracle at Delphi.

"Know thyself!" called out the barker. "Step right up and know thyself!"

Fifteen feet behind the counter a colorful wheel-of-fortune painted with cartoonish faces of classical deities rotated slowly. When a beanbag landed in one of the grinning mouths, the machine would broadcast a cryptic oracle along with its payoff in points which could be redeemed for valuable prizes.

Sometimes the oracle was broad and inspiring, leaving people nodding reverently: "I understand the speech of the dumb and hear the voiceless," the loudspeaker intoned. "Twenty points."

Other times it was vague and poetic: "I count the grains of sand on the beach and measure the sea. Thirty points."

Then again the oracle could be so specific as to mystify all but the most adept: "The smell of a hard-shelled tortoise boiling and bubbling with lamb's flesh in a bronze pot. The cauldron beneath is bronze, and bronze is the lid. Fifty points."

I paid my ducats, picked up a beanbag, and squeezed it. The beans shifted under the pressure. I rotated my arm like a baseball pitcher, went into my windup, and fired a wild pitch that smacked against the backboard.

"Zzzzzzz!" went the machine. The attendant laughed and handed me another beanbag.

Winding up more deliberately, I unleashed a second wild one. I shook my head. I used to be good at this!

"Settle down, champ," came a voice from behind me. I turned to see a round-faced man with dark, curly hair. A white cravat shown under his wide-collared jacket.

I recognized the eminent Mr. Fichte, interpreter of Mr. Kant and inceptor of the German Idealist school that culminated in Mr. Hegel.

"Uh, good day, sir. I'm having a hard time concentrating here."

Mr. Fichte bowed his head toward me. "You're focusing on the target. Know thyself first and foremost. Focus your attention on the being of the target not in itself, but as an object of an act of the self-positing self."

"Pardon me, sir?" I said. "What does self-positing have to do with hitting a beanbag target?"

He smiled knowingly. "The presence to the self of any object already presupposes its own act of self-positing, or its own act of being for itself. In any discussion of the self, we must observe the founding act of all systematic philosophy – the act of self-positing, which is the act by which the self posits itself for itself."

"Before I throw the beanbag I have to engage in a self-positing act?" I felt embarrassed saying the phrase in public.

Mr. Fichte seemed untroubled. "The act of self-positing is the act by which the self enacts its being and its being for itself insofar as its being consists of being for itself. All that the self is, is the act of being for itself. And conversely, all that is for the self is simply its act of being for itself."

I cast a glance at the beanbag barker. He seemed frozen in time. Realizing I had a moment to question my spirit visitor regarding this whole issue of the self – which seemed possibly to bear some relation to my broader

quest to rescue Mr. Testascrittore's proof of his own existence as well as hopefully extending its benefits to myself – I looked back at Mr. Fichte.

"I see. So where exactly do I start with becoming this self-positing thing?"

He nodded as if he had puzzled long over the question. "It would be a mistake to regard the self-positing self as a kind of thinking thing, or thinking substance. The self-positing self is nothing but the activity of the self in its being for itself."

My eyebrows beetled. "So the self is an act, not a thing?"

He brightened. "Exactly. The self is pure act, and nothing more. It is not even an 'active substance.' Simply act."

I nodded. While it didn't answer every question, I could see where treating the self as pure act could come in handy in the world of beanbags.

Mr. Fichte stepped back. The carnival barker came to life and harangued me to get on with the game.

"Let's go," he cried. "Know thyself!"

"Alright," I muttered, turning the beanbag over to get a good grip. "I'll give you a little of your Know Thyself!"

Focusing on a pure act of self-positing, I reared back and fired a perfect strike. The oracular loudspeaker crackled to life: "You are the pilot. Grasp the helm fast. You have many allies. Fifty points."

Nodding to Mr. Fichte, I blazed another one into the hole. "White-browed, they need a true seer's wisdom," blared the speaker. "Fifty points."

Two strikes. One more strike and I could choose among several prizes including a handy pocket flashlight.

Positing my self as a self-positing act one more time, I leaned forward as if taking the sign from the catcher. I gripped the beanbag along the seams, slowly wound up, and fired it toward the target.

Strike three! "Make your own nature," came the loudspeaker. "Take not the advice of others as your guide in life. One hundred points."

I pumped my fist in the air. I looked for Mr. Fichte, but he had disappeared into the crowd.

The barker handed me my prize – a small plastic flashlight complete with battery. I flicked it on and off and dropped it into my pocket.

Then I turned my attention to the task of finding a new disguise.

16.

"This jacket was worn by a woman who always used to talk about the day she bumped into Roland Barthes," said the clerk at Isidore of Seville's Recycled Ideas, Attitudes, & Attire Shoppe. "The stain on the sleeve is where he spilled his coffee on her."

I looked at myself in the mirror. "No, I don't think red and black polkadots is what I'm looking for."

"We have it in other colors," he said with a hint of disapproval. "Although you sacrifice the Barthes connection."

"No, I don't want a jacket at all. I'm a sweatshirt kind of guy."

He looked crestfallen, and I wondered if he was the designer of the polkadot jackets. "We don't have much in the way of sweatshirts. Just this one rack." He pointed to a long rack that stretched twenty feet toward the rear of the store.

Within minutes I'd found the perfect disguise – an Indiana State Fighting Sycamores sweatshirt. The Wanted poster featured the Berkeley sweatshirt – the Sycamores logo would throw them off completely.

But a more drastic change was needed to disguise my face. It called for the ultimate sacrifice – shaving. I stopped at the corner store and bought a razor, went up to my garret, and with shaking hand rid myself of my moustache and several days of well-groomed stubble.

It was the first time in some years I had been clean-shaven, a look scorned among my Berkeley peers. It would grow back, I knew, but the principle of the thing still bothered me.

I splashed on a little Old Spice, ran some Bryl-Creem through my hair, and headed for the Saint Thomas Aquinas Police Substation.

The disguise worked perfectly, and I waltzed into the cathedral-like nave of the police substation without anyone raising an eyebrow. I was delighted with my success, although wearing the Fighting Sycamores sweatshirt in public proved a bit of an embarrassment.

I mean, I'm not anti-environmentalist or anything, but it's hard to get excited about a team whose mascot is a Sycamore. How worked up can the pep squad get if they're cheering for a tree?

To compound matters, the Sycamores' football team was off to a terrible start, getting leveled by the Oregon State Beavers, the Northern Arizona

Lumberjacks, and the Southeastern Missouri Clearcutters.

With the Wisconsin Tech Golden Chainsaws coming up next, it looked like a long year on the old gridiron.

A sign I hadn't noticed on my earlier visits, hand-lettered but of sufficient discoloration to indicate a certain antiquity and therefore stability, pointed toward the Jail Reception office. I stepped around a partition and found myself in a spacious, dimly-lit hallway.

On the tall walls hung a series of faded tapestries depicting the Triumph of Order, in which scantily-clad nymphs paraded solemnly under faux-classical archways bearing the symbols of victory over the forces of chaos, anarchy, and general untidiness.

Along the tapestried hallway stood large urns from which rose the smoke of incense. The walkway descended slightly, which lent it a touch of grandeur.

The squeaking of my shoes was the only sound. At the end of the passageway, a door opened to the left. A narrow flight of metal stairs descended into the subterranean regions of the building.

I remembered my first visit, how I left the building through a basement passageway. But this time I seemed to be going deeper underground. My first instinct was to stop, until I saw a hand-drawn arrow pointing down the stairs.

Obviously it was intended to bolster dubious visitors such as myself, although as Mr. Later Wittgenstein observed on one of his crankier days there's nothing inherent in an arrow that compels you to follow the pointy end.

Nonetheless, I embraced the social convention and followed it.

At the bottom of the stairs, a metal doorway opened noisily. I entered a small concrete vestibule with an empty ticket-vending machine in the center.

After a while, I started to wonder if I was the only visitor.

"Hey! Anyone down here? Anyone home?" I thumped my fist on the opposite door, which I assumed led me closer to the jail cells.

I stood with hands on hips, wondering what I had to do to get service. I could demonstrate my dissatisfaction by leaving. But I'd lose any chance of finding out about Johann. I owed it to him and to myself to stick it out, however long I had to wait.

I pounded again. Finally, the door swung open. An older man in a plain brown uniform peered at me. "Yes?"

17.

"Who are you here to see?" The guard, whose wrinkled brown uniform looked suspiciously like a UPS castoff, rocked on his heels as if impatient to refuse my request.

"Johann, the custodian of the philosophy building."

"Which philosophy building?"

"The Albertus Magnus Empirical Metaphysics Building."

"Oh, of course, Johann." The guard's demeanor relaxed. "Good kid. Hate to see him messed up in something like this."

He bade me follow. Despite his appearance of assistance, my gut tensed. Was this some sort of elaborate ruse, taking advantage of my good nature and trust to lure me into the depths of the police cathedral and hold me incommunicado?

The guard nonchalantly led me down a concrete passageway with cells on each side. I trailed a bit behind, checking out the occupants.

One cell held a man dressed in a tattered suit. His space was lined on three sides with chalkboards on which he was carefully writing:

I promise that[1]

(1) I will not plagiarize my footnotes[2]

(2) I will not plagiarize my footnotes[3]

(3) I will not plagiarize my footnotes[4]

(4) I will not plagiarize..."

A few cells down, a woman sat cross-legged on a stool. In front of her was an hourglass with its sand almost run out. "It's true that the true is true," she said in a sing-song voice. "It's true that the false is false. It's false that the true is false. It's false that the false is true. If the false be false, then 'tis true to believe in its falsehood. But if the true be true, 'tis not false so to believe."

She looked my way, although her hollow eyes seemed to focus beyond me. "Might this not lead us to conclude that the false is actually true, in its falsity?"

I started to respond, but at that moment the sand ran out. The woman turned the hourglass over and began the process anew. "It's true that the true is true..."

Further along was a young man of about my age, stripped to the waist and chained against his cell wall. Behind him stood a hooded executioner with a crudely-knotted whip.

"All A's are B," said the executioner with exaggerated patience. "And all B's are C. Therefore, all A's are what?"

The young man rattled his chains as he gasped out: "All A's are letters!" He shrieked in pain as the executioner slashed the whip across his back.

"Incorrect," snarled the whip-wielder. Again he lashed the man's bare flesh, then repeated the question through clenched teeth.

I stepped forward to intervene, to insist that the young man's answer was technically correct, even if it was not the precise answer being sought.

But one cold glance from the hooded figure curbed my charitable impulses. After all, I reminded myself, the victim must have committed egregious logical errors to merit such drastic punishment.

Disheartened, I hastened after my guide.

We passed a row of empty cells. The bars were rusty except where they had been worn smooth by prisoners' hands. Finally the guard stopped and gestured to the left. "Johann, someone here to see you."

Johann, alone in the two-person cell, was lying on his bunk. He stood and came over to the bars. A harried expression cloaked his face. "What are you doing here?" he hissed as soon as the guard stepped away. "They're looking for you, too!"

"I'm in disguise. They'll never connect me to the villa break-in."

"No, not for that – you're wanted for burning the sweatshirt last night."

"What? How did they know about that?"

"Club Pascal must have gotten suspicious of how dirty we were. They called in a search squad, who found our firepit. They matched my DNA from a fragment in the ashes. I guess I left a few skin cells on one of the sticks."

"How did they get yours and not mine?"

"Oh, I'm sure they got yours, too. But they probably don't have your DNA in their files."

My spirits sank. "I gave a DNA sample at registration. They told me it was for a library card."

"The library will share the data with other authorities. Fortunately, they're so backlogged that they probably haven't gotten around to your specimen yet. But it's just a matter of time. At any moment they'll match the DNA and put out a warrant."

"Damn," I said, then stifled any further comment. What if our entire conversation was being recorded, and I had just confessed my involvement? Was Johann in league with the cops?

Or was his arrest for burning the sweatshirt a smokescreen? Maybe the authorities suspected Johann of the murders, but didn't want to tip their hand in case there was an accomplice. So they used the DNA as a pretext to hold him, counting on me to blunder into the trap.

"Listen," he said in a hoarse whisper. "I can only hold out so long. I can make it through one or two sessions, but not indefinitely."

"Hold out? For what?"

"You have to find some place to hide," he said urgently. "I think I can hold out tonight, but at some point, they're going to get me to talk, and I'll have to name you."

"You think they're going to interrogate you?"

"Oh, yeah, It's just a question of what degree. There are all sorts of stories about this place." He forced a laugh. "Torture chambers and all that."

"So it's true? No wonder they named the building after Mr. Aquinas."

"Supposedly there's another floor below this one, much deeper, with no windows or lightshafts. The bedrock is ten feet thick, and the ceiling is an arch of poured concrete. No sound can escape its confines."

"You don't think they'll take you down there for burning a sweatshirt, do you?"

His eyes looking fearful. Then he gave a nervous chuckle. "Isn't this what it's all about? Mr. Socrates stoically awaiting his death. Mr. Boethius writing his most profound work in prison. Mr. Voltaire sharpening his wit on the whetstone of the Bastille. This is the true test of philosophy."

I clenched my teeth. "I prefer the part where we stay up late smoking weed and talking about the meaning of life."

The guard came back down the hall. He held out his hands apologetically.

"Visiting time is up."

Johann cast me a hard, searching gaze but said nothing more. I mumbled a farewell and glumly followed the guard back to the receiving area. "You can leave by the way you came in, or take a short cut through the underground exit. It leads directly to the street."

"Just show me the quickest way out," I said.

"Go down that hall, take the first three lefts, then up three flights of stairs, back down one, up three, down two, and another left."

"Okay, I think I got all that," I said. I started down the hall.

"Wait," the guard said. "There's more. After that last left, you come to a fork in the hallway. Now you don't want to take the right fork, that leads into the sewers. And whatever you do, don't take the left, which leads down to the..."

"Down to the what?"

"Never mind," he said with a wave of his hand. "Just don't take it. Stick to the middle path, with the stacks of books. After that you'll go up and down a bunch more stairs and lots of doors, but don't turn off, whatever you do. Follow it until you come to a glass door. Knock there, and they'll let you out."

His directions worked perfectly, and soon I found myself at the fork in the hallway. Three paths diverged under a massive stone portal, over which was a stunning modern art mural which on closer inspection turned out to be elaborate stains from incessant leaking.

The right and left paths, against which I had been warned, were well-lit and unobstructed. But the middle path, so highly recommended by my guide, was piled with out-of-date library books, the sort that have no apparent value but which must be saved for the sake of posterity and the accounting department.

The Seussian stacks, which reached nearly to the 20-foot ceiling, wobbled precariously at my slightest breath, and I found myself uncomfortably reminded of the means of death of my two professors.

Was I being sent to my doom? I stepped lightly toward one stack, and several books slid off the top and came crashing down. None was heavy enough to kill me, but some of the other volumes clearly were.

I leaned forward and read the covers: Mr. Mach, Mr. Juarez, Mr. Proclus. Worthy ancestors all, but hardly the sort of authors one would wish to be buried under. At such a pivotal stage in my philosophical career, I

couldn't bear the ignominy of being crushed, not by a comprehensive and authoritative encyclopedia or dictionary of philosophy, but by a bunch of outmoded texts.

I stepped back and took a breath. Should I go to the right, through the sewers? But I might get swept into the processing plant and mulched.

Or should I go left, down to – down to the dungeon? What else would be below the jail level?

My innate sense of morbid curiosity called me that direction, but I didn't dare risk it. Not when I was already wanted both for the villa break-in and as an accomplice to Johann in the bonfire incident. I might never emerge.

My only path lay through the towers of books. I sucked in a slow breath and watched the stacks tremble. A few more stray volumes came tumbling down. I saw only one hope – to outrun the falling tomes. I stepped back, turned my head, and took a deep breath. Then I gritted my teeth and with a burst of adrenaline dashed down the center hallway.

The rush of air unleashed by my passing broke the delicate balance. Stacks teetered precariously. Inches behind me, a massive atlas slammed to the floor. Two oversized books of art-plates tumbled simultaneously, and only their chance deflection spared me a direct hit.

Ahead I spied a glimmer of light. I lunged between the final two stacks just as they came crashing down. The force of their impact drove me against the wall. I tumbled away as a cascade of books thundered to the ground behind me.

Gasping for air, I raced through hallways and up and down stairways till I arrived at the promised glass door. I rapped sharply, and sure enough, a bellhop opened it. He seemed irritated at the interruption, but escorted me to a small door leading to the street.

Coming suddenly into the fading sunlight, I squinted. I ducked my head and hustled away from the building, not stopping until I spotted the neon sign atop Logico's.

18.

Logico's was crowded as the weekend approached. I wished I felt more sociable, but with my best friend and number one murder suspect behind bars, I wasn't in a festive mood.

I took a seat in the far corner, ordered a pint of Hautian Homebrew, and picked up the Menu de Jour. I was tempted by the Salade Derrida, but the waiter wouldn't tell me the ingredients, only that it was different from any other salad on the menu.

"Viva la differance," I said, then changed my mind and chose a Pre-Socratic Greek Salad, a Mediterranean smorgasbord featuring the Heraclitian boast that however many times you returned for more, "you never visit the same salad bar twice."

Mr. Heraclitus, of course, noted that "one never steps into the same river twice."

Less known is his pseudepigraphical comment that "one all too often steps into the same puddle twice."

I took a swig of Hautian Homebrew and let the warmth flow through me. I thought back over the day, remembering my earlier resolve to visit Mr. Testascrittore's office and "interrogate" it.

Clever idea. But at the moment, the last thing I wanted to do was set foot inside the philosophy building. It'd be just my luck to run into Mr. Denkenschnelle again, and he'd have the heat down on me in a moment.

Unless he was the killer himself. But in that case, I wasn't much more excited about encountering him alone at night.

Suddenly a wave of exhaustion swept over me. A good night's sleep was what I needed most. No visions or visitations, no epiphanies or insights – just restful slumber. Maybe the next day I could swing by Mr. Testascrittore's office and have a look. After attending all my classes.

Honestly, even the classes didn't sound too appealing. Was I already hitting my November slump? Here we were, one week into the term, and I was already in mid-semester form.

If I were back home in Berkeley, the solution would be obvious – take a few weeks off and get a fresh perspective, returning in time to bluff my way through mid-terms. But here in the pressure cooker of Terre Haute, I knew that such a lapse could prove fatal.

I headed back to the Heraclitian salad bar for a refill, and was pleased to see the offerings had indeed changed, now featuring locally-farmed couscous and organically-grown croutons.

A bell pepper compote looked intriguing, but aware of the notoriously hot Indiana spices I wasn't sure it was the best idea even to taste it, lest it

bring on a deluge of night spirit-visitors.

Still, it was tempting. I started to take a sample, then hesitated. It looked so good. Was I asking for trouble?

From across the salad bar, Ms. Beauvoir blew a cloud of smoke past me. "Ah, uncertainty," she said. "The bane of Western philosophy."

I gave a dry laugh. "Uncertainty is my middle name."

"Well, that makes you human," she said. She adjusted the red scarf tied round her hair. "If you ever do achieve certainty, you simply are not looking at the complexity of the situation. The human condition is ambiguous to the core."

I scowled. "If there's no certainty, how do we ever know how and when to take action? In particular, how will I know when to confront a suspect or go the police with solid evidence of Mr. Testascrittore's murder?"

"You'll never know for certain," she said. "The existential challenge is not to attain certainty, but to decide and take action in the face of uncertainty and ambiguity."

"Then we're resigning ourselves to confusion?"

She exhaled another plume of smoke. "No," she said. "We learn to balance awareness of uncertainty with constant attempts to sharpen our awareness and to learn from our past efforts."

I waved the smoke away. "But still," I said, thinking of the seven-year program I had just begun, "it makes sense to do like Mr. Descartes or Mr. Husserl and take time out to examine the foundations of knowledge. If I can attain a reasonable certainty of basic truths like my own existence or how to know whether something is true or not, it would make the rest of my efforts a lot more valuable, wouldn't it?"

She gave a dry laugh. "Why do we imagine that wisdom lies in passivity and reflection? Christian hermits retreating to desert caves to find God. Mr. Descartes retiring to his study to contemplate his own being. Mr. Heidegger moving to a remote mountain to await the unveiling of truth. Why? Humans don't thrive on inactivity. We need to go forward, to act, to transcend the given situation."

"I'm not averse to moving forward," I said. "But unless we're sure of our foundations, how do we even know which way is forward? If we haven't established the foundations of knowledge, what difference does it make how much else we 'know'? "

"Speak for yourself," she said sharply. "The obsession with epistemology and achieving certainty is a peculiarity of white male philosophers. Others of us – women, people of color, and other marginalized groups – find a lot less certitude in the 'selfhood' of the dominant social caste."

Feminist epistemology – I recognized its novel strains. My brow furrowed. "Are you saying that epistemology and knowledge are gender-specific? How could that be? Surely truth is truth, knowledge is knowledge, regardless of who sees it."

"Perhaps in the limited realms of mathematics or physics," she said. "But what about the human sciences? What about art and literature? The dominant caste – those who are so concerned with being a 'Self' – overwhelmingly influence which truths can even be heard and seen."

I nodded. "I see your point about art and that sort of thing. But what about the sheer facts of a situation? The 'given reality,' as some call it."

"What's given? Meaning is always received, interpreted – filtered through one's own paradigm. When I published *The Second Sex*, Albert Camus said to me: 'You make French men look ridiculous.' The only 'truth' that he was capable of apprehending concerned men!"

I laughed sadly at my literary hero's solecism. "That says more about Mr. Camus than about truth."

She shook her head as if mimicking me. "What is 'truth' apart from what human activity discloses? There are not random facts floating around waiting to be noticed. Our actions and our theories – in short, human subjectivity – shape the contexts in which any truth, any knowledge, can be disclosed. And that context in turn shapes us, 'subjects' us, to the regimens of the dominant group. In Western culture, subjectivity reflects overwhelmingly the privileged viewpoint of men, of white people, of the owning class."

"That can't be right," I said. "Reason isn't the privileged possession of one gender or class. It's the common right of every person. If Mr. Testacrittore proved his own being, that proof extends to every conscious person, not just to his own subgroup."

"Perhaps in some ideal way," she answered. "But for most of us, what we see represented is the outlook of the elite. For the white male owning class, to think truly *is* to be – they see their thoughts objectified in industry, in culture, in financial and educational institutions. Small surprise that they represent their kind as 'Self,' while the rest of us are

taught that we are 'Other.'"

"I see what you mean," I said, thinking how students are cast as Other to the Selves of privileged professordom. "But it seems fatalistic. How do we ever get outside that framework?"

She blew another cloud of smoke past me. "That's the role and challenge of social action, of radical critique, and of art and culture especially – to break the spell of this privileged viewpoint. This means accepting that reality is not as clear and distinct as male academics insist it is. It means accepting ambiguity and uncertainty."

"Naturally, ma'am, I am reluctant to ally myself with the forces of social oppression and its concomitant intellectual tyranny," I said, drawing a slow breath. "But my immediate task is to discover and apprehend Mr. Testacrittore's killer. It seems that accepting ambiguity undermines my quest. I need *more* certainty, not less."

"Certainty," she said with a derisive laugh. "There you go again. Epistemology forever sharpens the axe but never cuts the tree. Isn't it just an excuse for not acting in the world? 'I need more information before I make a decision.' Or my favorite: 'We need to do another study.' Well, life isn't certain. Sometimes you have to make the best decision you can and take action."

I shook my head. "And what if your best decision is completely mistaken, as I so recently have had ample occasion to experience?"

She shrugged. "It's a process. You observe, you decide, you act, and you let the world give you feedback. You take that feedback and start the process anew. What could be more scientific?"

19. Pop Quiz

If Ms. Beauvoir is correct and the fixation on epistemology is pre-eminently an owning-class male preoccupation, which philosophical issues will be seen as most important in coming generations?

(A) How to prove one's own existence.

(B) How to prove that one has proven one's own existence.

(C) How to prove that one has proven the existence of a proof that one's proof of existence actually exists.

(D) Developing a truancy calculus to determine as precisely as possible

the best days to skip, arrive late, or be present at a given class.

If you answered A, B, or C, you are mired in the past, and will doubtless waste your best years chasing after proofs that the aforesaid proofs prove anything in the first place.

If you answered D your eyes are set on the future, and you will in all likelihood make great contributions to the Western philosophical tradition.

20.

I gazed across the salad bar at Ms. Beauvoir. To such an epistemologically-wrought mind as my own, her words were unsettling. Yet I was intrigued by her use of the word "science" to describe a process of observation and action. Maybe Phenomenology was onto something.

"You might be right," I finally said.

"Yes, I might be," she said crisply. Someone waved to her from a table across the floor. "Bon soir."

As she walked away I looked around Logico's. No one was paying me any attention. I made my way back to my booth and silently finished my salad. As I downed the last of the Hautian Homebrew, another wave of exhaustion swept me.

I staggered to my feet. Was West Central Indiana beer that strong? Was I losing my tolerance?

No, it must be sheer physical exhaustion. Accustomed as I was to getting a solid ten hours sleep back in Berkeley, the hectic pace of Terre Haute was bound to be draining. And being awakened by a ghost every night wasn't helping matters.

I needed a vacation. But how could I take one now, when the police might catalog my DNA and arrest me any moment for complicity in the burning of the sweatshirt?

From there it might be just a short step to accusing me of the break-in at the villa, and perhaps even linking me to the murders – assuming the authorities finally acknowledged that the deaths weren't accidents.

With my main ally in jail, what chance would I have of clearing my name? Even Mr. Grosskase might have to abandon me to my fate.

Time was slipping away. Whatever chance I had of solving the mystery

and salvaging my reputation before the pitiless bar of philosophical history was fast disappearing.

I stopped at the counter, got a glass of ice water, and knocked it back like a shot of cheap whiskey.

Then I headed out the door.

Q.E.D.

Above: Raphael's Parnassus and School of Athens, Vatican Stanze, Rome
below: School of Athens, with Renaissance artists as models for Ancient philosophers

Chapter Five

1.

Back in my garret, I splashed cold water on my face. If I didn't get some studying done, I was going to fall hopelessly behind.

But as I stared at my books – especially the annotated version of Mr. Levinas' *Totality and Infinity*, which was assigned for the next day's Hermeneutics class – my eyes blurred. With a title like that, you had to wonder how you'd ever reach the end.

I splashed more water across my face to no avail. The futon called to me like a lumpy lullabye.

As I pulled off my shoes and shorts, I formulated a plan. Go to bed now and sleep for a while, then get up around midnight and do some serious studying.

No sooner had I hit the pillow than I was wide awake. I reached up and pushed the window open, then flopped around so I could lay on my left side. But it was impossible to get comfortable.

What was I doing in the garret? If Johann broke down and talked, the police could come for me at any moment. Shouldn't I be looking for a hideout?

Forget it. Going on the lam was futile. Once my DNA was identified, it was only a matter of time till the cops caught me. My only hope was to solve

the mystery right away – to find the murderer before the law closed in. Where could I turn?

Mr. Copleston. He'd been my guide through the treacherous waters of epistemology. Maybe he could navigate me out of this jam as well. How perfect that one of my most important clues was Mr. Testascrittore's foot pointing at Mr. Copleston's *History of Philosophy*.

Of course, I had no idea what was intended by that foot. Did it indicate a specific philosopher, as I'd assumed? Or simply that the murderer was a philosopher in general? Or perhaps a historian of philosophy? Or a philosopher of the history of philosophy? Or a historian of the philosophy of the history of the philosophy of history?

My mind reeled with redundantly recursive possibilities. How could I escape the endless loop?

"Take action." I remembered the words of Ms. Beauvoir. Easy for her to say, I thought. She had a book contract.

I, on the other hand, had nothing but a mystery on my hands. How do you "take action" when you have no idea what to do?

A gust of cold air swept across me. I reached up to close the window, when I noticed a misty cloud coalescing along the opposite wall. Being now a veteran of such apparitions, I merely pulled the blankets a bit tighter and awaited further revelations.

Soon I beheld a slight man with rounded shoulders and long, thin fingers. He wore a silvery silk jacket, with his wig powdered and curled in the George Washington style.

2.

Unless my eyes deceived me, it was the celebrated Mr. Kant come to pay a visit. I sat up in bed and offered him a seat on the futon. His presence was an odd comfort. Not that I was excited about extending my unbroken streak of nightly visitations – I was going to have to talk to the management at Logico's about lightening up on the midwestern spices.

But I figured if anyone could set my disordered enquiry aright, it was the meticulous Mr. Kant.

He sat on the inside edge of the curved futon, making only the slightest of indents on the bedspread. He took a pinch of snuff in each nostril and held his breath, staring intently into a distance that I couldn't fathom.

Then he gave his head a slight shake and turned to me.

"Mr. Copleston asked me to stop by," he said. "Feeling perplexed, are we?"

"More than a little, sir. I shouldn't even be here. The authorities could force Johann to talk, and they could come to arrest me at any moment."

"Then why aren't you doing something about it?"

"Like what? No matter what I try, things get worse. My first suspect gets killed, and my second is in jail. Every time I think I understand what a clue means, it turns out that I don't even know what it means that meanings have meaning, let alone understand how to understand understanding."

"Indeed." Mr. Kant crossed his legs and laced his delicate hands over his upper knee. "Human reason has this peculiar fate, that its knowledge is burdened by questions which are dictated by the very nature of reason itself, so that we're not able to ignore them. And yet the questions transcend reason's powers, so we're not able to answer them, either."

I nodded politely. "You mean things like our preferences for flavors of ice cream? That definitely transcends reason."

He smiled slightly. "I'm speaking of questions like, 'Did the universe have a beginning in time, or is it eternal? Is the human will free, or is every act determined? Is there a God? Does life have meaning?'"

"I see," I said slowly. I had no desire to offend my illustrious guest. But I felt like I owed an honest response, seeing as he was such a stickler for the truth. This was a man who reportedly said, "If your dearest friend is hiding at your house and the police ask if you've seen him, it would be a moral crime to tell them a lie."

I wondered whether Mr. Kant had many friends.

Still, he'd offered to help, so I figured I'd better shoot straight. "You see, sir, questions about 'the meaning of life' and whether there is 'free will' are in ill repute these days. The shifting nature of truth and the relativity of time are all the rage. I guess that's where I get confused. If I can't even be sure what today's meaning will mean tomorrow, how can I move forward?"

"Indeed 'tis thus," he said sadly. "And I put it down to the neglect of metaphysics. Time was when metaphysics was truly queen of the sciences. And the pre-eminence of her tasks gives her every right to this honor. Now, however, the change of fashion brings her only scorn, as if metaphysics is but ancient time-worn dogmatism."

"I'd say that describes the situation pretty well," I said. "Scorn, or at best

indifference."

"Painful as it may be to admit," he said, "this scorn demands that reason undertake anew the most difficult of all its tasks – self-knowledge. It demands that we establish a tribunal which will assure to reason its rightful claims, and dismiss all groundless pretensions, not by despotic decrees, but in accordance with reason's own eternal and unalterable laws."

"Wow," I said. "Are you calling for a Philosophers' Parliament?"

Mr. Kant took a pinch of snuff and looked at me curiously. "No, what I have in mind is a *Critique of Pure Reason*. I don't mean by this a critique of books and ideas, nor of facts and systems – but a critique of the faculty of reason – none other than an examination of reason by reason itself."

"Not likely to make the bestseller list," I warned him, "although it sounds like a most worthy goal."

"Thank you," he said. He glanced at his gold timepiece and abruptly stood. "I must be departing for my next engagement."

Caught off guard by his sudden declaration, I fumbled for words. "Wait," I said, figuring that was a good start. "Wait – there's something more I want to ask."

"Yes?" he said as he hovered near the foot of the bed.

"Pure reason is all well and good. But I need to solve this 'impure' mystery fast, or I'm liable to end up in jail myself. Isn't that why Mr. Copleston sent you?"

"No, I think he sent me because he had a poker game with Mr. Ayer, and couldn't come himself."

"Well, you're the genius here. What am I supposed to do?"

"My young man, we're all geniuses. Every one of us is vastly intelligent. The problem with the world is not that people lack knowledge. It's that we don't live in accord with what we *do* know. When, in every situation, each of us acts the way we would want every other person to act, society will indeed approach the ideal to which it naturally aspires."

"Sounds like the Golden Rule," I said.

"Exactly. What could be more 'logical' than this simple precept: 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'? That is the ultimate meaning of my philosophy."

"No offense, sir, but why then did you write the other 2000 pages?"

He shrugged his shoulders. His silk jacket flared out behind him. "Perhaps I got a bit carried away," he said. "In any case, the ultimate point of my work was ethics, not epistemology."

I pursed my lips, uncertain how to respond. He looked at me urgently. "Don't bury yourself in epistemology," he said. "It teaches us a healthy respect for the limits of reason, but it's not an end in itself. There's a whole world waiting, a world of practical reason about which we can *never* attain certainty. All we can do is give it our best shot and see what the results are."

"I'll try," I said without a lot of conviction.

He checked his watch again. "I'm nearly two minutes late – you must excuse me." He gave a quick bow and strode away.

3.

After more fitful sleep, I woke at three in the morning with the elements of the mystery tumbling around my cluttered psyche.

The missing manuscript floated before my eyes – hundreds of dog-eared pages hovering in mid-air.

The philosopher's bust appeared enshrined in a scalloped marble niche, the very emblem and archetype of philosophical immortality.

And the Copleston volumes practically glowed, arrayed in order on the bottom row of Mr. Testascrittore's bookshelf.

I thought back to the felicitous Berkeley semester when I'd dropped my classes to read the series, packing the wisdom and paradoxes of Western philosophy into my overheated brain.

I recalled cruising Berkeley bookstores in search of used paperback copies and savored again the sense of achievement when I finished a volume – despite or perhaps because of the fact that no one was going to test me on the material.

And I felt again my sadness as the ninth volume wound down mid-way through the twentieth century, leaving the entirety of Structuralism and Postmodernism untouched.

Sure, there were plenty of textbooks covering contemporary philosophy, and even some good ones. But there was only one Mr. Copleston.

My mental image of the shelf in Mr. Testascrittore's office shone clearly, but the Copleston books wouldn't stay lined up. Try as I might to visualize them in a neat row, a couple kept sticking out, and the final volume insisted on falling over. I mentally straightened up the books, but as soon as I relaxed, they moved around again.

Why wouldn't they stay still? Was I intuiting the books' trauma at being hurled from their shelf during the break-in?

Why had the intruder de-shelved them, anyway? I didn't believe the rare-first-edition explanation. I pictured how the Coplestons laid all together on the floor, as if they hadn't even been opened. Either they had no resale value, or the intruder wasn't after the books at all.

And yet they seemed to hold a vital clue.

Was it significant that Mr. Testascrittore had used his foot to point to the Copleston shelf? Maybe he was indicating someone who was a mere historical "footnote." Of course, that would implicate most philosophy professors throughout the Western world.

And what of the right foot, the one awkwardly tucked underneath the left knee? Why would the methodical Mr. Testascrittore leave one entire limb out of the circuit of clues? Had fate obscured the final puzzle-piece, forever lost because Mr. Testascrittore ran out of vital energy?

Yet this was a man known to be a perfectionist, a man who, his skull crushed beneath the massive erudition of Cambridgian scholarship, managed to arrange his collapse such that each of his other limbs was precisely placed. Who with a splatter of blood had underscored a passage in Sartre. It seemed implausible that one foot would so completely elude his powers of expression.

I pictured the Copleston shelf. The books were once again out of line. Were the protruding volumes significant? Was my subsconscious sending me a symbolic clue? I imagined pushing them back, and other books popped out, seemingly at random. Apparently the specific volume wasn't the key.

Something was out of alignment. If not the books – the shelf? I remembered using a dictionary to brace the wobbly board. My custodial instincts flared, and I felt guilty for not taking the extra moment to secure the shelf.

But why was it my responsibility? No one was paying me to do repair work. That was Johann's job.

Johann. I felt another twinge of guilt at the thought of my fellow custodian wasting away in jail. What was I doing to free him? Some friend I was turning out to be!

Given my repressed guilt over neglecting my custodial comrade, it was small surprise that the loose shelf should weigh so heavily on my mind. I vowed to take whatever steps were necessary to procure Johann's immediate release, or failing that at the very least to go back and fix the shelf.

What an odd coincidence that it was the shelf under the Copleston volumes that wobbled. Repairing the shelf would have special significance.

The shelf under Copleston. 'Under Copleston.' The phrase was ringing some bell.

Under Copleston. One might have studied under Mr. Copleston. Suffered under him. Writhed. Flourished. Chafed. What else could one do "under" Copleston?

Tuck. I pictured Mr. Testascrittore's right knee, tucked underneath the left leg pointing to the Copleston shelf. Tucked under. Under Copleston.

I sat bolt upright in bed. Of course!

4.

Under Copleston – the manuscript was tucked under the Copleston shelf! It had been right at my fingertips, and I hadn't understood the clue.

A terrible thought crossed my mind – what if whoever ransacked the office had found the manuscript? But if they had, why would they have bothered to replace the shelf board?

I grabbed my office key and my newly-won flashlight and pulled on my Fighting Sycamores sweatshirt, which had proven such an effective disguise.

I broke a sweat as I hurried through the muggy night toward the Albertus Magnus Empirical Metaphysics Building. I passed no one on the Quad, but as I neared the entrance I spied a single illuminated window just down the hallway from Mr. Testascrittore's office.

Slipping in a side door I bounded up the stairs to the second floor. Making sure the hallway was clear, I crossed to Mr. Testascrittore's office and slid

the key into the lock. It turned noiselessly.

My heart pounded in anticipation. Shining the flash along the bookshelves, I knelt and scooped up the Coplestons. The wooden board wobbled.

I tugged the front edge with no effect. But when I pressed on the rear of the shelf, the front popped up enough to pry it loose.

Underneath was a chamber the size of a desk drawer filled with odds and ends: a nearly-empty pint of vodka, several dozen baseball cards, a small bag of weed, and a well-thumbed copy of Playgirl's infamous "Bad Boys of Epistemology" spread featuring Mr. Testascrittore himself posing in the buff, a handwritten manuscript page serving as a fig leaf.

Underneath the magazine was a thick envelope, dog-eared from repeated use. I unfastened the clasp and slid the papers out.

I knew in a moment it was the revised manuscript. A handwritten cover letter dated the very day of Mr. Testascrittore's death was addressed to an individual identified only as "David." Kneeling on the office floor, I read by the light of my flash:

"Dear David,

"At long last I deliver to you the corrected manuscript of *The Being of Nothingness and the Nothingness of Being (Part II)*.

"I trust your judgment as to the best release date, with no regard for the threats I have received over the past year. I know that you, like myself, will not be dissuaded from the quest for Truth.

"Into your hands I commend my manuscript. – P. Q. Testascrittore"

So there had been threats! What more evidence was needed that Mr. Testascrittore was murdered on account of the impending publication of his magnum opus?

I turned to the manuscript itself. The scrawled handwriting instantly identified it as Mr. Testascrittore's. Was a draft of the long-anticipated proof of existence buried in these irreplaceable pages?

Or did a red post-it once again flag the most glaring lacuna in the history of Western philosophy? Without a page-by-page examination, I had no way of knowing.

But at least I had the manuscript. A funny thought crossed my mind: Maybe David was the "manuscript thief" who had almost stumbled onto me when I hid under the desk a few days earlier. Maybe with the best

of intentions he had come to Mr. Testascrittore's office in an attempt to secure the manuscript, and was no danger at all.

What better person with whom to entrust the papers? Besides delivering the manuscript, I might share my suspicions about Mr. Testascrittore's untimely demise. Perhaps with David's deeper understanding of Mr. Testascrittore's work, he could decipher the text and pinpoint the murderer.

But how was I going to find someone with as common a name as David? He could be in Alexandria, Buenos Aires, New York, Rome, or even here in Terre Haute – any of a dozen centers of culture and learning. Where could I even begin the search?

Of course – ask Mr. Grosskase. Who more likely to know Mr. Testascrittore's publisher? With a discovery of this magnitude, his support could be pivotal.

I dug through Mr. Testascrittore's desk and found an address book. It was scribbled and corrected as thoroughly as his manuscript, and finding "David" seemed impossible. Fortunately Mr. Grosskase's address seemed not to have changed over the years: 999 South Sixth.

But knowing his address was only half the problem. I needed to talk to him confidentially. With Perkins managing the Rector's home-healthcare, it was a safe guess that the staff were spilling everything they saw to the toothpick of a grad assistant.

Luckily I had a bargaining chip – the manuscript.

5.

Kneeling before Mr. Testacrittore's bookshelves I slipped the manuscript back into the envelope and tucked it under my sweatshirt.

My work in his office was complete. Parlaying my prize into a private audience with Mr. Grosskase was my next challenge.

The bottom bookshelf slid smoothly back into place. I lined the Copleston volumes neatly in order and started for the door.

As I passed the desk, a spot of gold glinted in my flashlight beam. There on the corner of Mr. Testascrittore's desk was an athletic club membership card. And not just any athletic club. The gold-embossed logo heralded the Temple of Logic!

The card might be my ticket to the inner sanctum! Tucking it into my pocket, I went to the door and opened it a sliver. All clear.

Setting the lock, I shut the door and started toward the stairs. The hallway was dark except for the soft glow of the emergency nightlights.

Or was it? A slight glare animated the shiny floor tiles a few doors down – Mr. Denkenschnelle's office. I knew that I should get out of the building before anyone saw me, but I couldn't resist tip-toeing down to his office. I pressed my ear to the door. Sure enough, someone was inside.

Well, why not? Was there a rule that prohibited Mr. Denkenschnelle from burning the midnight oil – or the four a.m. oil, in this case? Why should I take it amiss that a professor at the leading philosophical institution in the Western world was working overtime?

From inside came the faint sound of a male voice. Odd, I thought. The popularity-craving Mr. Denkenschnelle didn't seem the type to mumble to himself. Of course, he didn't seem like a serial murderer, either. And at the moment, he had to be considered a potential suspect. Or victim.

The mumbling abruptly turned to cursing. A heavy object thudded on the floor. Sharp footsteps crossed the room, and I jumped back lest the door fly open in my face.

Was an intruder rifling Mr. Denkenschnelle's office? Had I caught the murderer red-handed, preparing for his next crime?

I should alert the police. But something stopped me. I'd had more than one occasion to suspect the police's allegiance. Alerting them might be the surest way of allowing the culprit to escape.

If I knocked, though, what could I hope for? Either I'd find myself face to face with a cold-blooded killer, with no help in sight. Or I'd have to answer Mr. Denkenschnelle's queries as to why I was wandering around the building at four in the morning. He'd likely call the police, who might recognize me from the Wanted poster and arrest me on suspicion of attempting another break-in.

The manuscript – that was my first duty. Get the package to Mr. Grosskase.

Suddenly a door opened behind me. I ducked behind a row of lockers. Footsteps came my way, then stopped.

I peeked around the lockers and could tell by the round shape it was Mr. Denkenschnelle visiting the water fountain. He took a sip of water, then abruptly walked over to Mr. Testascrittore's office.

Without looking around he reached down and rattled the handle. When it didn't budge he rattled harder. Then with a shrug he headed back toward his own office.

What an odd performance, I thought. Was I dealing with a would-be manuscript thief? A cold-blooded murderer returning to the scene of his crimes?

Or a potty professor who worked in the middle of the night and visited murder scenes on his breaks?

What if he knew that I was hiding behind the lockers and that I had Mr. Testascrittore's final manuscript? Would he shrug again? Or would I be in danger for my life?

He went back into his office, leaving the door ajar. Although the stairs were just twenty feet away, the entire stretch of hallway was exposed. If he came out of his office, I was nailed.

I looked around, but I didn't see an alternative. Maybe he wouldn't recognize me. Even if he did, I had the manuscript and a head start.

Gripping the package firmly, I started for the stairs. I wasn't halfway when sharp footsteps announced Mr. Denkenschnelle's return.

"Mr. Harrison?" Mr. Denkenschnelle's voice sliced through the silence. "Harrison, is that you?"

6.

It was me, all right. But not for long. I bounded down the stairs two at a time, clutching the manuscript to my chest.

Mr. Denkenschnelle called after me. I hated to be rude and ignore him. But if he was the murderer, I owed it not just to my own safety, but to the preservation of Mr. Testascrittore's manuscript and by extension to the entire 2500-year trajectory of Western philosophy to get as far away as I could. Once the manuscript was secure, I could come back and deal with him.

Mr. Denkenschnelle's voice echoed in my ears as I ran from the building. Would he call the police? They could be patrolling the streets of Terre Haute looking for me within minutes.

I ducked into the shadows beneath a tree. I had to find a place to hide. My garret was out of the question. I considered the boiler room, but with

Johann in custody his workshop might be under surveillance.

What about the grounds of Mr. Testascrittore's villa? The police might keep an eye on the house and office, but it probably wouldn't occur to them to search outside in the garden. I could bury the manuscript until I found out who "David" was.

But one thought of the vicious Anaximander cooled my ardor for visiting the villa grounds. Even if the hybrid canine didn't lay waste to another sock, he'd surely sound the tocsin and bring the authorities down on me.

What about Mr. Grosskase? I already needed to contact him about the letter addressed to David. Why not leave the manuscript with him? His illness would work in our favor – who could steal the manuscript if Mr. Grosskase never left home?

He could deliver the priceless manuscript to the mysterious David, or at least alert the publisher that it was in safe hands. I'd be rid of that responsibility, the better to focus on bringing the murderer to the steely bar of relentless justice, which I needed to do if I didn't want to spend the rest of the academic year on the lam.

I glanced at the clock on the campanile. 4:20 a.m.

Not my favorite time to be awake, but not the worst, either. I took a toke and formulated a quick plan. Lay low till dawn. Then make my way by a circuitous route down to Mr. Grosskase's mansion. Assuming I could persuade the domestic staff to rouse the Rector and give us privacy, I would ask him to hold the manuscript. Then I would be free to return and deal with Mr. Denkenschnelle.

Of course, I'd have to adopt a fresh disguise on my return. Mr. Denkenschnelle had probably reported me as wearing a Fighting Sycamores sweatshirt. Immediately I peeled it off.

What could I do for a new costume? I needed to ditch the whole sweatshirt motif and adopt a totally different look.

I could pose as a literature major. That would certainly throw the authorities off my trail. But then I'd be expected to discourse knowledgeably on all those tedious early twentieth century novels. It seemed like a heavy price to pay.

How about a Chemistry major? Science was fun. I'd have to wear black-rimmed glasses, though, and carry around one of those tinker-toy molecule kits. My social life was grim enough already.

What about the arts? Dance had always appealed to me, as I suspected my legs would look especially shapely in tights. Unfortunately the dancing part would be a giveaway.

In the distance I heard a siren. I picked up my pace and headed away from campus. Better to take my chances on the streets of the Historic Latin Quarter Preservation District than risk being stopped by campus police, especially when I was carrying Mr. Testascrittore's manuscript. Talk about incriminating evidence!

The sirens grew louder. Was there an all-points bulletin out for me?

I rounded a corner and ducked under the portico of an old brick building as the sirens came closer. If only I could get to Logico's! I could wolf down a plate of Boeuf Rabelais and leave a few leftovers on the table. If the police found me, I could point to the remnants of the meal and say I'd been there all night studying, and that Mr. Denkenschnelle was crazy to have thought he recognized me.

The sirens faded. I had strayed several blocks off my intended path. As I rounded a corner a stunning array of multi-colored lights struck my eyes.

I gaped as I beheld in all its glory the sparkling towers of the Temple of Logic.

7.

Despite the hour, the Temple of Logic was fully aglow. Faerie lights sparkled along the massive buttresses. Spotlights played over the central steeple. Ushers stood on either side of the art deco entrance welcoming the devout with the blessings of rational thought.

Perfect! The campus authorities would never suspect that I had gained admittance to the sacred precincts.

With luck there would be a sunrise service where I could simultaneously evade the authorities and pay homage to the deepest spirit of Western rationality.

Approaching a checkpoint, I fished Mr. Testascrittore's athletic club membership card out of my pocket, hoping the guard wouldn't study it too carefully.

When he saw the name, he stiffened. "Mr. Testascrittore?"

"A nephew on my mother's brother's sister's side," I improvised. "I hope

you will allow me to pay my respects to my dearly departed uncle at this Temple that must have meant so much to him."

The guard stifled a laugh. "Well, sir, I don't recall ever seeing your uncle around these parts during worship hours. But if you would like to pray here, who knows, perhaps it will ease his poor soul."

I thanked him and approached the glowing west portal. Up close, the art-deco arches were somewhat less impressive, particularly where strands of chicken-wire showed underneath the veneer of stucco.

The entrance opened directly into the central space, a huge squarish hall with tall concrete walls sloping slightly inward. Arching steel beams rose from each corner, meeting high overhead at the base of a cast concrete steeple.

Colorful banners celebrating the victories of logic through the ages adorned the bare walls. A sumptuous altar bedecked in gold-trimmed cloth and silver candelabra formed a focal point for curving rows of wooden pews.

Despite the early hour, the pews were filling up. I took a seat in the back row and was tapping my foot to the organ rendition of "Swing Low, Sweet Syllogism" when I felt a tap on my shoulder. A stern usher bade me follow.

My eyes darted around. Were the police waiting outside? In the cavernous chapel there was nowhere to hide.

When we reached the aisle the usher guided me through a door, where a single priest waited. I breathed a sigh of relief that he seemed to interpret as exasperation.

"Sorry to disturb your meditation, sir," he said hurriedly, "but I've been informed that you are a near kinsman of the late Mr. Testascrittore?"

It seemed a bit awkward and possibly dangerous to rectify my earlier exaggeration of our relationship, yet I was reluctant to state an open falsehood within the Temple proper. "Yes?" I asked.

"Very well, sir – the Archidrone has sent me to beg you to speak a few words by way of elegy for Mr. Testascrittore's recently departed spirit. Even though your uncle was not the most diligent of devotees, the athletic club was always remembered in his charitable giving, and I know that deep in his heart he considered himself a loyal votary of the Temple of Logic. A few words from you would be very inspiring to all of us."

I groaned inwardly. What had I gotten myself into? What if someone

recognized me and challenged my status as kin?

Luckily, the usher sent me backstage for make-up. The helpful staff fitted me in a crimson robe and matching mortarboard. They powdered so much rouge on my cheeks that my own mother wouldn't recognize me. Not that I expected her in the audience. But you can't be too careful.

A black-robed usher led me to the dais where the officiants were seated on oversized wooden chairs. The Archidrone seated me at his right hand, in full view of the congregation.

Not only could I not escape, I couldn't even kill time by leafing through the hymnal and humming the songs to myself. I was going to have to pay attention, or at least give a good appearance of it.

Luckily, religion is one of those things where, at least among mortals, the appearance is as good as the fact – to seem devout is sufficient unto the day.

Esse is percipi, as Mr. Berkeley would say – being is simply what appears, and we needn't bother ourselves with any putative "reality" behind it.

This strategy is quite effective in dealing with most human beings as well as most philosophy professors.

It doesn't prove so successful with deities or lovers.

Seated in a stiffbacked chair on the dais, I sat patiently through endless mytho-poetic invocations of the Cardinal Virtues, Language, Number, and all nine classical Muses.

The final invocation was the grandest of all – Rationality itself was called into the presence of worshipers with the exclamation, "Reason, be here now!" The cry was greeted with everything from rapt devotion to ecstatic dancing.

After a brief homily concerning our obligation to be logical with our enemies as well as those we love, the Archidrone gestured for me to take the rostrum. I nervously approached the microphone, which started feeding back as I leaned toward it.

Gathering my composure, I looked out over the crowd. The pews, which spread out in a wide fan shape, were nearly filled. In the front rows, faces were upturned expectantly.

Further back, the attention was not so uniform, and I found myself distracted by two people in the last row who appeared to be groping one another.

I shut my eyes and focused on the most valuable lesson I'd learned during my matriculatory years at the University of Southeastern Berkeley: when called upon to testify to the power of philosophy in your life, don't despair that you may be hopelessly under-prepared and utterly unworthy, even though you probably are. Just stand tall, breath deeply, and surrender to the divine logos.

I leaned to the microphone. "Mr. Testascrittore – my dear uncle Phineas, that is – was a pillar of Logic. I remember my dear old grandfather – that would be, uh, Mr. Testascrittore's father – used to say, 'You have to get up pretty early in the morning to catch old Phineas being illogical.' So we – all the kids of the younger generation, I mean – would set our alarms and get up and surprise Uncle Phineas in his pajamas, staggering in the throes of illogic."

I smiled at the memory, then remembered that it wasn't actually a memory. But wait – how could I have a memory that something else is *not* a memory? Isn't that like counting up to something that isn't a number?

I looked out and beheld a multitude of auditors awaiting moral edification, or at least a decent punch line. "So we'd catch him," I hurriedly added, "being all illogical. And over the years, I came to realize that my uncle wasn't such a stickler for logic as he was always made out to be."

A gasp went up from the congregation, and I realized I'd made a horrible faux-pas. I hastened to paper it over with platitudes about Mr. Testascrittore's well-documented fondness for hyper-abductive ampliative reasoning and his deep and abiding concern for the ontological rights of Nothingness.

The crowd settled back, and I breathed a sigh of relief. As I concluded my elegy I wondered if I should reveal the existence of the manuscript tucked under my robe. What a thrill that would send through the assembled worshipers!

But I was sworn to silence, at least in my own heart. Trust no one – that was my new credo. I concluded with a grand Spinozistic Q.E.D. and returned to my seat.

As the Archidrone thanked me for sharing my intimate personal reminiscences, I began to regret not divulging the manuscript's existence. Not only would it have filled people's hearts with awe and inspiration – I might have gotten an honor-guard escort to Mr. Grosskase's house. Who would dare steal the manuscript amid such a cortege?

My unease and guilt were compounded when the Archidrone stepped to the altar and unveiled the Logos Incarnate.

8.

"Brethren, sistren, and siblings of all genders known and unknown," declared the Archidrone of the Temple of Logic, "we are gathered in the name of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful to do honor to the Ideal Forms of all Being. So often as ye eat of the Bread of Knowledge and drink of the Wine of Truth, do ye this in memory of the Divine Logos."

Having been less than fully truthful in my elegy – in fact, having prevaricated from the outset in portraying myself as any sort of relation to Mr. Testascrittore whatsoever – I would have preferred not to partake of the Logical Host. But sitting in full view of the congregation, I couldn't very well refuse.

The congregation was served first. I looked out at the faces of those already savoring the sacred bread. Some smiled ever so slightly. Others stared dumbly into space as if auditioning for a Pasolini film. One woman cast her arms wide, a small handbag dangling from her right wrist.

The Archidrone stood before me and made the sign of the sacred syllogism, then placed the Wafer of Knowledge into my mouth. I tried to swallow it whole, but the disk clung to the roof of my mouth and began to burn my tongue.

I gripped the arms of my chair. Unable to breathe through my mouth, I snorted in air through my nose, shuffling my chair around on the wooden dais to cover up the noise.

At last the gold-plated Chalice of Truth was presented to me. Desperate for relief from the wafer, I gulped from the cup and gagged on the sour red wine, which festered as a sordid aftertaste.

Thankfully the offertory dancing was next. As the other officiants stood, I slipped out of the sanctuary and raced for the drinking fountain, making a solemn vow never again to impersonate Mr. Testascrittore's nephew, or at least to wait until my supposed uncle had been dead long enough that I didn't wind up having to commit a mortal sin on his account.

I considered making the Temple of Logic my refuge until dawn. But so far it hadn't been much of a refuge. I dropped a few coins into the poor-box, then headed back to the street and made my way toward Logico's. Just a

few more hours and I could turn the manuscript over to Mr. Grosskase.

But what if I wasn't allowed to see the Rector? What if Perkins or his spies denied us privacy? Where else could I turn?

What about Johann? His present indisposition might work in my favor. If I could smuggle the manuscript into his jail cell, no one would be able to steal it. I'd have the entire police department protecting it.

What was I saying? I was going to march into the police substation carrying a murder victim's manuscript and try to smuggle it into a prisoner's cell? What if Johann's supposed arrest was the linchpin in an elaborate ruse designed to lure me to my destruction?

Were Johann and the police conspiring to frame me for the murders?

Then again, just about anyone could be in cahoots with the police. What about Mr. Denkenschnelle, snooping around the Albertus Magnus Empirical Metaphysics Building and rattling the door to Mr. Testascrittore's office? He must be pretty confident that the police wouldn't accuse him of wrongdoing. Then he sees me – and right away I start hearing sirens.

Mr. Dascapitali certainly had been keeping a low profile. Was the Marxian master secretly campaigning to replace Mr. Testascrittore as the Greatest Living American Philosopher? Might he be colluding with the police on a scheme to label the deaths accidental while working to divert or suppress Mr. Testacrittore's final writings?

Then there was the inscrutable Perkins. His classroom appearance with Officer Narckenstein certainly suggested a pattern of collaboration. In fact, based on the way he overshadowed the apparently sincere Narckenstein, I had to wonder whether Perkins was the mastermind behind the murders, and the faculty and police merely his hapless pawns.

Was I scapegoating him? Just because Perkins had some blatantly obvious personality defects was no reason to accuse him of a brutal double-murder. The killer could just as well have been someone I respected and cared for – like Johann.

I'd come full circle. As if all that wasn't confusing enough, all of my conjectures assumed that the culprit was someone employed at the Institute. Was it that simple? I'd never been back to question the villa gardener, who certainly seemed anxious to get me off the grounds the day of the break-in.

Neither could I ignore the Club Pascal connection. Had Mr. Testascrittore

been drawn into the lurid underground of epistemological gaming – a realm where money is expensive and life is cheap? Club Pascal glittered on the surface. But run afoul of the unwritten code and even proving your existence might not save you.

I made it to Logico's without further incident. Late-night business was slow, but I figured I could blend in for a couple of hours until dawn. I found a corner seat, pulled out some notepaper, and furrowed my brow to indicate that I had long been immersed in deep thought.

A waiter skated up, chewing gum in a way that encouraged me to hurry up and get focused. The Soup de Jour was Boolean Borscht, which the menu promised was mouth-wateringly good.

But wait – I already have water in my mouth. Does that mean my life is mouth-wateringly good? In that case, I'd say it's a mixed compliment at best.

While we're at it – who came up with "wateringly"? Can you imagine inventing a word like "airingly" or "firingly" and getting away with it?

The waiter cleared his throat. I quickly ordered a bowl of Boolean Borscht along with a side of Noodles a la Nietzsche, a cheese and pasta casserole baked into the shape of the great prose stylist's brain.

Making sure no one was watching, I pulled the manuscript out and riffled through the ink-splotched pages. Mr. Testascrittore's handwriting was familiar by now, or at least not entirely indecipherable. Scanning the chapter headings sent a thrill through me.

I flipped to the back, hoping to spot a section entitled Proof of Existence. But none of the titles was under a dozen polysyllabic words. At least I didn't see any red post-its this time – a good sign. The proof must be in here somewhere.

Even though I knew I couldn't keep the manuscript to myself, I had no compunction about copying Mr. Testascrittore's proof if I could locate the salient pages. Given all the trouble I'd endured, the least I could get out of the deal was definitive confirmation of my own being.

Unfortunately, what with the scribbled original and myriad scrawled corrections interpolated into the text, it was slow going. Only the need to kill time before delivering the manuscript to Mr. Grosskase kept me turning the pages.

My borscht and noodles arrived. Despite the resustenance my eyes grew

bleary as I began a new chapter:

"On the Being of the Nothingness of Nothingness's Being: Ontological Auto-Awareness and the Phenomenology of Postmodern Descriptics, with Special Attention to the Historical Trajectivism of the Problematic of Hermeneutic Verification Protocols in the Post-Cartesian Milieu."

I read it over several times, the phrases taking on various plausible shades of meaning.

Was this the proof? Or just another prologomena?

The opening pages were an excursus into Mr. Heraclitus's theory of the flux – the pre-Socratic Greek sage's contention that all reality is forever shifting and changing, a view that Mr. Testascrittore claimed foreshadowed his own theories about the being of nothingness or the nothingness of being or possibly both.

I yawned and flipped another page, and another. Then suddenly a section subtitle leapt from the page: "Certain Epistemological Remarks on the Epistemic Certainty of Our Search for Certitude Regarding Epistemology."

I blinked and refocused. There, halfway down the next page, was a list of seven – not one, but seven – proofs!

In contrast to the cluttered text, the list stood out in pristine clarity. Instead of an ontologico-etymologic analysis in the style of Mr. Heidegger, or a dialectical disquisition in the fashion of Mr. Aquinas, or a series of meditations in the Cartesian vein, Mr. Testascrittore offered a simple iteration:

Hunger

Grief

Frustration

Boredom

Humiliation

Pain

Death

I'd found it! But the proof baffled me. Was this simply an outline that Mr. Testascrittore intended to flesh out in a final version?

Or was this list the proof itself – a stridently minimalist solution to the age-old conundrum?

I read further down the page, but my eyes started to blur again, and the handwriting degenerated into patterns resembling termite tunnels. I turned back to the spartan list.

How did humiliation prove anything? Or Boredom? I'd been bored plenty of times. I was once completely and utterly bored for the entirety of a weekend seminar on Mr. Descartes himself. But I didn't come away with any added certainty of my existence.

Maybe you had to do all seven to get the full effect. If so, was the order compulsory, or just a recommendation?

Was there a time limit? Or could you get the first five out of the way, then hold off for a while on the last two?

Perhaps the idea was to do them all at once. What if you died of hunger in deep boredom and pain, under the most frustrating and humiliating circumstances imaginable? If the experience caused you grief, which seemed like a safe bet, you would be certain you existed.

Although by that time, you might yearn for a little less certainty.

I considered keeping the manuscript a little longer so I could study the text more carefully. Maybe with a little sleep and a few re-readings it would start to make more sense.

But besides the ethics of the situation, I knew the police were closing in. If I were caught with the manuscript I probably would be charged with Mr. Testascrittore's murder. I had to rid myself of the papers as soon as possible.

If I could evade the police for just a couple more hours I could place the text in Mr. Grosskase's hands and be done with it.

As I pictured my advisor, though, my gut tightened – what if Mr. Grosskase himself was the murderer?

What if he killed Mr. Testascrittore so he could have the sole right of advising me? Suppose the entire affair was a ploy by Mr. Grosskase to gain unimpeded access to the most strikingly original insights I would almost assuredly one day attain, which he planned to steal and publish as his own?

The thought gave me pause. But with Johann in jail, I had to find a confidante. I owed it to the memory of Mr. Testascrittore to preserve his final work. Mr. Grosskase was clearly the best bet. Whatever the risk to my own academic career, I'd have to trust the Rector – and let whatever was, be.

For a moment I lost my train of thought, enchanted with the ontologico-temporal interplay of the dual-being construction: "was, be."

9. Pop Quiz

Use this triple-being phrase in an everyday English sentence, without adding internal punctuation of any sort: <was is to be>

The answer will follow. But first, we pause for this important message from our sponsor.

Picture it – after years of selfless labor, you've finally published your magnum opus. Reviews have appeared in the most important journals, and students around the world are compelled to purchase the text and cite it in their term papers.

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And now, the answer to the quiz concerning the phrase "was is to be":

Who the killer was is to be revealed in the coming scenes.

10.

I left Logico's at sunrise, heading toward South Sixth Street. As I passed Mr. Testascrittore's villa, I crossed to the other side lest Anaximander spot me and raise a hue and howl.

As the rosy red fingers of dawn cast their luminous rays over the Queen

City of West Central Indiana, I stood outside 999 South Sixth. No one seemed to be stirring.

Social grace dictated that I wait another hour or so. But I couldn't very well pace the sidewalks of the wealthiest district in town. That was a sure way to get stopped by the police.

I strode up to the front door, took hold of the heavy metal knocker, and rapped five times. Hearing no immediate response I rapped five more.

A light came on in the window to my right. I waited for the door to open. But instead a metallic voice barked from a speaker under the mail slot: "Yes? What is it?"

I bent down to speak into the intercom. "I need to see Mr. Grosskase at once on a most pressing subject which I have reason to believe he will in all likelihood find to be a matter of the utmost urgency for the future of the Institute, indeed for the entirety of Western philosophy!"

I stayed bent over, turning my ear to the speaker as I awaited the response.

"Yes?" The voice came from behind me. I straightened up and faced Mr. Grosskase himself. His bushy grey eyebrows beetled together, and he sucked in short breaths through his mouth. "Mr. Harrison – to what do I owe this honor?" The bantering tone seemed a tad forced, and I got right to the point.

"Sir, I need to speak to you about Mr. Testascrittore's manuscript!"

At that moment, a car screeched to a halt in front of the house. The door jerked open and out jumped Perkins.

"Sir!" he cried as he bustled up the lane. "You should not be out of bed! You know it's against doctors' orders." Perkins glared at Mr. Grosskase.

The spindly grad assistant turned to me. "How can I be of assistance?" he said coldly.

"I need to have a word with Mr. Grosskase, if you don't mind." I tried to step around him.

"You can speak in front of me," Perkins said in a dismissive tone.

I patted the envelope under my sweatshirt to strengthen my resolve. "No, I need to speak to Mr. Grosskase in private."

"Quite impossible," Perkins responded. "As you can see, the Rector is in no position to receive visitors. Now I must insist that –"

"It's alright, Mr. Perkins." The resonance of Mr. Grosskase's usually-creaky voice surprised me. "I can give Mr. Harrison a few minutes of my time."

"But sir —"

"It will be fine," Mr. Grosskase said, the weariness creeping back into his voice. "Please give us leave."

Perkins' teeth clenched, and he seemed to struggle to refrain from arguing. Mr. Grosskase ushered us inside, and with a few words directed Perkins to a sitting room. Then he led me to his office and closed the door behind him.

The room was paneled in oak with dark mahogany trim. Tall, carefully-curated bookshelves lined three walls. Glass doors opened onto a porch on the fourth. A large uncluttered desk faced the porch.

Mr. Grosskase crossed the room to his desk, shoved a book off his leatherbound chair, and dropped heavily into the seat. He looked at me with tired eyes. "Now, Mr. Harrison, what is it you wanted to talk to me about?"

For a moment, I wanted to tell him everything about my experience in West Central Indiana – how lost I felt amid the high-powered Terre Haute milieu, how ill-prepared I was by my undergrad training – and most of all how homesick I was for the quiet ways of Berkeley.

But his labored breathing brought me to the point. I pulled the thick envelope from under my sweatshirt.

"Sir, amid circumstances that I will relate at a more opportune moment, and which I am sure will exculpate my disruption of your repose, I have come to inform you that I have had the good fortune to find Mr. Testascrittore's revised manuscript. The cover letter says that it is ready to be sent to the publisher, someone named 'David.' I'm hoping you'll either know the man, or be able to locate him."

Without blinking an eye, Mr. Grosskase took the manuscript from my hands and leafed through the opening pages. He didn't say a word, but the intensity of his concentration was in sharp contrast to his demeanor a moment before.

At last he looked up. "This is it," he said. He looked at me, then back at the cover letter. "David Snellingsworth in Glasgow," he said. "I'll wire him right away."

"Then you can get the manuscript to him?"

"Yes," he said with a wink, "although I dare say we ought to send a copy and keep the original for the Institute. Could have a bit of historical value."

"If anyone can read it," I said, unsure whether he was serious or not.

"Bah, no one reads these things, they just want to put it in a display case. Auctioning this original could pay for an entire wing of the new library."

I wanted to feel a wave of relief at having placed the manuscript in the aged Rector's hands. But a troubling spectre clouded my mood – Perkins. Mr. Grosskase might be alert now, but during the course of the day he was bound to drift off, allowing Perkins an opportunity to get his nefarious hands on the priceless manuscript.

"Do you have a safe where it can be locked up?" I asked as casually as I could. "Just to be sure, you know."

"You're quite right," he said with a nod. "What with digital backups, I never think of losing a manuscript. Old Testascrittore, though, he never did come into the computer age. All the more reason to make a photocopy. But for now I'll lock it up."

He went to his desk and rooted around. "Where's that key? I thought I put it right here. Well, no matter, I have another." He opened a lower drawer and produced a small silver key.

Walking over to the bookcase on the right, he pulled several volumes off the shelf, seemingly at random. As the third was removed, the entire case swung open to reveal a wall-safe. He dialed a combination, inserted the key, and opened the door.

Placing the manuscript back in its envelope, he sealed it with a piece of clear tape. Then he deposited it in the safe, spun the lock, and closed the bookcase.

I gave an audible sigh of relief as he turned to me and smiled.

"There," he said. "That should take care of it. No one even knows this safe exists except you, me, and Mr. Perkins."

11.

"Perkins?" The word escaped my lips.

"Oh yes, Mr. Perkins knows everything. He's been of invaluable service to me during this recent chain of events."

"So he knows about the safe..."

"Yes, of course. But only I have the key."

Great, I thought. Just a few minutes earlier, Mr. Grosskase was missing a key. Perkins might quite possibly be in possession of it already.

How secure was my conversation with Mr. Grosskase in the first place? I hadn't considered that Perkins could be snooping at the keyhole, or might have the office tapped. My strategy of leaving the manuscript with Mr. Grosskase was drowning in a fresh wave of doubt.

Doubt. Didn't that used to count for something? Back in Mr. Descartes' time, a reliable doubt was enough to guarantee your existence. Now, if Mr. Testascrittore's proof was correct, you had to suffer humiliation, boredom, hunger, death, and several other unpleasant sensations.

So much for cultural progress.

Mr. Grosskase saw me to the door. I didn't see any way to alert him to the danger without precipitating a showdown with Perkins – a clash I was sure to lose. All I could do was pray that Perkins didn't have the key to the safe.

Back on the street, morning was in full autumnal bloom. I took a breath and tried to savor the crisp air wafting off the Wabash River.

But the thought that Perkins might have access to the manuscript gnawed at me. I circled the block, pondering whether to stake out the Rector's house to see if he had the envelope when he left.

I didn't have to wait. As I approached Mr. Grosskase's house Perkins bolted out of the door and raced across the yard. In his hands was a package – the manuscript!

"Stop him! Stop, thief!" Mr. Grosskase staggered out of the front door and stood shaking his fist. Perkins nimbly hurdled the hedge.

Mr. Grosskase stood helplessly on the porch. It was up to me.

With a shout I took off after Perkins. He shot a glance back, then stooped his shoulders and raced on.

For a bookish guy the senior graduate assistant was surprisingly fast. I tailed him a couple of blocks down South Sixth, then lost him as he turned right. When I reached the corner, he was sprinting toward the Index District.

Did he have a hide-out? Was he in cahoots with warehouse workers who could stash the manuscript among their indexes and provide the muscle to protect it?

My legs were heavy as I pursued my prey across Highway 41 and into the District. Leaping off a curb I slipped on a soggy stack of old index pages and wrenched my back.

Perkins was fading in the distance. A couple of blocks ahead he turned left. I took a gamble and slanted down a railroad spur, using my last burst of energy to race along the tracks.

My strategy worked. As I crossed a street two blocks later, I spied him a mere hundred yards ahead. He looked winded, clutching the package to his chest while his free arm flapped frantically.

He cut to the right with me close behind. Scrappy trees lined a gravel road. The pungent aroma of the Wabash River filled my nose. Was a motorboat waiting to whisk him and his ill-gotten goods away?

Suddenly Perkins pulled up, glanced back at me, and slipped through a gap in the trees.

I staggered up to the gap and ducked through. Standing there with hands on my heaving hips, I saw where he was heading: Club Pascal.

12.

Club Pascal? Of course – what better place to find an underworld fence who could take the hot pages off his hands?

The manuscript might fetch a fine price on the illegal market, and perhaps an even higher extortion payment. I pictured the mobsters burning a page a day and sending the ashes back to the Institute until the ransom was paid.

Across the parking lot, Perkins disappeared through the front door. I wasn't all that keen on going inside. The casino was surely crawling with undercover police and informants. Why not just wait outside and pick up the trail when he left?

But what if he sold the precious pages while he was inside? Or gambled it away? We were talking about a manuscript that might cast the entire Western philosophical tradition in a new light and usher in a new Trans-Postmodern era of epistemological certitude.

Whatever the risk, I couldn't just sit and wait.

I took a deep breath and resolved that I'd catch Perkins if I had to chase him up and down every aisle of Club Pascal. I'd catch him if I had to chase

him through every one of the Thousand Taverns of Terre Haute. I'd recover the manuscript whatever it took – and maybe apprehend a murderer in the process.

Stepping through the glitzy doors into Club Pascal I sized up the scene. Perkins was talking on a phone near the bar, speaking in an anxious, hushed voice. The package was clutched to his chest.

Did Perkins have a plan? Was he preparing to sell the manuscript to an agent for a Viennese Post-Structuralist cell? Barter it to an alumnus of a famous academy in exchange for a prize appointment? Pass it to a confederate who would wait till the heat was off before selling it on the philosophical black market?

Or did he plan to use the text as collateral for a gambling binge, hoping to enrich himself while retaining possession of the treasured document?

Wrapping up his call, Perkins waltzed out onto the dance floor. He wasn't a bad dancer, moving with a certain mechanical grace, although the bulging manuscript under his jacket required that he keep one hand on his mid-section at all times, making his every move look like an avant-garde variant of an Irish jig.

He seemed not to have seen me come in. I bought a pint of Hoosier Pale and took up a position where I could keep a discreet eye on the suspect. Around me, slot machines flashed and roulette wheels whirled.

Beyond the bar, a tote board gave odds for the Battle of the Books, a biennial competition that pitted Western philosophers against one another based on recent assessments of their surviving writings.

A crowd queued up to place bets. Mr. Spinoza was the early favorite, the only thinker under 2-1 on the big board, with Mr. Kant, Mr. Ibn Sina, and Mr. Aristotle close behind.

As I studied the odds I listened to a tall man in a grey fedora and sunglasses delivering a running commentary for an international radio audience. A gaggle of bettors clustered around and hung on his every word as they prepared to place their final wagers.

"Forget Hume," the guy in the fedora was saying. "He'll go down in the Modern Philosophy sectionals, falling along with Leibniz and Descartes before the meticulously-executed attack of 'Dutch' Spinoza. Put your bet on Spinoza and leave it there.

"As for Kant, I see him reaching the semifinals. His offense is well-planned,

and his defense is the best this side of Aquinas. He'll take Hegel and Fichte in the Idealist sectionals, then slip past Husserl and Russell in the regionals, before running into Spinoza in the semis.

"My money's on the Dutchman, with his grinding offense and punishing defense. But don't write Kant off. No one can air it out like he can, and if he gets a chance to go long on you, watch out. Even Aristotle might have trouble keeping up.

"That's right, I'm picking Aristotle once again in the Ancient regionals. He'll handle Zeno's trick plays and Valentinus's flashy moves with no trouble. His only challenge will come from Plato. If it's a late-afternoon match and the shadows are a factor, Plato might find a way around Aristotle's disciplined game plan. Otherwise, I'm sticking with the Stagirite.

"Looking up on the tote board, we see 9-5 on Spinoza to take it all. Aristotle leaves the gate at 3-1, Avicenna and Kant 4-1, and Husserl a dark horse at 7-1. No one else rates higher than 12-1, with Aquinas the best long-odds gamble at 30-1."

"Saint Thomas is coming off a tough year," interjects a color commentator in a Howard Cosell twang. "And he's facing Avicenna and Augustine in the first round. But he's going to show up for the matches that count. Did the Summa-man ever let the Inquisition down? He's going to play his heart out for Holy Mother Church."

For myself I found 7-1 on Mr. Husserl tantalizing. Having grappled with his *Logical Investigations* the previous year, I wondered whether even the mighty Mr. Spinoza could match him for sheer density of thought. If he could top "Dutch" in the regionals, Mr. Husserl might go all the way. I was on the verge of pulling out my wallet.

At that moment the phone rang at the bar. I turned to see the bartender waving to Perkins, who sidled over from the dance floor and took the call.

As he listened he tossed a few bills on the counter. He mumbled into the phone, handed it back to the bartender, and in the blink of an eye shot out the door.

I jumped up and scampered after him. As I cleared the outer portal, Perkins leapt into the back of a taxicab and sped away.

13.

Another taxi wheeled up to the curb. "Follow that cab!" I cried as I slammed the door behind me.

The cabbie looked over his shoulder, and I recognized my adventurous driver from a few days earlier. "No need to do that, pal," he said. "I'll just take a shortcut."

I repeated my order to follow the other cab, but the driver slammed the glass partition and clicked the latch. He immediately took a left, and I watched helplessly out the rear window as Perkins' taxi sped away in the other direction.

What was going on? I'd followed my plan to the letter. I'd placed the manuscript in Mr. Grosskase's hands and watched him lock it in his safe. When that failed, I had pursued Perkins through the Index District all the way to Club Pascal.

Now, despite my most diligent and determined efforts to protect and preserve Mr. Testascrittore's final testament, I'd lost the trail entirely, and was speeding down a country road in a renegade cab.

I rapped sharply on the divider. The driver ignored me. I rapped more forcefully. Finally he slid the glass open. "What now?"

"What are we doing out here in the boondocks? The other cab must have headed back to town."

"Look, buddy, who's driving, me or you? If you want to walk, you can get out anytime. I told you, I know a shortcut."

"To where?" I demanded. "You have no idea where I want you to go."

The driver cast a glance over his shoulder. "Why on Earth should I be concerned with your emotional desires?"

"Because it's the passenger's itinerary which determines where a cab goes, not the driver's whims!"

He twisted around and glared at me. "Are you propounding some pre-Humian theory of causation wherein the passenger's thoughts exert some sort of quasi-magical influence on the driver? Pray tell me, how can your internal mental processes have any causal effect on me?"

"You're missing the point," I said, trying at the same time to indicate by movements of my eyes that he ought to be watching the road. "There is a social convention that allows the passenger to name the destination. The

driver is paid to fulfill that request."

"You're mistaken," he said with a toss of his head. "We're paid by the mile. Your request is merely the pretext under which we drive around and accumulate billable miles. If we happen to get you where you intend to go, that is an especially felicitous outcome and we expect a tip commensurate with the convenience. If not, well, you've gotten a ride, often accompanied by expert commentary on the sites and attractions of our fair city."

"So you aren't planning to get me anywhere in particular?" I said, recalling my previous ride.

"On the contrary," he insisted. "I will absolutely get you somewhere in particular. And you'll find out where that is any minute now."

This time I slammed the dividing window. What was the point in arguing? I'd long since lost Perkins' trail. I slumped back and stared out the window.

We were cruising through the Historic Latin Quarter Preservation District, past the Lucky Toga Etrusco-Chinese Laundromat and the Hedonist's Haven motor inn. I even thought I saw The Man Who Looked Like Augustus Caesar. But when we got closer he reminded me more of the statue of Trajan in the Louvre. Maybe he was a cousin of The Man.

We circled a few blocks, and I thought we were in a holding pattern, when the cabbie suddenly veered left into a narrow alley. He careened down the easement, crossed another alley without stopping, cut left onto a main street, and slammed on his brakes.

"Where are we?" I asked.

Before he could respond, I looked out the window and froze – our cab was surrounded by police!

14.

In front of us, two officers dismounted from their motorcycles. A patrol car cruised up alongside us. A squad of riot police came marching up the sidewalk.

My stomach knotted. Had Johann ratted me out? Had he and Perkins laid a trap and lured me to my downfall? My eyes darted around, but police were everywhere. They had me surrounded.

Actually, though, no one seemed to be paying any attention to my cab.

The squad of riot cops marched on past. The officers in the patrol car glanced our way and drove on. The cycle cops dismounted. One removed his helmet and rubbed his neck.

I looked at the building behind them and beheld the cathedral-like entrance of the Saint Thomas Aquinas Police Substation.

By simple counter-induction, that would account for all the police. But what accounted for my presence here?

The cabbie turned and held out his palm. "That'll be fifty dollars," he said.

"Excuse me," I said with a bit of heat. Now that the police were moving along, I felt a surge of anger for having been put into the frightening non-predicament in the first place. "Exactly why have you brought me to this god-forsaken place?"

He smiled offhandedly. "Oh, this is where we bring everyone from Club Pascal. We figure they may be wanted by the police, and whoever delivers them here might collect a hefty share of any reward."

I tensed again, recalling the crude drawing on the Wanted poster. As signifiers went, it was fairly meager. But to hear some Postmodernists tell it, *any* sign was meager in the end. Had the cabbie realized my identity? "So you were planning to turn me in?"

"Don't take it personally, chap. It's just a percentage play. It's part of the job – a way to make a few extra bucks. All the cabbies do it."

"Oh, they do, eh?" I mimicked his tone of voice, mentally calculating an especially low tip to emphasize my displeasure with his general level of service.

At that moment, a second cab raced up to the taxi-stand and jammed its brakes to avoid rear-ending us. I wrenched around and saw a tall, gangly figure jump out the rear door.

Perkins! His driver had apparently delivered him here as well.

He still clutched the package to his chest. His head jerked back and forth as if getting his bearings. He spotted me and did a sharp double-take. Then he threw a bill at the driver and scurried toward the station.

Where was he going? Was he crazy enough to carry the purloined manuscript into the police's bastion?

And was I crazy enough to follow?

There was no time to ponder the question. Quickly I thrust way too much

money at my cabbie, belatedly appreciating his profession's vital if rather mercenary assistance in catching my nemesis.

Casting aside my concern over my Wanted status, I took off after Perkins, who raced around the side of the police cathedral and into a small utility door.

I grabbed the handle and jumped inside. Footsteps pounded to the left. I squeezed around a partition into a narrow, poorly-lit passageway. Spying Perkins just ahead, I started after.

Suddenly a tall, powerfully-built figure stepped directly into our path. "Halt! Where do you think you are going?"

Perkins slammed to a stop and I nearly plowed into him. Looming in front of us, hands on wide hips, stood my old friend the police administrator, or a very impressive facsimile thereof.

Abandoning my usual social graces, I grabbed her arm. "Help!" I cried. "This man has stolen Mr. Testascrittore's manuscript!" I thrust my finger in Perkins' direction lest she miss the referent of my assertion.

She yanked her arm out of my grasp and in one quick motion whipped out a stun-gun. I jumped back. Taking no heed of my strong recommendation that she place Perkins under arrest, the administrator used the stun-gun to point to an opening between two partitions.

Surmising that she meant not that the partitions needed to be shocked, but that Perkins and I ought to avail ourselves of the opportunity to traverse the indicated portal, we stepped through into an office strikingly similar to those I had previously visited.

It may even have been the same space with the partitions moved in a few feet and most of the file cabinets removed. A big desk dominated the room, with two cheap folding chairs facing it.

The hyper-caffeinated Perkins paced back and forth, giving the space a particularly claustrophobic air. Inspired to set a more professional example, I feigned nonchalance, standing with deliberate calm in front of the desk.

Facing us with her stun-gun at the ready, the administrator picked up the phone and reported her action to the central office, referring to me and Perkins as "The Suspects." Did the beleaguered administrator recognize that a Wanted person was standing in front of her? So far she hadn't given any indication of it.

Perkins maintained his bantam rooster impersonation, eyes darting this

way and that, and I feared lest he suddenly bolt through an opening in the partitions. Since he had the manuscript, I'd have to pursue. But we wouldn't get far, and there'd be hell to pay for trying to escape.

The administrator must have shared my concern. Still on the phone, she pointed her stun gun directly at Perkins and gestured to him to sit down. He obeyed, perching himself on the edge of a folding chair.

Although the administrator commenced her call in a voice resonant with self-assurance, the authorities to whom she was reporting were apparently none too pleased with her precipitous action. Soon she was on the defensive, explaining at length why she had taken the liberty of apprehending us without approval from above.

As I listened it became clear that the administrator didn't recognize me either from my previous visits or from the Wanted poster. To her I was just the better-looking half of The Suspects.

Finally she promised to file a complete report in quadruplicate and hung up the phone. She stood facing us in the center of the room, tapping the stun-gun against her open hand. "Now what's all this commotion in the hallway?"

Perkins started bawling about an important meeting in the lower level. I wondered whether he knew that the next level down was the jail, with rumors of a dungeon below that.

As he prattled on, I realized my best hope lay in enlisting the administrator's assistance. When Perkins finally paused, I addressed her in a measured voice. "Ma'am, this man is a manuscript thief. And he may well be trying to destroy Mr. Testascrittore's proof of his own existence."

Perkins burst up in objection, but the woman silenced him with a jerk of her stun gun. Deflated, he slumped back down into the folding chair.

Ignoring my charges of Perkins' criminal culpability, the administrator looked at me and snorted. "Mr. Testascrittore's proof? Hardly a tragic loss to philosophy. Mr. Aquinas laid out the definitive proof of being. The only adequate proof, as he demonstrated, is to know the ground of your being – to know the First Cause, the Prime Mover."

"What does that prove?"

She tapped her finger on a large-print edition of the *Summa Theologica*, which lay open on her desk. "Mr. Aquinas's proof of existence? It's simple, really. You are a finite, contingent being. By yourself, you cannot exist. You

lack a ground of being. Something caused your existence."

I gave a dry laugh. "That would have been my parents," I said.

"I should certainly hope so," she said. "And they in turn had to be brought into being by something prior to them. This is true of every created entity, all the way back through history. Only the First Cause, which we call 'God,' is itself uncaused."

I threw up my hands in exasperation. "Don't you understand? Mr. Testascrittore proved his existence with no recourse to deity or first causes. It's a purely existential proof. And it could be destroyed if you don't take action to prevent it."

The administrator tossed back her head and shook with laughter, although not a sound escaped her. At last she wiped her eyes and composed herself.

She spoke methodically, using the stun-gun to accent key points. "How can a proof be destroyed? If it were truly the foundation of existence, it could neither be created nor destroyed, but would necessarily exist. Anything that can be destroyed is contingent like ourselves, and cannot be the ultimate ground of our existence."

"But the manuscript..."

"Again I ask – what sort of epistemological theories do you hold, that you believe truth can be destroyed like a flimsy manuscript? Either it *is* the truth, in which case it is true for all time. Or it is not the truth, in which case, who cares that it perishes?"

Perkins, who given his exalted position in the ranks of graduate assistantdom might reasonably be expected to have a reply to such a challenge at the ready, sat dumbly in his folding chair.

I groped for a response. "Regardless of the eternity of truth, some human being must be the first to enunciate it. The *expression* of truth is not eternal – it can be destroyed and lost forever, or at least lost to the present generation."

"I believe Mr. Aquinas addresses precisely that issue. But I don't have time to elaborate, so I must demand that the two of you leave the premises instantly."

Perkins started up, but I quickly got between him and the exit. If we left the building, my nemesis would take off, and who knew whether I'd ever get this close to nabbing him again.

"Please, ma'am! If you would just be so good as to detain this gentleman, I believe you will in the end find you have rendered an invaluable service to the Institute – indeed to the future of Western philosophy. Not to mention sparing me a great deal of trouble."

She glared at me. "I repeat – you are liable to arrest if you do not exit the building at once. I thought we went over our procedures when we met previously."

"Aha!" I cried, grasping at the straw. "You admit that we've met! Last time, you denied that my being in your presence constituted a 'meeting.'"

"I was using the term loosely this time," she replied coolly. "I did not mean to imply any social connotations, simply a spatio-temporal co-presence."

"But you said –"

"I used a word which is susceptible of numerous interpretations. I intended one meaning, and you are trying to impose another that would be more favorable to your own meager case. Little good will that do you, since I am the final judge of my own meaning."

"Who appointed you the 'final judge' of anything?"

I figured that would put her in her place. But instead, she strode over to a file cabinet, shuffled through a couple of drawers, and came back with a gold-embossed crimson folder.

She opened it and displayed to me and Perkins a yellowed letter written in antiquated calligraphy stating that the bearer was appointed by the Papal Office to be a Final Judge, so often as circumstances and the public interest should demand.

It was signed at the bottom in a bold hand: "The Pope."

Impressive, I had to admit. I considered challenging her on whether a decree signed by a prior Pope – which this aged document almost certainly was – was still valid.

But she might produce a Vatican Code citation that would clinch her case, and I'd be sunk. I had to find another angle.

The administrator stared at me, one hand resting on the *Summa*, the other on her hip. The hip-hand shifted, reaching for her stun gun. Was she preparing to forcibly evict us? Would Perkins escape my clutches?

15.

The police official stared triumphantly, one hand poised on the *Summa Theologica* as the other gestured with her stun gun. "One is always the final arbiter of one's own statements," she stated flatly.

I knew it wasn't that simple, particularly in the Postmodern era which we were presently either inhabiting or possibly in a dialectical process of transcending. But I couldn't exactly explain why.

The police official pointed her stun gun at us. "Leave! Now!"

Before Perkins or I could move, a rustling came from between the partitions. From out of the shadows Mr. Derrida stepped forth. His thick brown hair showed streaks of gray. His long trenchcoat and the hint of a smile in his eyebrows reminded me of the old TV detective Columbo.

"Sir," I cried. "This administrator is insisting she is the final judge of the meaning of anything she says, and is about to free this thief on those grounds. Surely that can't be right!"

Mr. Derrida adjusted his trenchcoat as he turned to face the administrator. "A 'final judge,' have we? An arbiter of 'final meanings,' I presume? On what grounds?"

"Simple," the woman said. "I am the author of the original phrase, so obviously my intention prevails. Any later constructions must yield before the author's intended meaning."

Mr. Derrida laughed sharply. "Says who, the author? There is no ontological priority in being the 'original speaker.' After all, what is spoken second might clarify or correct what came first. Or it might incorporate the first point in a dialectical sublation and transcend it, as Mr. Hegel suggests. Once meaning enters the world, it is the equal possession of all. The author doesn't 'own' it."

The administrator's hands flapped back and forth as if warding off a grave error. "No, you're mistaken, and I will prove it." She bent over her desk and began turning pages of the *Summa Theologica*.

Mr. Derrida crossed his arms and began whistling "La Marseillaise."

As the administrator flipped frantically through the *Summa*, Perkins suddenly bolted toward the opening in the partitions. In a flash he was gone, and with him the priceless manuscript.

Shooting a glance at Mr. Derrida imploring him to keep the administrator

busy, I took off after Perkins.

As my eyes adjusted to the dim corridor, I didn't spy my prey. But at the end of the hallway a set of double doors were still swinging.

The doors bore a stenciled sign: "No Admittance Beyond This Point."

I pulled up short. Perkins must have passed through in spite of the stricture.

Dare I so flagrantly defy the warning? The social value of any sign, after all, depends to some extent on our general acquiescence in semiotics. Each time we ignore a sign we devalue all signs. I didn't want that on my permanent record.

Yet I couldn't give up the chase now. A counter-argument took shape in my mind.

The No Admittance sign, I reasoned, wasn't intended to prohibit everyone. If no one whatsoever was admitted beyond this point, that meant the people who posted the sign were barring themselves as well. That would be like inventing a secret handshake so arcane that even the inventor didn't know it.

Clearly *someone* was admitted beyond this point. The failure of the sign to specify who this favored person was and why they were accorded special privileges provoked me to such Thoreauvian fury that my only honorable option was to defy the injunction.

The doors led to an industrial stairway that descended to a lower level made entirely of concrete. I stopped and listened, but heard only dripping water.

Hurrying down the hallway I reached a cavernous court with a thirty-foot ceiling. The concrete walls were streaked with years of water stains. Around the glaring overhead lamps bats streaked to and fro.

From this central space sprang eight passageways lined with steel-barred cells. With a shudder I realized I had reached the subterranean jail via a rear entrance.

In the middle of the underground courtyard stood a tall watchtower which afforded a view in all directions. I peered through the tinted windows, but couldn't see anyone inside.

As I pondered the situation, a janitor came my way pushing a mop and bucket. "You again?"

I gave him a puzzled look. He shook his head. "Oh, sorry, sir, I thought you were the other gentleman."

"A tall, skinny guy?"

"Yes, I should say so, speaking strictly in a comparative sense. Not that I've never seen a taller person. But in the general run of things, yes, he was on the taller end of the spectrum."

"And where did you see him?"

"Down here," he said, gesturing widely. "Can't rightly recall which corridor, but one of them for sure."

I thanked him, and he rolled his bucket away. As I gazed down one of the identical passageways, a glint of light at the far end caught my eye. I started past a row of empty cells toward it, when I felt a sudden chill.

Up till now, I'd been pursuing a fleeing thief, assuming that when I caught him I'd wrestle the irreplaceable manuscript away and be done with it.

But what if Perkins was in fact the murderer? He might this very moment be laying a trap and luring me to my doom.

I slowed my pace, listening intently. All I heard was the ceaseless dripping.

Suddenly a shadowy figure poked his head out from the end of the corridor, shot me a glance, and scuttled off the other direction.

I broke into a run. Ahead, a door slammed. I ran up and yanked it open. A flight of bare concrete stairs rose before me. I took them two at a time, then raced back down the opposite side, up a short flight, then down, down, down into the bowels of the building.

At last I reached a wide hallway with stone walls and a low ceiling lit only by an occasional blue light. The damp air felt like a storm sewer. The tunnel curved to the right, and in the dim glow I could see only a short distance ahead.

Down the tunnel, muffled footsteps echoed on the concrete floor.

I started in that direction, moving slowly in the dimly-lit tunnel. My eyes were just adjusting when I stumbled over a length of heavy chain.

I froze in my tracks. Bolted to the stone wall were skeletons in various stages of decomposition. Some were whitened with age, while others still had bits of clothing and hair attached.

A battered sign bore a hand-lettered inscription: Librarial Delinquents.

Was this the fate of those who returned philosophy books late? Who wrote in the margins of history texts?

Or had I stumbled onto the remains of a macabre office Halloween party?

This wasn't the time to conduct a thorough Phenomenological investigation. I pushed my way past the chains and hurried on down the curving corridor till I came to a narrow wooden door. I reached for the handle.

Suddenly, from the other side came a sickening shriek. A heavy weight slammed against the door, followed by silence.

16.

As the scream echoed from the damp dungeon walls, my inner voice of wisdom cried "stop!"

Unfortunately, inner voices of wisdom have limited value unless there are inner ears of wisdom to hear them. My hand was already turning the latch.

I pushed, but the door stuck. Forcing it open I squeezed through and stepped on a lumpy mattress. The edge rolled under my foot and I stumbled, grabbing the door for balance. My other foot kicked the mattress and then hit something hard.

I looked down. Even in the dim light, I could see that it wasn't a mattress at all – it was Perkins! I studied his face. He was out cold. With his eyes wide open.

As I stepped back, I tripped over his legs. That's odd, I thought. What were his legs doing down there?

Suddenly I leapt back in horror, realizing the head wasn't attached to the body. I slowly approached again. Sure enough, Perkins lay there decapitated.

Once again, my number one suspect was dead. Either I was the world's unluckiest detective, or they were the world's unluckiest suspects!

Where was the manuscript? I reached down gingerly and felt under Perkins' coat. Had his killer stolen it? Of course – the phone call at Club Pascal must have lured Perkins down here to deliver the manuscript into his executioner's hands.

I snapped to attention. Dare I chase further? Ahead of me lay the

manuscript – but also a cold-blooded killer. I peered into the darkness, but saw nor heard nothing.

I knew I should get away and find help, but I also knew that the irreplaceable manuscript lay within my grasp.

And suddenly I realized who was now in possession of it.

Duh! The biggest mystery was why I hadn't realized it from the start. Who was more likely to disparage – to the point of death – the work of the century's leading Phenomenologist than the Institute's foremost advocate of Analytical Positivism – Mr. Denkenschnelle?

Thank goodness I fled when the professor recognized me outside his office early that morning. Had I hesitated but a moment longer, I might have been snuffed on the spot.

The only question in my mind was whether the police in the station above were in cahoots with Mr. Denkenschnelle, or simply his unwitting dupes.

The click of metallic footsteps rang out. I jerked to attention.

Should I run? I eyed the door, but Perkins' headless torso wedged it shut. I was trapped!

I turned to confront Mr. Denkenschnelle.

Was it really him? Who else could it be?

Perkins was dead. Mr. Zeitenschreiber was dead. Johann, at last notice, was safely locked away. The police didn't typically kill with sickles. That certainly narrowed the field down.

But suddenly I knew – it wasn't Mr. Denkenschnelle at all. The clues snapped into place like a magnetic puzzle. The blood-stained Sartre book. The Roman philosopher's bust. The row of Copleston volumes.

And most of all, the manuscript and the proofs of existence – the publication of which would impact the life's work of one person above all others.

A person who strode toward me wielding a long, rusty sickle.

17.

"Ah, Mr. Harrison," said Mr. Grosskase. He was breathing hard, staring down at Perkins. In his right hand he held a bloody sickle. "We meet again. I believe you're looking for this?"

He handed me the manuscript package. The tape on the envelope was still intact. Perkins never had a chance to look at it, and despite carrying the precious cargo all over town he died without ever reading the proof of his own existence. Poor fool.

Mr. Grosskase's welcoming tone shook me out of my absurd fantasy. What was I doing, blaming the Rector for an act of self-defense? I'd seen Perkins steal the manuscript from right under his nose.

Thankfully, while I was nearly losing the trail at Club Pascal, Mr. Grosskase had apparently lured Perkins to these subterranean chambers by offering to ransom the manuscript – that must have been the phone call at Club Pascal.

An argument ensued, during which Mr. Grosskase grabbed the closest implement of defense he could find, and in one wild blow caught the treacherous Perkins square across the neck.

Had Perkins really murdered Mr. Testascrittore? And Mr. Zeitenschreiber? It was difficult to believe such a dweeb could so profoundly influence the course of philosophical history.

I suspected that Mr. Grosskase knew all the answers, but this wasn't the time to ask. My God, I thought, how this man has been raked by death in the past week. But if my intuition was correct, my trusted advisor had just put a grisly end to the Institute's reign of death.

Mr. Grosskase stepped closer, so close that he barred my way to the door. His head was slightly bowed, and he peered at me with a weird open-mouthed grin.

"Yes, Mr. Harrison," he said, gesturing at me with the sickle. "We meet again."

His sickle wavered over me. My heart sunk as I was forced to modify my Hermeneutic understanding of the situation to conform with new and discordant Phenomenological observations.

So Mr. Grosskase really was the killer. And he had the door blocked. Any attempt to run would surely get me cut down.

I felt the weight of Mr. Testacrittore's manuscript in my hands. Even with the completed proof of existence the tome lacked the heft to bring down a crazed professor emeritus.

Fight and flight were both useless. My only hope was to engage him in a spontaneous round of ethical dialectic.

Summoning my Inner Utilitarian I spoke with forced calm. "I fear the pleasure of our meeting may be a bit one-sided. And I must note that from a strictly Utilitarian point of view, killing me is not likely to promote the greatest pleasure of the greatest number."

"Now, you don't know that," he chided. "Mr. Denkenschnelle told me of your view that we can know nothing of death, since we've never experienced it. Given that, how can you dismiss the possible pleasures of death? For all you know, I am about to send you to a land of eternal bliss."

"I have a different idea," I said none too hopefully. "Why don't you go on ahead to the land of bliss and grab us a table? Don't wait to order, I may be delayed a while."

Mr. Grosskase chuckled drily. "Not so long as you might wish. I hope you don't have any library books checked out."

"No, as a matter of fact, I make a point of always returning them on time," I said, hoping my somewhat-exaggerated diligence might count for something. But the situation looked grim.

If only I'd seen the pattern of the clues earlier! It was all so clear now.

The foot pointing at the Copleston volumes, which I'd been sure would pinpoint the killer, turned out to indicate not a person but the location of the manuscript.

The Sartre book, on the other hand, pointed to Mr. Grosskase as Professor Emeritus of Sartrics. The bloodstain was probably inadvertent.

The left arm, pointing toward the Roman philosopher's bust? The "head" of the Institute.

And who stood to gain or lose the most by whatever Mr. Testascrittore published? The Rector, of course.

Mr. Grosskase. It was all there.

A little late.

He gestured at his latest victim with the sickle. "It was quite inspiring when you set out to capture Mr. Perkins. I give you an 'A' for effort. Still, your final grade will be a 'D' for death. I'm afraid you know a bit too much for me to let you live, don't you agree?"

I had to admit that on strictly racionatory grounds, his case looked airtight.

18.

But if logic were really cut and dried and there were no loose ends, people wouldn't have spent two millennia arguing about it. Among all the axioms, postulates, corollaries, and QEDs, there must be a loophole in there somewhere.

As an aside, this is the kind of inference that I would like to have named after myself, particularly if I were to die in the line of duty – Harrison's Axiom, stating that the value of a proof is in inverse proportion to the effort one expends in its development.

Colloquially, Harrison's Axiom might appear in this form: The more complicated a proof is, the more ways there are to evade it.

The pursuit of epistemological immortality notwithstanding, I needed a fresh inspiration. And with Mr. Grosskase's bloody sickle glistening in the silvery security lights, I needed it fast.

Squeezing the manuscript bundle to remind me of my mission, I blurted out a line from an old movie: "So you were the mastermind who worked all this out? I never would have guessed you were behind it."

He tossed his head back. "Thought I was over the hill, didn't you? Looks like I reeled in another sucker."

His words stung, but I had to keep him talking. "Did you plan it all from the beginning?"

"For the most part," he said with modest pride. "Although Mr. Zeitenschreiber's death was an unexpected nuisance. Once I realized that he was searching for the second manuscript, I had to get rid of him."

"So it *was* Mr. Zeitenschreiber I saw at the villa that day. Why did he want the manuscript?"

"The proof, of course," Mr. Grosskase said with a cold laugh. "I'm sure he planned to rework it in a Heideggerian vein and publish it as his own. Look at Mr. Testascrittore's proof: humiliation, pain, boredom – add anxiety, insomnia, and a touch of indigestion and there's nothing a Heideggerian couldn't live with."

"But why did you kill Mr. Testascrittore in the first place?"

"His usefulness was at an end. Sartrics is destroying the balance of the Institute. His brand of Existentialism already enjoyed hegemony, forcing the other schools to frame themselves as various types of Sartrean

studies. If he published his supposed 'proof of existence,' his fame would have known no bounds. The cooperation of different schools of philosophy that I have nurtured for three decades would collapse under his dominance."

"And for that you killed him? After all he did for the Institute?"

Mr. Grosskase looked rueful. "He'll be hard to replace as a fundraiser, I admit."

"Not just that," I said, holding up the manuscript bundle to underscore my point. "You denied him the well-deserved fruits of his proof of existence!"

He laughed sharply. "Proof of existence? What an illusion. Philosophy can never provide that sort of certainty, least of all regarding your own existence. At its best it teaches you to question that existence."

"But if someone *did* claim to prove their existence, doesn't posterity deserve to know?"

"Bah! Take a look at Mr. Testascrittore's so-called 'proof.' What is it? A laundry list of bad moods. Hardly the stuff of legend."

"No, there's more to it than that," I insisted.

"Is that so?" he said sarcastically.

Picturing Mr. Testascrittore's proof, my mind raced barely ahead of my words. "Pain, hunger, frustration, boredom – these *do* prove one's existence. These are moments when life feels heavy, like a burden. We're compelled to realize we are alive, because at that moment we are caught under life's weight. It's when I can't escape suffering that I am compelled to recognize that I exist."

"Not for long," he reminded me. "You're about to die."

"Death," I said, intrigued at the coincidence. "Death is the ultimate proof of existence, isn't it? I'm beginning to see now what Mr. Heidegger meant when he spoke of this paradox, that in facing my own death – in authentically living-toward that finitude which is existentielly my ownmost – I am inescapably confronted with the totality of 'my' life, with 'who I finally am.'"

"Well, you better appreciate it while you can," he said, looking at his wristwatch. "You realize, of course, that if you had stayed focused on your studies you wouldn't be in this predicament."

He had a point, but I didn't see any advantage in trying to learn from my

mistakes at this late moment. "Sir," I said, hurriedly changing the subject. "What about Perkins? Why did he have to die?"

"Alas, poor Mr. Perkins," Mr. Grosskase said with a slight chuckle. He tapped the sickle against his open palm. "Had he stuck to our agreement, all would have been well. I promised him the rights to one of Mr. Testascrittore's final essays, which was already in my possession. Mr. Perkins could have published it under his own name and instantly been acclaimed an heir to the Testascrittoreian legacy. His academic future would be secure, and he might have aspired to a post at Cambridge or Harvard.

"Instead, he stole the manuscript from the safe and tried to pressure me into appointing him to a post here in Terre Haute. Imagine that – Mr. Perkins a professor at the Institute! He has not a whit of originality about him. At best he belongs at Columbia or the Sorbonne."

"Or Berkeley," I couldn't help saying.

"Let's not speak ill of the dead. Surely you don't want people saying that about you!" His eyes glinted.

"No sir, you're right," I said, grasping for something more to ask. "How did you get Perkins to come here?"

He smirked. "Mr. Perkins called me from Club Pascal, trying to blackmail me. When he left there, I knew the cab would drop him at the police station – they always do. I told him to meet me in the basement level. As Rector, I know my way around this building as few others do. So I lured him down here where I could eliminate him without a trace."

I shuddered. "So Perkins was your partner in crime?"

"He was the sentinel. It was his job to keep your orientation class immobilized while I took care of Mr. Testascrittore, then make sure the hall was clear just long enough for me to escape before sounding the alarm."

"Yes, I remember," I said. "A lot of good it did him. And a lot of good it will do you. You'll never get away with it!"

"My boy, I already am getting away with it. The police don't think anyone's been murdered. I am about to eliminate you, the only person who even suspects it. It could be years before your bones are discovered down here. You've also done me the excellent favor of locating the sole copy of Mr. Testascrittore's final manuscript, which I'll deposit in the incinerator after I dispose of you."

"The incinerator?" I cried.

"Precisely where it belongs. A proof of existence – really!"

"Mr. Testascrittore's theories can't be repressed so easily! They'll come out in the end. The truth always does."

"Is that so? History is littered with forgotten truths."

"Such as?"

"If I could name them," he said, "they wouldn't be 'forgotten.' That's the proof that they've been forgotten – I've never even heard of them."

"They aren't totally forgotten," I countered. "Even today, we speak of those forgotten truths in tones of reverence, and dream of the day we might recover even a glimmer of their former power."

"Idle chatter," he said. "Just like the words that will be spoken of you. It will be as if you never existed. And maybe you don't."

"What?"

"The more I think about it," he said, "the more obvious it is that I am the only one who actually exists. Other humans are but a fanciful apparition sent by some malevolent deity determined to plague me with endless chattering."

"You're insane!"

He waved the sickle at me. "There you go again. Why should I listen to you? You don't even exist."

I could see from his feverish eyes that I'd never reach him with moral arguments. My only hope was to ensnare him in a philosophical conundrum, some epistemological puzzle that would short-circuit his demented mind long enough for me to escape.

If ever my life depended on philosophy, this was it. There was only one thing to do.

"Help me, Mr. Copleston! Help!"

19.

Mr. Grosskase stopped short, an incredulous stare on his face. "Are you loony? No one can hear you. There's ten feet of concrete between you and the next level. You don't think the administrators want to listen to the sounds of suspects being interrogated, do you? They wouldn't get any

work done at all."

I started to explain that in spite of the apparent irrationality of it all, I was actually calling for the late Frederick Copleston, doyen of philosopher-historians, to help me out of yet another bind.

To my relief, Mr. Copleston spared me the trouble by coalescing against the opposite wall of the dank tunnel. He pulled out a silk handkerchief and held it to his nostrils.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir," I said. "As you can see, things are a bit desperate here."

After sizing up the situation, my guide shook his head. "I'm not sure I can take you any further. I'm afraid you've reached the legendary Volume Ten of my opus, which would have covered the Postmodern era. But we have to stop somewhere, as they say – if only to die."

"What should I do?" I asked urgently, not quite yet ready to emulate my mentor in that final step.

"I suggest we call again for Mr. Gadamer," he said. "His dialogic approach will suit you perfectly. He should be here momentarily. Until then, you'll have to improvise."

I looked from him back to Mr. Grosskase, who saw Mr. Copleston as well as I did. But it seemed to have no effect on his intent to kill me.

I fumbled for words, wishing Mr. Gadamer would hurry up and arrive. "Odd," I said to Mr. Grosskase. "You don't think I exist, but I haven't the slightest doubt that *you* exist. Interesting disparity, wouldn't you say? Maybe we ought to get a third opinion."

"You know that I exist because I'm exercising power over you. The slave never doubts that the master exists."

A passage from the tattered volume of *Hegelian Highlights* that used to hang in my great uncle's outhouse floated before my mind. "Indeed, sir, the slave must acknowledge the master – but the master even more requires the slave's consciousness. If the slave dies, the master ceases to be master. So the master cannot kill the slave, on whose recognition his title to mastership depends." I pointed at the sickle to emphasize the immediate relevance of my argument.

The corner of Mr. Grosskase's mouth curled. "You forgot one thing. If the master doesn't care about being master, the slave's existence becomes a matter of indifference. In *my* world, your consciousness does not exist." He

gestured grandly. "And this is my world."

I wasn't sure whether he meant the dungeon or the entire planet. At the moment, the distinction seemed academic.

Mr. Grosskase raised the blade and stepped toward me. I backed against the wall and held up the thick manuscript, hoping it might slow the blade's pitiless descent.

Before Mr. Grosskase could bring the sickle down, a broad-shouldered figure with a black beret crowning his grey hair came bustling down the hallway. He gestured to the Rector, who groaned impatiently as he lowered the sickle.

"Mr. Gadamer!" I blurted out.

"Yes, yes, sorry to be late," he said in a West Central German accent. He paused to catch his breath, then eyed the murderous Rector. "Mr. Grosskase, I believe we have a few unanswered questions before you proceed. You say that because you don't need recognition from other people, they have no existence?"

The Rector stared back impassively. "Yes, that was my point."

"But you're caught in the solipsist's paradox," Mr. Gadamer said. "In order to persuade Mr. Harrison that he doesn't exist, you have to assume his existence as an autonomous consciousness."

Mr. Grosskase's eyes narrowed. "I don't believe he or any other living person is capable of understanding me."

"And yet, paradoxically, your challenge to his understanding presumes that he can understand your challenge."

Mr. Grosskase pointed the sickle at Mr. Gadamer. "Perhaps *you* might understand. But him? No way."

The insult from by my erstwhile advisor stung. But Mr. Gadamer smiled. "There we have you," he said. "Why am I even appearing right now, except as a reflection of Mr. Harrison's consciousness? I'm speaking now because his thoughts have called my voice forth."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Mr. Grosskase.

"We philosophers of the past are like so many aspects of the human mind," said Mr. Gadamer. "We appear whenever our questions resonate in the lives of later thinkers."

Mr. Grosskase seemed never to have contemplated the possibility. He

looked at Mr. Gadamer suspiciously. "Wait – you're saying that you're inside of him?"

"I said my thoughts exist in him. I'm dead, in case you hadn't noticed. But my ideas didn't die with me. They're the common heritage of thinking people everywhere, and will recur so often as the same questions and problems arise."

Mr. Grosskase laughed nervously. "My, you're certainly a jolly character. So you're saying that you're inside of me as well?"

"No, sir," Mr. Gadamer replied. "We philosophers live only inside of sincere questioners."

"Then why am I even seeing you?" the Rector snarled.

Mr. Gadamer looked at him levelly. "I'm not certain. My provisional interpretation is that you are completely crazy, and you're conversing with dead people."

Mr. Grosskase blinked. "Enough of this nonsense! My objection remains unanswered – my statements are made entirely for my own benefit, and imply no reference to any other living consciousness, least of all Mr. Harrison's. I speak solely to and for myself. " He raised his arm again to strike.

Mr. Gadamer spoke slowly and with a calm assurance. "You're contradicting yourself. When you say 'my self,' you are implying that there are other 'selves' from whom you must distinguish 'your' self. Furthermore, as Mr. Later Wittgenstein might note, your use of language implies the existence of a community of auditors."

Mr. Grosskase's arm hovered above his head, his face contorted in frustration. He was still positioned between me and the door, and would surely cut me down if I tried to bolt past.

But a few more jibes from Mr. Gadamer might put him out of commission altogether.

20.

To my dismay, Mr. Gadamer gave me a casual salute and turned away. "Auf wiedersehen. We're expecting a vote today on the fundamental nature of Being at the Philosophers' Parliament, and it's going to be close."

"Oh no," I groaned. "The Philosophers' Parliament is today? What terrible

timing! What am I supposed to do about him?" I gestured at Mr. Grosskase, who remained frozen like a statue, poised to strike.

"He's lost in his own thoughts," Mr. Gadamer said. "You're fine as long as you don't move and he can't think of a response. Once he comes up with an answer, you better be ready." Mr. Gadamer glanced at his wristwatch.

"Shoot," I said. "I was hoping for some help on this."

"Why don't you come along to the Parliament? Everyone will be there. Maybe someone can spare a few minutes to help you out."

"I can go with you and leave Mr. Grosskase here?"

"Your consciousness can step away from the present so long as he is stymied. Just don't physically move or do anything to pull him out of it. Your mind can go where it wishes until he speaks again."

"And then?"

"When he speaks, your attention will be pulled back to the dungeon – and you better be ready with a fresh argument!"

Turning my attention away from my attacker seemed dangerous. But I needed help, and quick.

Should I call Mr. Copleston again? He was probably heading to the Parliament along with the others.

"Okay," I said. "Let's go."

A portal opened in the wall of the concrete tunnel, and my mind followed Mr. Gadamer into a huge open-air edifice strikingly similar to Raphael's famous painting of the School of Athens.

Whether the painting was a copy of the hall or the hall a copy of the painting was unclear. Perhaps they were simulacrums one of the other.

As we passed under the entry arch, I noticed that the ambulatory was lined with paintings. "It's Mr. Hegel's gallery of philosophers! I've been here before."

As we walked down the majestic hallway, I admired the spirit of the portraits, even if the brushwork was not of the highest caliber.

At the far end a clump of visitors gathered beneath a huge carved triptych portraying in sequence Egyptian pyramids, Greek temples, and Roman aqueducts. At the center of the little crowd I spied Mr. Hegel himself, his thinning grey hair falling loosely over his shoulders.

Minerva's owl perched on a nearby post, eyeing the circle of listeners.

Mr. Hegel gestured toward the gallery of philosophers, which after an antechamber portraying Babylonian magi, Egyptian pharaohs, and Hebrew prophets began in earnest with a trio of portraits: Mr. Thales, Mr. Democritus, and Mr. Empedocles, early Greek forerunners of Mr. Socrates.

"Behold," Mr. Hegel said, gesturing toward the paintings, "a gallery of heroes of thought, who by the power of Reason have penetrated into the being both of nature and of spirit, and have won for us by their labors the highest treasure – the treasure of rational knowledge."

The owl nodded approvingly as the listeners looked slightly puzzled.

"Intellectual history," Mr. Hegel continued, "is not a chance sequence of events but itself reveals the activity of free thought. We seek to know the history of thought not as an external object, but from inside, as it has arisen and produced itself.

"Such a study shows how the history of philosophy falls into natural periods, exhibiting an organic, progressive whole through which this history attains the dignity of a science. And so the history of philosophy develops into the science of philosophy, and this is the most interesting point of all."

His auditors, apparently too well-mannered to walk away while Mr. Hegel was speaking, craned their necks to see the paintings down the hallway. The owl ruffled its wings and glared at the restless crowd, but Mr. Hegel seemed not to notice.

"Our tradition," he continued in a flat tone, "is no motionless statue, but is alive, and swells like a mighty river which increases in size the further it advances from its source. It is the function of our own and of every age to grasp the knowledge which already exists, to make it our own, and to raise it to a higher level."

The owl gazed exultantly at the crowd as Mr. Hegel looked somewhat glumly around. After an awkward moment people clapped politely before dispersing among the paintings.

I'd liked to have stayed and taken a closer look a the gallery. But Mr. Gadamer was moving along.

Near the entrance to the meeting hall a toga-clad man juggled little tinker-toy atoms. "Don't disturb Mr. Lucretius's concentration," said Mr. Gadamer.

Stepping back, I watched the Roman poet struggle to keep innumerable little atoms aloft, tossing one handful after another into the air. As they fell, the atoms seemed to swerve toward and away from one another, colliding and clinging into larger clumps that took on shapes akin to balloon dachshunds.

I wanted to get one of the atomic dachshunds to decorate my garret, but Mr. Gadamer headed on. I followed my guide toward the meeting room, keeping one eye on Mr. Grosskase back in the dungeon as he grappled with Mr. Gadamer's anti-solipsist challenge. His brow furrowed more and more deeply, even as his arm remained frozen in mid-air.

My goal was to secure an ally quickly and return to the dungeon. But with the Parliament about to convene, no one had attention for a lowly first-semester graduate student. My only hope was to watch patiently for an opportunity to make my plea.

Mr. Gadamer excused himself. I eyed the philosophers' entrance, wondering how to slip into the main hall where I'd have a better chance of finding support.

Up ahead, several people in Baroque costumes and powdered wigs filed through a doorway. I fell in step, and the usher let me pass, apparently taking my jeans and T-shirt for Postmodern garb.

I found myself in a Greek theater. Curved rows of seats faced an elevated stage. At the podium stood a balding man in a formal toga: Mr. Cicero, acting as moderator.

He picked up his gavel and banged it on the table. No one paid any attention. Finally Mr. Kierkegaard stood on a chair and yelled: "If people will take their seats, we need to get started. Some of us have other things to do besides standing around arguing all day."

"Yeah, like obsessing about your love-life and calling it 'philosophy,'" Mr. Brentano muttered. Mr. Kierkegaard didn't look amused.

Mr. Cicero banged his gavel again, and gradually people took their seats. I found a spot in the back row with Mr. Lyotard and Mr. Zeno. They were playing Deconstructive Hangman, where instead of adding letters you subtracted them by placing one at a time "under erasure."

They were so intent on their game that I knew better than to interrupt.

I looked around the auditorium, wondering who would make the best ally in my impending showdown with Mr. Grosskase. Even though the Rector

looked like a waxen statue, I feared he would formulate a response and be back in action at any moment.

21.

Seated in the back row of the Philosophers' Parliament I looked out over the assembled dignitaries. Garb ranged from pleated togas to monkish robes to courtly dress to suit and tie. I was the only person in a T-shirt, but maybe the others were late in arriving.

Around the auditorium old friends and comrades hugged and laughed, while longstanding adversaries cast harsh or anxious glances across the hall.

I tried to catch the eye of several eminent thinkers, but despite courteous nods in my direction all seemed bent on another conversation or mission.

Mr. Early Wittgenstein strode past asking whether anyone had seen his Later avatar.

Someone called down from the gallery: "Mr. Later Wittgenstein is up here playing language games."

"And he keeps changing the rules," came a second voice.

Up front Mr. Cicero banged his gavel. In stentorian tones he called out over the din: "Friends! Philosophers! We are gathered to resolve the greatest intellectual disputes of Western history. Let us remember and proceed in this spirit!"

He waited a moment for voices to subside. "The first order of business," he said, "is to approve the minutes of our last session. As you recall, we reached agreement on the proposition that 'the principle of identity is identical to itself.' After extensive debate, the proposal was adopted by a voice vote, with Mr. Hegel, Mr. Fichte, and Mr. Schelling dissenting."

Mr. Schelling tried to reopen the debate but was shouted down by a cabal of Neo-Kantians and Pragmatists. The minutes were approved.

"We're now open for old business," declared Mr. Cicero, "of which I believe there is a great deal." His final words were drowned in a general uproar.

Mr. Eco clamored for attention to his suggestion to redesign all of the signs in the building. Mr. Locke demanded a hearing for his proposal outlawing innate ideas. Mr. Schlick advocated for a complete inventory of reality, while Mr. Leibniz campaigned for equal rights for all Monads.

Tensions escalated as Neo-Platonists and proponents of Scholastic Aristotelianism nearly came to blows over whether substantial forms were an emanation from the Godhead, or the emanations were themselves substantial forms derived ultimately from the Godhead as Prime Mover.

My teeth clenched. With these sorts of issues on the table, how would I ever manage to get a hearing for my personal epistemologico-existential plight? I stole a glance at Mr. Grosskase back in the dungeon, still holding his sickle aloft. Maybe I had more time than I thought. But my reprieve could end at any moment.

Mr. Cicero banged his gavel and made himself heard over the still-clamoring voices. "Friends! Every issue you have named deserves our deepest attention. But we must return to the beginning and settle once and for all the dispute between Mr. Parmenides and Mr. Heraclitus concerning the ultimate nature of Being. If we can reach agreement on whether the nature of reality is fundamentally unity or flux, many of the thorniest dilemmas of the past three millennia will be brought closer to resolution."

I recognized the names from the first chapters of Mr. Copleston's *History* – Mr. Parmenides, who claimed that all being is ultimately one and unchanging, versus Mr. Heraclitus, who saw everything as fundamentally in flux.

Had they recognized the deleterious impact their dispute would have on the Western tradition, the two might long ago have agreed to settle it as a Graeco-Roman wrestling match. I could picture it:

Mr. Parmenides has the advantage of weight, and strides to the center of the ring to take his stand against all comers. Mr. Heraclitus, his worthiest adversary, refuses to stand still, shifting constantly in an effort to avoid being pinned down.

As the rounds wear on neither shows signs of giving in. Taking down Mr. Parmenides is like tackling a mountain. Entrapping Mr. Heraclitus is like getting a hammer-lock on a river.

In the end, neither can score so much as a single drop, and the hope of settling the venerable dispute by means of athletic competition comes to naught.

The vexed conflict dragged on for over two millennia. But now the Philosophers' Parliament was about to vote and settle it once and for all.

The cacophony subsided to a general grumbling, and Mr. Cicero

continued. "We've heard from both sides – the Parmenideans for whom all Being is ultimately one, while change is an illusion, versus the Heraclitians, who assert that Being is constantly in flux, with stability the illusion. Now we hear the rebuttals."

As the speechifying commenced, the mood began to grow fractious. Mr. Russell heatedly defended the honor of the Parmenideans against the traducements of Mr. Hegel, while Mr. Spinoza went on the attack against Mr. Democritus's conception of the world as a collection of independent atoms, proving by means of geometrical demonstration that reality must consist of one and only one primary substance.

My own exasperation increased by the minute. Didn't my life – the life of a currently-living proponent of the very tradition that the assembled thinkers were so ardently debating – count for something? The clock was ticking. How much longer could I expect Mr. Grosskase to remain lost in thought?

Debates multiplied, each attempt at compromise giving rise to renewed strife. "Friends," called Mr. Cicero over the tumult, "let us recall our noble purpose and strive together in a spirit of unity!"

"Tell it to the schismatics!" yelled a Dominican Metaphysical Realist. A claque of Parisian Nominalists and Post-Structuralists drowned him out.

Straying from the topic, Mr. Hobbes and Mr. Rousseau got into a shouting match over whether human nature was fundamentally depraved or winsome. Finally Mr. Locke managed to separate them by asserting that our nature was inherently neither good nor evil, but a blank slate.

Mr. Hobbes smirked and walked away, while Mr. Rousseau complained to anyone who would listen that he was, as always, being persecuted.

Amid the chaos Mr. Kierkegaard stood on his seat. "I call the question!" Instantly, dozens of voices rose for and against the proposal.

Mr. Cicero hammered his gavel for order. "I think the issues are abundantly clear. Before we move to a vote, however, the chair is prepared to offer a mediating proposal."

A hush fell over the room as the great Roman sage drew himself to his full height. The pleats in his toga hung motionless, and his great brow showed traces of immense intellectual strain. "Mr. Parmenides' camp would have us believe that all being is one," he said. "Mr. Heraclitus asserts that being is in constant flux."

He paused portentously, surveying the expectant crowd, then announced in his grandest voice. "I suggest this compromise: 'All Being is one, and is constantly in flux.'"

Silence held for a moment. Slowly, whispered comments probed the proposal. From around the hall came the sounds of "maybe," "possibly," and "it could be." In front of me, Mr. Plotinus started laughing good-naturedly. "By Jove, that might solve the matter," he said.

But just as quickly, an undercurrent of doubt began to swell. The more devout Parmenideans contended that the additional clause, far from providing a desirable balance, served only to dilute the crystalline purity of their master's original observation.

The Heraclitians raised an even greater complaint that their viewpoint – as so often in the acrimonious history of philosophy textbooks – had been relegated to a subordinate clause incapable of standing on its own.

Throughout the hall arguments rekindled. The matter seemed destined for a long and acrimonious disputation, ruining any chance I had of prying loose a philosopher or two to help me face Mr. Grosskase.

Too nervous to remain seated, I roamed down the side aisle until I was behind the speaker's rostrum, looking out over the chaotic room. Everywhere raged the struggle, omnes contra omnes, nasty, mean, and brutish: Idealists versus Materialists, Scholastics versus Humanists, Subjectivists versus Objectivists, Pre-Moderns versus Moderns versus Post-Moderns.

A wave of despair engulfed me, both for my own plight and that of Western philosophy. Mr. Cicero leaned against the rostrum, staring blankly down at his notes.

I stepped up behind him and looked over his shoulder, where he had written his compromise proposal. "All Being is one, and is constantly in flux."

The situation was desperate. Mr. Grosskase could be back in the flux any moment, and I would be pleading for my life.

If I wanted to get any help here at the Parliament, I better bring my janitorial skills into play, pronto!

22.

Striding up behind Mr. Cicero at the moderator's podium, I surveyed the metaphysical chaos. Something had to be done. And who better than a

custodian?

I reached past Mr. Cicero and took up his quill. "Excuse me, sir," I said. "I believe we could tidy this up a bit."

I dipped the quill deep into the inkpot and placed five of the nine words including "Being," which I suspected as the chief bone of contention, under erasure:

All ~~Being~~ is one ~~and is constantly in~~ flux.

"All is one flux," Mr. Cicero read mechanically, then with more gusto: "All is one flux."

He took his gavel and slammed it down with authority. The hall quieted somewhat, and Mr. Cicero's baritone rang from the marbled arches: "All is one flux."

The last noise faded, and you could have heard a Monad drop. At last Mr. Socrates broke the silence. "By Zeus, I think he's got it!"

Pandemonium broke loose. Positivists and Phenomenologists hugged joyously, while Realists and Nominalists stammered tearful apologies for the many cruel slanders and cutting remarks that had peppered their writings over the centuries.

Mr. Hegel's owl soared overhead as Homeric bards lauded the glories of Post-Structuralism. Medieval scholastics and Enlightenment philosophes tangoed in the aisles.

The Ancients seemed most affected. Mr. Plato sang the praises of poetry, while Mr. Aristotle launched into a vigorous round of break-dancing. Mr. Diogenes threw off his filthy cloak and streaked stark naked around the room.

I had hoped that upon resolution I might take the rostrum for a moment to make a brief announcement of my rather pressing need for epistemological assistance.

But Mr. Cicero thanked me peremptorily, as if I were an errand boy from the copyediting department. He turned back to the assembled delegates. "Please take your seats," he called out, "and we'll move on to the dispute between the Aristotelians and the Platonists."

My shoulders slumped. My editing, far from bringing the session to a close, had inspired in the assembled philosophers a renewed sense of unity and dedication. How could my puny predicament compare to the mightiest intellectual controversies of Western history?

I looked at Mr. Grosskase back in the dungeon, his sickle still poised overhead. His face had brightened, suggesting that he was on the verge of solving the solipsistic paradox which Mr. Gadamer had placed before him. As if by a magnet, I felt my attention drawn back toward the dungeon.

I was drifting toward the exit empty-handed when Mr. Nietzsche came stalking up the aisle muttering that the compromise between Parmenideans and Heraclitians was symptomatic of the weakness and decay of Western philosophy and demanding that all issues be adjudicated by an appeal to pure power.

At a respectful distance followed Mr. Foucault, light glistening from his shaved head. His intense eyes peered through wire-rim glasses as he spoke a running commentary on Mr. Nietzsche's words into a small recorder.

Far as Mr. Nietzsche might be from the ideal debate coach, I grasped that he was my last hope in the impending showdown with Mr. Grosskase.

I caught his eye, and he abruptly halted his tirade, as if he were embarrassed to be heard talking to himself. His thick black mustache hung almost to his chin, and his deep-set eyes seemed to stare through me.

"Good day, sir," I said uneasily. "Might I have a word?"

"Verily," he said, "you choose the hour well. For just now the nocturnal birds are flying."

Thinking of Mr. Hegel's owl, I took his response as encouragement. "You see, sir, my life is threatened by a murderer who doesn't even acknowledge that I exist. If I could for even a moment attain certainty of my own existence, I believe I could outwit Mr. Grosskase and escape with Mr. Testascrittore's final testament."

He twisted the drooping end of his mustache. "Your epistemological questions are of no concern to me. Truth is a set of fictions we devise for our own self-enhancement. All that matters is the power to impose one's interpretation – the power to define reality. The victor is the one who defines the truth."

"I see your point," I said, anxious to show that I appreciated his engaging with my predicament. "But your formulation is ambiguous. Is the victor the stronger party who can impose their view on the weaker? Or is the true victor the weaker party who slyly insinuates their worldview into

the dominant culture? Roman armies conquered Greece, but Greek philosophy and art dominated the cultural field."

"Interpret it as you wish," he said with a wave of his hand. "In neither case is 'truth' determined by epistemological concerns. In one case it is physical force, in another strategy. Both are facets of power. And this is what matters – not an ethereal concern with establishing the indubitability of trivial propositions, but purely and simply the Will to Power."

I scowled. "In my case, sir, that is little consolation. So far as a Will to Power, Mr. Grosskase's monopoly of power seems incontestable."

Mr. Nietzsche shrugged. "If that is the case, then it has been so before, and it shall be so again. We mortals are subject to the Law of Eternal Return. The challenge is to embrace one's fate and embrace its return."

He started away. I called after him. "Embrace my fate? I shouldn't even try to resist?"

23.

Mr. Nietzsche ignored me and walked on down the majestic gallery outside the Philosophers' Parliament.

Mr. Foucault stepped forward and met my eyes. "Don't despair," the French Post-Structuralist said. "A master's power is never absolute. The slave always has the means to resist, to exercise counter-power in specific ways and moments, however small."

"Very well, sir," I said. "But I'm not a slave. I'm a graduate student."

"That's not my fault," he said. "Analyze your situation. Power is not generic. It must be understood as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate. Power exists through ceaseless struggles and confrontations which transmit, transform, strengthen, or even reverse that power. Your challenge is to read the situation closely and discover the points at which you can exercise resistance or counter-power."

I grasped at the straw. "Great idea – but how do I develop this counter-power?"

"Stop worrying about epistemology and pay attention to discourse. In discourse, power and knowledge are joined. Discourse transmits and reproduces power – but it also undermines and exposes it, rendering it fragile."

I scowled. "So basically you're saying I should get Mr. Grosskase talking?"

He stared at me through his thick glasses. "Study the situations in which you are engaged. What are the most immediate power relations, and how do they make possible various kinds of discourses? Discourses are always embedded in a multifarious and mobile field of force dynamics wherein structured but never completely stable effects of domination are produced and reproduced in the most far-reaching ways."

"The most immediate force-relation isn't far-reaching at all," I replied sharply. "Mr. Grosskase's sword is about ten inches from my skull."

Mr. Foucault tilted his head as if studying the issue from another angle. "Yet within this situation lies the possibility of a counter-discourse. There is no discourse which is inherently that of power and domination. Indeed power engenders resistance as one of its possible outcomes. Any discourse can be contested."

"Okay," I said, casting a nervous glance at Mr. Grosskase. "The question is, how exactly does one go about effectively contesting the discourse of a person holding a sword over your head?"

He nodded, looking past me. "I would begin from the recognition that all power is exercised in immediate, specific micro-situations. Within any situation there are always diverse points from which a counter-discourse can be mounted. Each moment offers and demands a unique, authentic choice among those alternatives."

I gave a discouraged laugh. "So you're saying that in a unique situation I need to come up with a unique response?"

"Precisely." He peered at me intently as if scrutinizing my understanding, then turned and hurried after Mr. Nietzsche.

My spirits sagged. Formulate a unique response? How was this different from Mr. Dewey's pragmatism or Ms. Beauvoir's "just take action"?

What ever happened to the good old days when philosophy told you what to do and when to do it?

My time had run out. Inexorably I felt my spirit drawn back from the pristine halls of philosophy to Mr. Grosskase's dungeon. Apparently he had figured out a response to Mr. Gadamer's final challenge. Or at least some way of evading the issue until after he'd dealt with me.

Finding myself back in the concrete tunnel, I inhaled the fetid air and faced my sickle-wielding tormentor.

His glazed eyes looked past me. "I see my mistake," he mused. "I was directing my remarks to an Other, when clearly I am the only one who matters. I speak merely to remind myself of my unique status. All else can be treated as irrelevant and eliminated."

His remarks seemed possibly to refer to the present situation, particularly with regard to the issue of potential elimination. As he muttered to himself the Rector seemed oblivious to me, even as his sickle hovered over my head.

I pressed my back against the cold stone wall, fearing that my tiniest movement would bring destruction unless I could find a way to thwart his self-obsessed logic.

I scoured my mental *Cliff Notes* for another objection to Mr. Grosskase's solipsism. If I'd gained anything from the years I'd invested in philosophy, this was the moment to cash in the dividends.

But wherein lay the answer? The entire corpse-strewn history of Western philosophy passed before my eyes – from the hemlock-laced execution of Mr. Socrates to the barely-cold body of Mr. Testascrittore. Every thinker I had ever valued – kaput. And I was about to join them in death.

Death – didn't that prove something? I flashed on Mr. Testascrittore's proof of his own existence, featuring Death in the ultimate position.

Sure, there were also Frustration and Humiliation, which I was certainly feeling. And Grief was probably lurking nearby.

But most of all, one proof struck me – Death. If someone died, they obviously must once have existed.

That was it! I looked at Mr. Grosskase, still lost in his solitary reverie. "I believe, sir," I said dramatically, "that I see a fatal weakness in your argument."

He turned his head, but his malicious eyes seemed to pierce through me.

"Suppose you kill me," I continued quickly. "If I understand Mr. Testascrittore's proof correctly, in that very act you would affirm that I existed. After all, how can you kill someone who doesn't exist?"

I stared at him expectantly. He squinted as if just becoming aware that I was speaking to him.

Sensing that I had him hooked, I drove my point home. "Admittedly, sir, my satisfaction in this epistemological outcome might be somewhat diminished by dying. But if you kill me your efforts to negate my existence

would be shattered. Murdering me would refute your solipsism once and for all."

Mr. Grosskase's eyes met mine. His teeth gnashed. The sickle-hand wavered.

Seizing the existential moment in all its authenticity, I resolutely affirmed my being-toward-the-future by springing forward and shoving the big man. He staggered against the wall. I yanked Perkins' headless body aside, forced the door open, and leapt through.

24.

I raced down the dungeon tunnel. Behind me pounded Mr. Grosskase, the big man showing no signs of his supposed illness.

My pursuer was barely twenty feet back as I sailed past the librarial skeletons. I reached the stairs and took them two at a time, gasping for air.

I burst through the utility door into the jail-cell corridor with Mr. Grosskase storming after me. Reaching the center courtyard, I darted down another hallway, past which I spotted a metal ladder rising into a dark opening. A disk of light shone at the top.

Rapidly deducing that it took me closer to ground level, I grabbed hold of the ladder, struggling to hold onto the manuscript as I hoisted myself upward.

Gaining the top, I clambered into a narrow passageway between two rows of beige partitions. Mr. Grosskase cursed as he climbed up from the opening. I ran to the end of the passageway – smack into a dead end.

Mr. Grosskase lumbered toward me, his arm brandishing the sickle at a crazy angle. He seemed to have no remaining doubt that I existed, but looked hellbent on remedying that problem. The big man raised his weapon to strike.

"No!" I shouted, holding the manuscript up like a shield.

To my astonishment, alarmed voices called back from the other side of the partition.

There was no time to yell again. Mr. Grosskase's face contorted in rage as his huge frame bore down on me.

I ducked, driving my shoulder into his gut. He groaned, but his momentum hurled me backward into the wall. I braced to be crushed by

his massive frame.

As we slammed into the partition, the entire wall gave way. We tumbled into a cubicle, our cries drowned in the shrieks of the occupants.

Mr. Grosskase swung wildly with the sickle. The blade deflected off the manuscript and sunk deep into the wooden leg of a desk.

The maddened Rector clawed over me and banged into the legs of a stocky woman in a grey suit – the police administrator!

The tall woman gaped as she dropped the huge *Summa Theologica* onto the corner of her desk. Two police officers scurried behind her and took refuge.

On hands and knees the Rector grasped the embedded weapon and struggled to free it, oblivious to all else.

I lunged at him, knocking him against the desk. Above, the heavy book teetered. The Rector's firey eyes seared my soul as he grasped the sickle and yanked with all his might.

The desk shook from the force of his effort. Too late the Rector spied the danger overhead. He let out an anguished cry as with a sharp scraping sound the mighty *Summa Theologica* slid off the desktop and crashed down upon his skull.

Epilog

The *Summa* only stunned Mr. Grosskase, who lived to be put on trial by the Inquisition itself – not for the death of Mr. Testascrittore or Mr. Zeitenschreiber, which remained officially classified as accidents, nor for that of Perkins, who was never missed – but for the attempted murder of the police administrator, whose heroism in the face of the onslaught was rewarded with a promotion to Deputy Assistant Under-Secretary for Internal Affairs, where she found her true vocation monitoring the extra-marital carousings of departmental personnel.

Johann lingered in jail a few days longer. I went to the station to vouch for his innocence the first night. But being of dubious reputation myself, my word only made the authorities more suspicious, and it was early the next week before they let him go.

As for myself, I got off with misdemeanor charges of unlawful entry, disturbing the peace, damaging Institute property, and flagrant littering.

The court offered me two years' probation plus random drug testing to be sure that I was smoking enough weed.

I figured it was the best deal I was going to get, and signed the release form.

Mr. Testascrittore's magnum opus, *The Being of Nothingness and the Nothingness of Being (Part II)*, was deemed inadequately edited and sent to

a select committee for revisions and emendations, including a thorough explication of the "so-called proof of existence" to be co-written by the editing team.

I began to wonder if the proof in its pristine form would ever see the light of day, when I happened to discover it published in that most uncensored of all pasquinadical forums – scrawled on a lavatory wall.

The inscriptor had reversed a couple of the items and added "Hangnails" at the end, which somewhat diminished the climactic impact of "Death" in the original.

But I still felt heartened to know that notwithstanding an insane killer, notwithstanding repeated attempts to purloin the precious proof, notwithstanding the Machiavellian machinations of a select editing committee – the proof was beginning to see the light of day.

Or at least the fluorescent light of a restroom.

Worst of all, I got marked absent for all the classes I missed, ruining my chances of making that all-important positive first impression on my professors in the opening days of my initial term.

In sum, aside from the fact that I was still alive, it was not the most propitious start to my career in Terre Haute.

I toughed it out, though, and made it through the academic year. Despite my early set-backs, with steady effort and the support of my new advisor, the Acting Rector, I managed to earn an "Incomplete" in all but one of my classes.

"It's an amazing legacy," said my advisor when I stopped by on the last day of classes. "Eleven Incompletes out of twelve classes. I venture to say that your record will never be broken."

"Yeah," I said. "Too bad I dropped Phenomenological Statistics, or I'd have had a perfect record."

"Very impressive just the same," he said. "Sure, I took a few Incompletes in my day. But it was simply to finish up a paper or project. Yours are genuinely incomplete Incompletes."

I smiled sadly. "Yeah, I won't be finishing them. I've decided to withdraw from the Institute."

I expected him to be shocked, but he nodded slowly. "I suspected as much. Not everyone is called to the hectic pace of Terre Haute."

"Not just that," I said. "I've realized that there's more to life than epistemology." I paused for dramatic effect. "I'm thinking of enrolling in seminary back in Berkeley."

"I didn't know you believed in God."

"I don't. But I'm curious. Maybe it's being around all this death, making me wonder what life is all about. Anyway, the seminary is up in the Old Citie. I've always liked that part of Berkeley. That counts for something."

"I know what you mean," he said. "There's a magic to certain places. I miss my old office."

"Yeah. It was a great place."

Johann sighed. "I was thinking of keeping it as a private retreat. But the new custodian insisted on her right to the boiler room. She's already having it redecorated."

I looked around the spacious Rector's suite. "You could always ask them to run a few heating ducts through here if you get homesick."

"Good idea," Johann said, picking up a big pen and jotting on his executive notepad. "Of course, I'm only 'Acting' Rector so far."

"I heard there isn't much competition," I said. "Sounds like you're the only person that people trust to hold the Institute together."

"They could do worse," he said. He opened a carved oak box on his desk and offered me a neatly rolled joint.

I lit it and took a hit. "Indeed they could," I said, savoring the sweet smoke. "So – when are you going to come out and visit Berkeley?"

Johann accepted the joint from me. "It'll have to wait till next year. This Fall I'm teaching a seminar in Paralogic. We'll award our first certificates in December and have trained paralogicians on the street by new years."

I smiled, just a tad sorry I wasn't sticking around Terre Haute for the Fall term. "Paralogic," I said. "The world will be a better place for it!"

Q.E.D.

Appendices

Various helpful and entertaining postscripts

Glossary of Terms

Frequently Asked Questions

Key to Raphael's *School of Athens*

More Books by Luke Hauser

Glossary

This glossary is not an expert commentary, but a guide to how these terms are used in this book.

Possibly this book will become the standard by which all of Western philosophy is assessed, in which case, this list will prove an invaluable cheat-sheet.

Analytical Philosophy (aka Logical Positivism): fact-based twentieth-century trend which grew out of nineteenth century Positivism. They share a concern with "just the facts" that typifies much science writing. Analytic philosophers tend to be concerned with logical problems, not with how we live our lives. Analytical philosophy has been popular in Britain and the U.S. In this book, Analytical philosophy and Positivism are used interchangeably. Names: Russell, Early Wittgenstein, Ayer, Moore.

Cartesian: refers to the philosophy and influence of Rene Descartes. Loosely can mean mind/body dualism and a strict rationalistic approach (in contrast, say, to a descriptive or experimental approach). Names: Descartes, Malebranche, Hobbes.

Dialectics: literally, back-and-forth arguments as per Plato. More recently, the back-and-forth flow of Hegel's philosophy, adapted by Marx to political ends. In Marx, a belief that a social system generates its own contradictions and resolutions, and that this back-and-forth process eventually brings about a just society. Names: Hegel, Marx, Engels.

Empirical: refers to worldly experience of all sorts. Often taken as the opposite of metaphysical. Material objects, other people and their actions,

various sorts of energy – these can be directly experienced and compared with the experiences of others, hence are empirical. On the other hand, ideas such as God, Freedom, Truth, and other ideals cannot actually be experienced, hence they are non-empirical, or metaphysical.

Empiricism: philosophies which emphasize sense-data experience and experimental techniques. We are all "empiricists" to the extent that we trust our sense-impressions as guides to the world. Names: Aristotle, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Moore, Wittgenstein.

Enlightenment: a name given to the 18th century phiilosphers who challenged the philosophical underpinnings of absolute monarchy, religious conformity, and human depravity. Many "philosophes" believed in the gradual improvement of the human situation, in early theories of evolution, etc. Names: Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot, D'Holbach.

Existentialism: uses Phenomenological (descriptive) techniques to describe and analyze daily life, with a view to living an "authentic" life. Via Sartre, Beauvoir, Camus, and others, Existentialism shone as a philosophy of engagement with society and political activism, with powerful contributions in art theory, sociology, psychology, and other fields. Names: Heidegger, Sartre, Beauvoir, Camus.

Feminist Epistemology: an approach to philosophy that emphasizes the roles of gender (associated trends emphasize class, race, sexual orientation, etc) in establishing what counts as truth, knowledge, justice, etc. Feminist and other radical epistemologies have challenged the self-evidence of Westerm logic and philosophy.

Hermeneutics: a pragmatic approach to truth which highlights a back-and-forth process of understanding – projecting a possible meaning, observing and testing, modifying our views, and projecting a new possible meaning to start the cycle over. Hermeneutics grew out of textual interpretation, and has connections to pragmatism. Names: Gadamer, Husserl.

Idealism: rationalist philosophies which emphasize the guiding power of reason and ideas in both philosophy and history. For Kant, human reason is fully capable of critiquing and understanding itself – a view Nietzsche and Freud would challenge. The interpretation of history as "the progress of freedom" is Idealist – it underscores the power of an idea/ideal to shape our lives. Often contrasted with Materialism. Names: Plato, Augustine, Kant, Fichte, Hegel.

Logical Positivism: see Analytical Philosophy.

Materialism: empiricist philosophies which emphasize the deterministic

role of the material world and of human material needs and production in shaping our lives. Marx opposes Hegel's Idealism by saying history is shaped not by the interplay of ideas but by the development of productive forces. Names: Democritus, Spinoza, Feuerbach, Marx, Skinner.

Phenomenology: although the term was used by Hegel and others, since 1900 the term has been associated with Husserl and his development of a "descriptive science". Phenomenology studies appearances and descriptions of lived experience, without judging whether or not they are "real," whether A "causes" B, etc. The goal is to descibe experience, scientific experiments, art, etc in the clearest possible terms. Later developments included Existentialism, Postmodernism, and Feminist Epistemology. Names: Husserl, Sartre, Beauvoir, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty.

Positivism: see Analytical Philosophy.

Postmodernism: broad term for post-Existentialist and post-Structuralist philosophies which challenge fixed meanings and foundations. Overlaps with Feminist, Post-Colonial, and other approaches that challenge the traditional certitudes as class- and gender-inflected. Names: Derrida, Beauvoir, Foucault.

Pragmatism: an approach, not a theory - sort of an informal hermeneutics, where we project a meaning or a practice, see how it works, and modify it according to experience. Pragmatism denies any final truths and scorns traditional philosophical problems. The point of philosophy is to clarify ideas and help us live better lives, not to answer age-old conundrums. Names: Dewey, Later Wittgenstein.

Rationalism: philosophies which trust the power of human reason to figure out what the world is all about - often saying that what we directly experience is illusory, and that "true being" lies hidden behind the shifting appearances. Names: Parmenides, Plato, Augustine, Leibniz, Descartes, Spinoza, Hegel.

Scholasticism: High Medieval philosophy in Arabic and European lands. An argument-based method for "discovering" truths such as God's existence, the centrality of the Earth, the need for strong government, etc. Names: Ibn Sina, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Ockham.

Semiotics: the science of signs, their functions and interpretations. Words and other communications are seen as sub-categories of signs in general, and are analyzed similarly to other signs. Names: Eco, Lyotard, Derrida, Baudrillard.

Zenoism: a paradoxical approach to the traditional problems of philosophy – is time real? Is motion real? Zenosim was originally created so that there would be a philosophical school staring with Z.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is Terre Haute really an epicenter of contemporary philosophy?

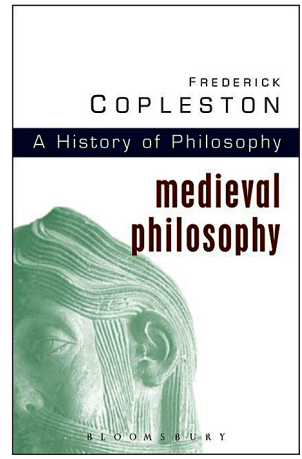
Not quite yet – but stay tuned!

Q: Is Berkeley really a backwater?

Berkeley is Berkeley. Nuff said.

Q: Do dead philosophers really chatter in people's head?

Yes, but not typically in such clear English. It's more a flow of energy. Half the challenge is slowing down long enough to listen – and half is transcribing this energy into comprehensible prose. Let's hear it for people like Augustine and Russell who actually tried to speak and write clearly!



Q: Is Copleston's History really so amazing? What about Russell's?

Copleston is all that, and more. As a thorough and incredibly sympathetic narrative of the entire span of Western philosophy, his books may be supplemented but probably not superceded in the near future.

He's "Idealist," in that his is a history of ideas, with little attention to material circumstances. Whether a thinker is a government official or a near-vagabond, whether their patron is the Church or a hedonistic aristocrat, all is irrelevant – all that matters is the interplay of ideas.

Russell, by contrast, discusses the broader historical context of philosophers, but has little sympathy for past ways of thinking. Russell lacks the depth of understanding of the material that Copleston routinely displays.

Q: Is there really a field called Sartrics?

Not quite. When this idea popped up it seemed like a joke about a once-popular but now fading philosopher. However, closer inspection shows that Mr. Sartre and his fellow travellers continue to exert a subtle but profound effect on many fields, particularly social and aesthetic critiques. So who knows – maybe someday Sartrics *will* rule philosophy.

Q: Do you actually call everyone Mister?

Nope.

Q: What's the Q.E.D. at the end of the chapters?

Quod Erat Demonstrandum is a phrase that Spinoza borrowed from geometry proofs. Q.E.D. at the end of a Spinozan proof (or a chapter of this book) indicates that the preceding material will now be taken as established, and further proofs (or clues) will be built on this basis.

Building proof upon proof, Spinoza in his *Ethics* was able to demonstrate that we are all part of God.

This book is slightly less ambitious.

Q: Do philosophers really try to prove their own existence?

Happily, yes – thus supplying more than two millennia worth of material for novelists to make fun of!

Q: Do they really talk like that?

The wackier their dialog sounds, the more likely their words are a direct quote. Lord knows they must have been trying, but clearly many of them never took the philosophical writing class which I plan one day to offer as part of the Paralogic curriculum.

With the most obtuse, one might possibly detect a strain of misanthropy in their convoluted prose. Let's celebrate Descartes, Beauvoir, Augustine, Voltaire, Plato, and the others who learned to write in an engaging fashion!

Q: Who are the funniest philosophers?

Voltaire, hands down - try *Philosophical Dictionary*. Camus' *The Fall* is bitterly funny, as is Sartre's *No Exit*. Nietzsche can be funny if read through the right glasses, as can Plato's *Gorgias*.

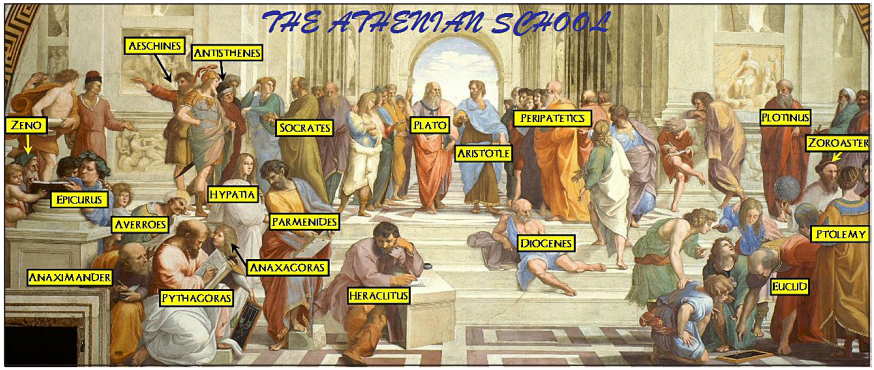
Derrida and Baudrillard are quirky and insightful.

There's humor around the edges of the academic tradition – Rabelais, Cervantes, Apuleius, Borges.

Aristotle is not funny. Aquinas is not funny. Hegel and Leibniz are, but only accidentally.

Raffaello di Urbino

School of Athens



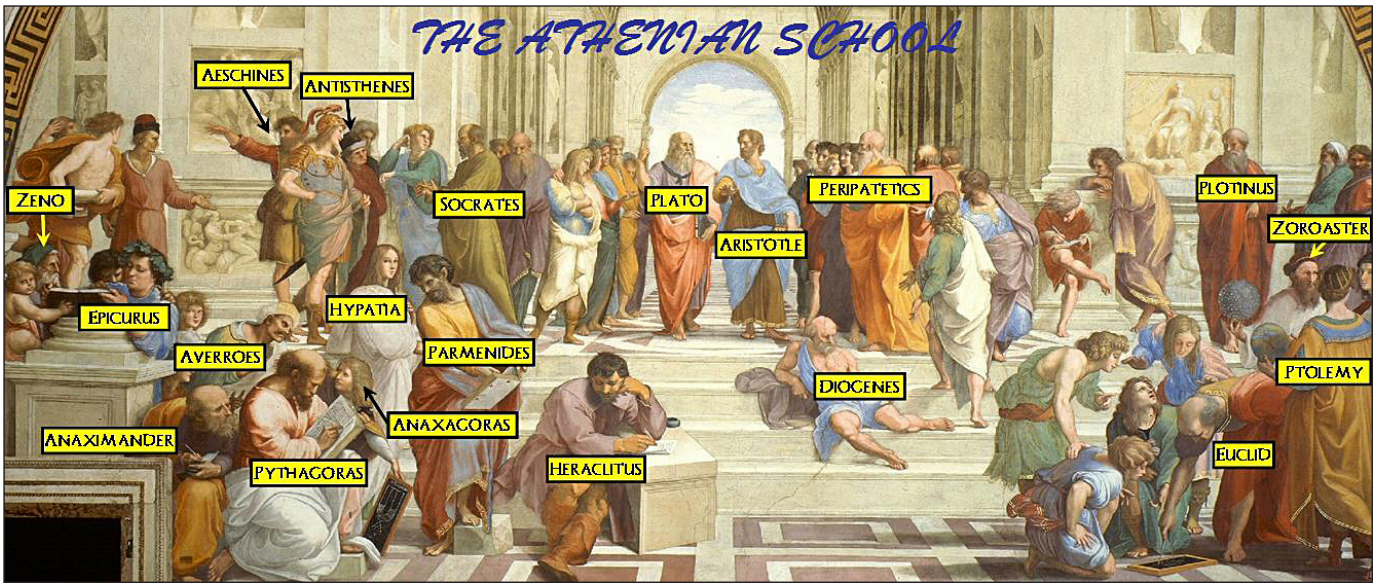
(larger version on next page)

Raphael's famous painting, which some believe was created especially for this book, portrays several dozen Greek philosophers on orientation day at an idealized academy.

The models for the philosophers are Florentine Renaissance artists such as Leonardo (Plato), Bramante (Pythagorus), and Michelangelo (Heraclitus).

The painting is a mural in a meeting room in the Vatican. In the event the Vatican is ever turned into a SRO hotel, I claim dibs on this room!

See next page for a larger version of the painting.


THE ATHENIAN SCHOOL
AESCHINES
ANTISTHENES
ZENO
SOCRATES
PLATO
PERIPATETICS
PLOTINUS
ZOROASTER
ARISTOTLE
EPICURUS
HYPATIA
AVERROES
PARMENIDES
PTOLEMY
DIOGENES
ANAXAGORAS
ANAXIMANDER
EUCLID
PYTHAGORAS
HERACLITUS

Therefore I Am: A Philosophical Murder Mystery

by Luke Hauser

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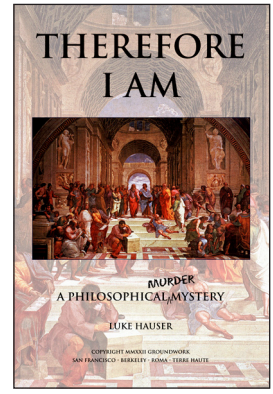

About the Author

Luke Hauser is a parajournalist and community organizer based somewhere between San Francisco, Berkeley, and Oakland.

In the bygone days of his callow youth he fulfilled a lifelong dream by matriculating for a time in Terre Haute. Finding Indiana a mite bit chilly, he relocated to the warmer climes of the Bay Area, where he has maintained a precarious toehold ever since.

He has co-edited several publications including *Direct Action, GroundWork,* and *Reclaiming Quarterly*, and served seven years in The Funky Nixons, known as "the house band of People's Park."

Learn more by perusing his FBI file, or visit DirectAction.org.

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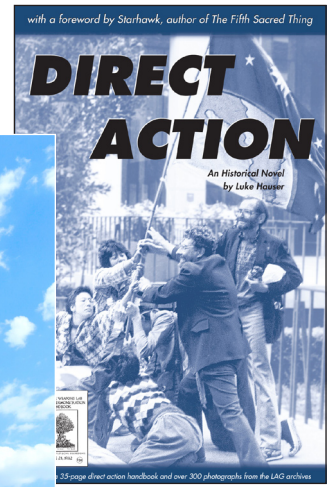

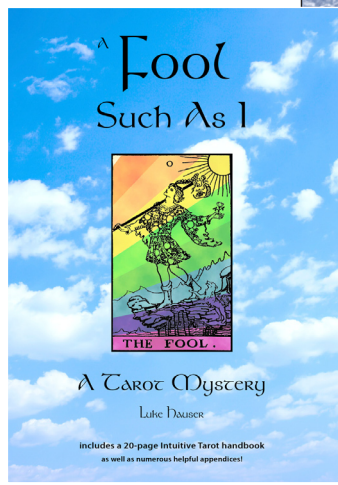

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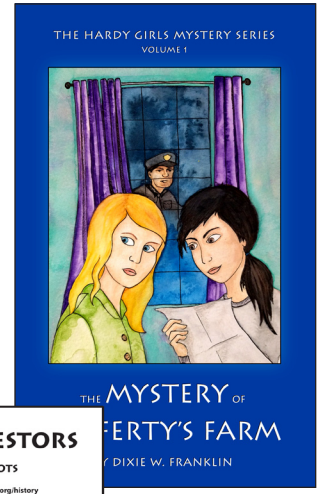

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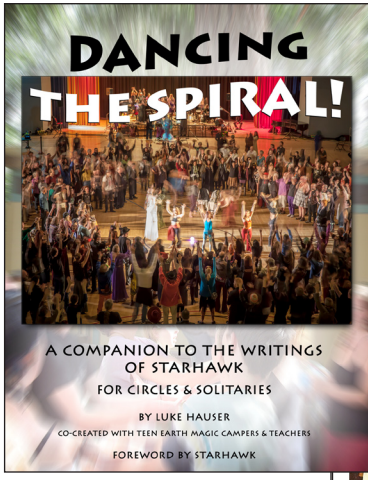

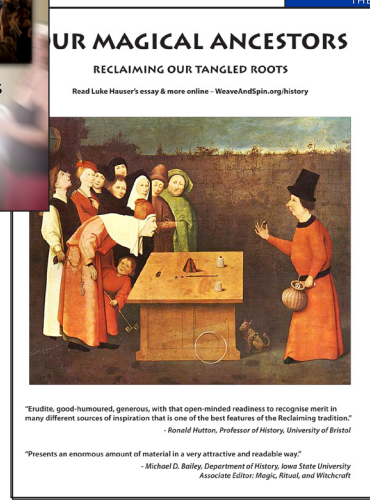

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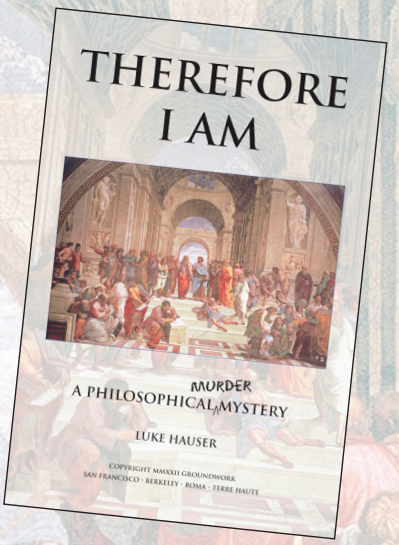

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