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IMAGINING REALITY IN
TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

Supposing truth is a woman — what then? Are there not grounds for the suspicion that all philosophers, insofar as they were dogmatists, have been very inept about women? that the gruesome seriousness, the clumsy obtrusiveness with which they have usually approached truth so far have been awkward and inappropriate means for winning a woman's heart?

THESE OPENING LINES from Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* bear upon the question of why philosophers have been so afraid of Virginia Woolf, and why their approaches to her work have failed to touch the heart of its poetic truth. Perhaps their advances have been so inept because these philosophers (almost all male) think themselves alone suited to woo the goddess of revelation. Uncomfortable with a woman novelist's having disclosed some profound truths about human existence, they have supposed that if these truths are in any way philosophical, they must be due to the influence of professional philosophers within her range of acquaintance. In the discussion that follows, I shall demonstrate that the way scholars have so far approached Virginia Woolf's work misses its philosophical import, and I shall present alternative perspectives from which the philosophical achievement of the novels can be more fully appreciated.

I

If philosophy and literature both — at their best — disclose certain truths about the nature of human being and of the world, it would seem reasonable to applaud their concomitant pursuit — whether by a philosophical novelist or poet, or by a philosopher with a forceful literary style. One would be justified, too, in asking that the two be integrated — that the philosophical ideas be woven into the fabric of the literary text and not just tacked on, and that the style be germane to the ideas and not merely thrown around them as an afterthought. But

in most cases of a writer's being influenced by a philosopher, such influence tends to manifest itself as outer trappings rather than as the core of the work — unless (as with the influence of Platonism and Neoplatonism on such poets as Shakespeare and Blake) the philosophy in question has been so powerful as to inform the entire *Weltanschauung* of an epoch. More interesting than cases of influence are those in which a writer's ideas derive from independent meditation upon philosophical issues.

The problem with recent treatments of philosophical ideas in Virginia Woolf's work is that one of the main ways they have attempted to reveal the philosophy in her novels is precisely through demonstrating influence. And not only is it left unclear what the *significance* of such demonstration is, but the sources of this putative influence seem to me quite infelicitously chosen and attention to them to blind the reader to the genuine philosophical significance in the novels. The currently voguish fascination with the Bloomsbury Group has given rise to a number of attempts to demonstrate the influence on Woolf's fiction of certain philosophical figures on the periphery of the Bloomsbury circle. I shall focus my criticisms upon two of these attempts in particular, since they embody much that is misguided in contemporary approaches to Virginia Woolf's philosophy: the first is an essay by S. P. Rosenbaum, entitled "The Philosophical Realism of Virginia Woolf," which purports to show that the philosophical position that informs her work is "realism" (a major ground for this claim being that she was greatly influenced by G. E. Moore); the second is an article by Jaakko Hintikka, entitled "Virginia Woolf and Our Knowledge of the External World," which argues that her epistemological position is congruent with Bertrand Russell's (but that this is due to quasi-osmotic rather than direct influence).¹

In both cases the external evidence for influence is slight. Rosenbaum does show that Moore's philosophy had been enthusiastically espoused by a number of men in the Bloomsbury Group, including Leonard Woolf; but aside from an expression of baffled admiration in a letter written to her sister after struggling through *Principia Ethica*, no direct evidence is presented that Mrs. Woolf was herself very inspired by Moore's thinking. Hintikka's case rests primarily upon internal evidence from both the content and style of Woolf's writing — though the only piece of external evidence he adduces (he quotes from a diary entry which records her preference for listening to "the songsters of Trafalgar Square" over "going to hear Bertie's lecture")² detracts from the plausibility of direct influence. In fact, Hintikka's essay comes closest to the mark in its concluding three sentences, in which he suggests that the philosophy of Plato is "an indirect influence which is very real indeed." The influence is indeed real; but why (given that Hintikka himself notes that the "young Virginia Woolf spent a great deal of time reading Plato's dialogues") say that the influence was *indirect*, by way of the philosophies of Whitehead and Russell? — especially since the young Virginia Stephen's exposure to Plato was prior to her acquaintance with the

work of her philosophical contemporaries. Indeed, in the face of Rosenbaum's assertion that "philosophically, G. E. Moore influenced Virginia Woolf more than anyone else" (Rosenbaum, p. 319), the mind of anyone acquainted with Woolf's novels and with Plato must surely boggle — since while she is by no means a pure Platonist, Platonic ideas abound in the novels.³

Not only is our two scholars' concern with influence of questionable value, but also — and this is a more basic criticism — the level of their approach is inappropriate. Rosenbaum's primary thesis is that the philosophical position embodied in Woolf's criticism and fiction is a Moorean realism, one of the basic presuppositions of which is an "epistemological dualism between consciousness and the objects of consciousness that exist independently of it" (Rosenbaum, p. 321). Hintikka's discussion, which is in large part based on Rosenbaum's (and which I shall therefore address less frequently), is again predominantly epistemological. But it detracts from the depth of their vision to call Virginia Woolf's novels, as Hintikka does, "fictionalized epistemology" (Hintikka, p. 6). Not being a professional philosopher, Woolf was able to rise above the positivist backlash against "metaphysics" which informed English philosophy's concentration on epistemology in the early decades of this century, and thereby to keep her gaze focused on more enduring philosophical issues. Without any regard for sense-data theories and skeptical problems concerning "our knowledge of the external world," her concern lay with broader and deeper questions, of the kind branded as "metaphysical" and rejected as "meaningless" by so many of her philosophical contemporaries, such as: What is the *meaning* of there being a world at all? In what does the reality of "the real world" consist? What is the contribution of the so-called "inner" world of fantasy to the constitution of the external world? How are we to understand the depths of the soul? and death? and time?

My positive thesis concerning Virginia Woolf's philosophy has two interdependent emphases. First we reflect back upon man's most primordial way of being in the world — *participation* in phenomena. We find the experience of participation to be a central element in Woolf's fiction, and are then impelled to consider the ways it is mediated by the *images* of the novel and by the operations of the *imagination* in our experience of the world. The argument will be all along a railing against the realist position, and the primary focus on *To the Lighthouse*, which Rosenbaum characterizes (correctly) as "Virginia Woolf's most overtly philosophical novel."

II

Nowhere do we find anything farther from the realist's "independence of objects from subjects" than in participation — the *nondifferentiation* of subject and object, an unconscious *identification* with the surrounding world. Its primordial form is found in the "*participation mystique*" — as the French anthropologist Lévy-

Bruhl has called it — of the so-called “primitive” with his environment.⁴ Here subject and object are not yet explicitly differentiated; the boundaries of the self, between inner and outer, are not yet established. Whereas we moderns have (under the influence of Descartes) divided the world into the realms of the animate and the inanimate, for the primitive the entire universe is pervaded and moved by the same “soul-energy” — the most common name for which has been “*mana*.”

As a result of such non-differentiation between self and non-self, the primitive, rather than standing over against an objective reality independent of human concerns, participates in the phenomena of his world. Lévy-Bruhl first characterized such participation as “mystical” because the links that bind primitive man to the members of his family and the social group, to his personal possessions and “appurtenances,” to the animals and plants, trees and rivers around him, are *preconscious* — intuited and imaged rather than cognized.⁵ Since the primitive’s self has not been gathered into a unitary ego-center of consciousness, his soul is so dispersed throughout his world and his immersion in the historical continuity of the social group so complete that the idea of *individual death* has no meaning for him.

Before we dismiss participation as “mere animism,” let us recall that an identical understanding of the psyche’s relation to the world informs the basis of the Western philosophical and psychological tradition. In the earliest documents of our culture, the Homeric epics and the fragments of the “Presocratic” philosophers, the ancestor of our word “psyche” (the Greek *psuchē*) connotes the “world soul” — the *anima mundi* — as much as the soul of the individual. And even Plato, whose thinking has perhaps been the greatest single influence on the Western conception of the psyche, rarely thinks of the human soul apart from its relation to the soul of the universe. Subsequently, the idea that there is a faculty in man that links him at a preconscious level with the world reappears in Kant’s reflections upon the transcendental imagination, which in its productive rather than merely reproductive capacity prefigures a priori all experience. The idea of the imagination as the medium between the soul and nature is further developed by the German Romantic movement and by poets such as Coleridge in England, and is to be found also in Nietzsche’s ideas about the fundamental pervasiveness of creative fantasy, and, more recently, in Jung’s theories concerning the archetypal imagination.

If we could break the spell of Cartesian rationalism which, by sucking all the soul out of the world and locating it solely within the human being, extinguished the experience of participation, we might be less quick to condemn the primitive for illegitimately projecting his “inner psychic contents” on to the “external world.” Thinkers such as Nietzsche and Freud and Jung have been telling us for decades that we are *all* — along with savages, neurotics and psychotics, and poets, artists and philosophers afflicted by divine madness — rapt by images of the invisible, bound to things by chains of fantastic animation.⁶

III

But let us now look at some of the things and persons in the novels, in order to evaluate the claim that Woolf's philosophical position is realism — i.e., that things and persons are what they are independently of human consciousness.

It would be appropriate to begin with something inanimate such as *the sea* — since this is the most important source of imagery in Woolf's fiction, pervading even *Mrs. Dalloway*, the story of which is set entirely within the city of London.⁷ But in deference to the realist's concern for "the real thing," let us take a turn *To the Lighthouse*, in which the action takes place on a small island surrounded by the actual, salt-and-water sea.⁸ And yet here we find that the presence of the sea is manifest far more in the metaphor and simile of the narration and in the characters' imaginings than as something simply described by the narrator or actually perceived by someone. (This is all the more remarkable since the topic of the final third of the novel is a long excursion to the Lighthouse, seen from the perspectives of those in the boat and those who stayed behind.) Fewer than one third of the presentations of the real sea are "pure" — without any admixture of fantasy-image, metaphor, and other meaning constituted by the perceiver — and if one includes the sea as imagined by the characters or embodied in the metaphor and simile of the narrative, the ratio drops to less than one quarter. Some examples of "impure" presentations: ". . . the blue waters of the bay looked bluer than ever. [William Bankes and Lily Briscoe] came there regularly every evening drawn by some need. It was as if the water floated off and set sailing thoughts which had grown stagnant on dry land, and gave to their bodies even some physical relief. First the pulse of colour flooded the bay with blue, and the heart expanded with it and the body swam . . ." (p. 33). Sometimes the participation is more active: Nancy, crouching over a tide-pool, "changed the pool into the sea, and made the minnows into sharks and whales" (p. 114); and Lily "looked at the bay beneath her, making hillocks of the blue bars of the waves, and stony fields of the purpler spaces . . ." (p. 270). And when we encounter a simile such as this one from the "Time Passes" section — ". . . the winds and waves disported themselves like the amorphous bulks of leviathans whose brows are pierced by no light of reason . . ." (p. 202) — are we to suppose with the realist that the image of the leviathans is something "subjective" imposed upon the phenomena by the impersonal narrator? Should we not rather say that there is something inherently monstrous and animate about the sea that makes resonate an image in the psyche, that the inhuman chaos of the sea mirrors something deep in the human soul, with which it is connected, and that their connection through the imagination is marked by the poetic image?

I maintain that the sea that is central to *To the Lighthouse* is not the actual sea of the realist, taken literally and independently of human awareness. Rather, for Virginia Woolf the "reality" of the sea *includes* the images and likenesses by which

the characters' perceptions of it are informed, its appearances in their fantasies, and all the tropes by which their experience is mediated to the reader. This is because she acknowledges the reality of participation and the part the imagination plays in this mode of being in the world, understanding that our apprehension of the real sea is conditioned by — and in turn conditions — our quasi-mythical dreams and archetypal fantasies of the ocean.

Let us now consider a purely auditory encounter with the sea, as described in that strangely powerful passage (pp. 27–28) in which “the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach,” normally so comforting to Mrs. Ramsay, suddenly confronts her with her death, making her “look up with an impulse of terror.” Just as the prospect of the waves' making towards the pebbled shore reminded Shakespeare of the way our minutes hasten to their end, relentlessly, so the beating of the waves upon the beach presents Mrs. Ramsay with an intimation of her mortality in the image of the engulfment of the island by the sea.⁹ How can we divest the ocean of its ceaseless play in counterpoint to human mortality and not lose something of what it really is? Is it a matter of indifference that what brings Mrs. Ramsay face to face with her death is the sea? Would the sky or a mountain have done just as well? No — because of the fundamental equivocality of Woolf's images of the sea. On the one hand the sea suggests the basic life-force which flows through and sustains all existence, perpetually; and to experience one's participation in this flow can be a source of comfort and support. On the other hand such participation necessitates a dying to our individuality, an extinguishing of the empirical personality, and yet at the same time can force an acknowledgement of the separate, mortal self. Thus the ocean confronts us with the realization that although we are *a part of* the cosmos, our death abysmally sets us *apart from* it.

Now let us consider something even less animate than the ocean, the Lighthouse itself. As in the case of the sea, the Lighthouse is disclosed through a variety of perspectives — but the unitary self-sufficiency that the realist would ascribe to it does not even hold for its being seen by the same person at two different times. Near the end of the book, young James Ramsay approaches in the small boat the Lighthouse he had seen so often from afar some ten years before: “So that was the Lighthouse, was it? No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing. The other Lighthouse was true too” (p. 277). This is in direct contrast to his literalist/realist father, for whom everything is what it is: one thing, and not another thing.

Rosenbaum does go so far as to admit (p. 340) that the Lighthouse “symbolizes and is a symbol for both [Mrs. Ramsay and her husband]”; but this is to obscure the difference between the realist Mr. Ramsay and his wife, who actually becomes *identified* with the Lighthouse. First she becomes its inverse — “the wedge-shaped core of darkness” — as which she is able to shed her attachments to “real life” and wander in the far realms of the imagination (pp. 95–96). She then looks out at the Lighthouse with its three strokes:

. . . watching them in this mood always at this hour one could not help attaching oneself to one thing especially of the things one saw Often she found herself sitting and looking, sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became the thing that she looked at — that light, for example. . . . It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone one leant to inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one (pp. 96-97)

It is interesting to compare the similar experience of participation of her prototype, the eponymous protagonist of *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she should cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? but that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself. (p. 12)

Before turning to consider some perspectives on persons in *To the Lighthouse*, I should make a few remarks about literary realism and its relationship to certain styles of narrative. The traditional realist novel tends to employ an omniscient, relatively impersonal author/narrator who is able to grant access to the minds of the characters and to impart, through his or her objective standpoint, the “reality” of the situation. Historically, there appears to be a connection between the unitary and all-encompassing perspective of the omniscient author/narrator on the one hand, and the predominance of monotheism and the belief in a unitary and objective reality on the other. It would not be surprising, therefore, if the death of God proclaimed by Nietzsche’s madman were to undermine not only the belief in an objective reality independent of the various possible perspectives on it, but also the validity of literary realism. Indeed, it is Nietzsche’s perspectivism that is the important precursor of the “multi-perspectival” narrative characteristic of authors such as Joyce, Faulkner, Beckett — and Virginia Woolf.

IV

Two particularly significant features of *To the Lighthouse* are the narrator’s *lack* of omniscience¹⁰ and the way his/her quasi-objective perspective merges with those of the novel’s characters. The latter feature is exemplified in the opening scene of the book, in which James Ramsay, aged six, is sitting on the floor beside his mother, cutting out pictures from a magazine. We are told that James, intent upon a picture of a refrigerator, “appeared the image of stark and

uncompromising severity, with his high forehead and his fierce blue eyes, impeccably candid and pure, frowning slightly at the sight of human frailty . . .” — a rather unusual way for a six-year-old, so engaged, to appear. But our puzzlement is lessened as the sentence finishes: “so that his mother . . . imagined him all red and ermine on the Bench or directing a stern and momentous crisis of public affairs” (p. 10).

Within the space of the novel’s first page, then, the observations of the closest figure we find to an omniscient narrator shade off in mid-sentence into the perspective of one of the characters. Were this a traditional novel, the realist’s position that there must be one way the boy *really* looks (like a six-year-old, perhaps?), and that the image of the judge/politician is a mere fantasy-projection on the part of his doting parent, might be more tenable. But Woolf makes it clear throughout the book that such projections are *not* merely subjective (in that they are often common to several characters),¹¹ and that they generally have some “hook” in the object on which to hang. Neither subjectively inner (peculiar to the particular consciousness whose perspective it is) nor objectively outer (actually there in the thing in itself), these images arise from the transpersonal imagination, the medium of participation between the inner and outer worlds.

Bearing this in mind, let us now focus on the person of Mr. Ramsay, since the realist’s case rests in part upon a certain understanding of Woolf’s portrayal of this character. The argument behind Rosenbaum’s discussion of this issue runs something like this: Mr. Ramsay is portrayed as an epistemologist who shares features in common with G. E. Moore and whose philosophical position is a Moorean realism; Woolf’s portrayal of Mr. Ramsay and his philosophical orientation is sympathetic; therefore she was favorably disposed toward (because influenced by) Moorean realism, and this philosophy predominantly informs *To the Lighthouse*. While the first premise is true, the second — and, therefore, the conclusion — is false.

The problem of assessing the extent of the author’s sympathy with the characters of *To the Lighthouse* is aggravated by the fact that the reader’s knowledge of them comes only partially by way of the narrator, and primarily through the perspectives of the other characters. With great ingenuity Woolf constructs a world of mutually reflecting perspectives: character A is seen as irascible from the point of view of B, but this judgment is relativized when we learn that from C’s perspective B has certain particularly irritating traits — or, irritating at least to someone as susceptible as C is (from the viewpoint of a character such as D). To wander through this hall of mirrors in the search for what A is *really* like can be a bewildering experience, especially since the occasional perspective of the narrator is constantly merging with those of the other characters.

From the perspective of the narrator, Mr. Ramsay appears in a predominantly negative light: he is sarcastic, vain, self-satisfied, yet hopelessly insecure, subject to irrational fits of rage, totally lacking in aesthetic sensibility — in short,

“a man afraid to own his own feelings” (p. 70). About the only favorable report from a neutral viewpoint is equivocal:

His was a splendid mind. For if thought is like the keyboard of a piano, divided into so many notes, or like the alphabet is ranged in twenty-six letters all in order, then his splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one, firmly and accurately, until it had reached, say, the letter Q. He reached Q . . . Q he was sure of. Q he could demonstrate . . . but . . . he would never reach R. (p. 53)

Rosenbaum ignores the conditional “if thought is like the keyboard of a piano” (and no doubt certain modes of thought are), misses the irony of the passage, and reads it as exemplifying the author’s admiration for “Mr. Ramsay on the frontiers of thought” (Rosenbaum, p. 339). He is right to point out the allusion to the letters used by formal logicians to symbolize propositions — P, Q, R — but overlooks the element of parody. The main point of the passage is that Mr. Ramsay is stuck at Q and *cannot get to R*: that is to say, by means of step-by-step deductive procedures in which everything can be surely demonstrated, Mr. Ramsay cannot reach *himself*; his single-minded desire for certain knowledge of the external world at all costs prevents his attaining any degree of self-understanding.¹²

We receive favorable impressions of Mr. Ramsay primarily (and significantly) by way of the female characters — his wife, Lily Briscoe, and his daughter Cam. Their responses are for the most part reverential in the face of the magnificence of his intellect, but they are more than counterbalanced by the antipathy of these women towards his egotism, his “imperious need” for praise, “his immense self-pity,” his tyrannical demand for sympathy, and his outrage over “the folly of women’s minds” and their hopeless vagueness. Clearly a number of transpersonal or archetypal projections condition these relationships: the Elektra complex is strongly constellated in Cam — at the age of seventeen, “no one attracted her more; his hands were beautiful, and his feet, and his voice . . .” (p. 253); and Lily’s awe of him derives from his embodying the archetypal image of “the husband,” as we are told explicitly, when “suddenly the meaning which . . . descends on people, making them symbolical, making them representative, came upon [Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay], and made them in the dusk, standing, looking, the symbols of marriage, husband and wife” (p. 110).

But it is in James’s reaction to his father (which, even taking into account his strong Oedipal feelings of hostility, is extreme) that the transpersonal elements are most manifest. We are presented on the book’s second page with the first of a number of fantasies of parricide (p. 10). While James’s hatred of “the twang and twitter of his father’s emotion which . . . disturbed the perfect simplicity and good sense of his relations with his mother” appears to have certain grounds in his father’s personality and behavior (as corroborated by most of the other

characters), it also has a strong archetypal dimension that is imparted by a recurring pair of striking images. Mr. Ramsay is here hovering around his wife and son, demanding sympathy: "Mrs. Ramsay . . . seemed to raise herself with an effort, and at once to pour erect into the air a rain of energy, a column of spray, . . . and into this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself, like a beak of brass, barren and bare" (pp. 58-59).

However, by the end of the novel, after the ten-year hiatus, James has become aware of the transpersonal elements in his hatred of his father. "Only now, as he grew older, and sat staring at his father in an impotent rage, it was not him, that old man reading, whom he wanted to kill, but it was the thing that descended on him — without his knowing it perhaps: that fierce, sudden black-winged harpy, with its talons and its beak all cold and hard, that struck and struck at you . . ." (p. 273). Now, "the thing that descended on [Mr. Ramsay]" is no more a purely subjective fantasy of James's than an actual part of his father's personality: such things descend (or arise) from the middle ground of the impersonal psyche, the archetypal imagination whose products are constellated *between* people, through their interacting.

It might be argued that the portrayal of Mr. Ramsay is unsympathetic because the character is modeled upon Virginia Woolf's father, Sir Leslie Stephen: but that the author should transpose a host of her father's least attractive traits on to the figure of an academic epistemologist of the Moorean persuasion does not incline one to believe that she held Moore and his realism in such high esteem as Rosenbaum claims. It should by now be clear that realism is even less applicable to the presentation of the people in the novel than of the things. People are not the people they are independently of those who encounter them: rather, their being is a complex function of the perspectives of the quasi-impersonal narrator, and of the impressions they make upon the other characters, which are themselves informed by images that transcend the realm of the personal, linking the human with the non-human.

V

I have argued that the philosophy embodied in Virginia Woolf's fiction is far from realism because it acknowledges the extent to which we human beings participate in the phenomena of the world, and the extent to which our apprehension of things and persons is mediated and conditioned by images that are precognitive and pre-rational — archetypal rather than merely subjective. The way such images are employed in *To the Lighthouse* (and in most of the later novels), and the way the narrative of the novel is structured, serves to undermine the belief in an objective reality apart from the perspectives of the various characters on it. But there must be *something* there, protests the realist, something that all these perspectives are perspectives *on*. Rosenbaum, in com-

menting upon Auerbach's discussion of the multi-perspectival narrative of *To the Lighthouse*, speaks of "the necessary objective reality upon which [the various perspectives] focus" (p. 341). But necessary *for whom*? It is necessary for Auerbach to slip back into positing a reality at the center of the multiplicity of perspectives because he is writing the final chapter of a monumental book bearing the subtitle, "The Representation of Reality in Western Literature." But those who are beginning to understand the import of the death of God as it applies to *all* metaphysical absolutes are no longer drawn to look for some single "way it really is" underneath and independent of the appearances. And so although at first Nietzsche and Woolf may appear to make the strangest bedfellows, they share deep down a common ground in their response to the realist: No, there is *nothing*; nothing but the sum — or more complex function — of the perspectives. For Nietzsche, beneath every apparent ground is the abyss; for Woolf, all is "curves and arabesques flourishing around a centre of complete emptiness."

By way of conclusion, I suggest that the search for philosophical influence on Virginia Woolf's work be called off, unless its aim be to enhance our response to the novels by showing their themes against the background of the major concerns of Western thought. If we look to the novels themselves, we find that their approach is phenomenological rather than analytical, and existential rather than epistemological. I suggest, therefore, that the attempt to articulate Virginia Woolf's philosophy had best look for support to the Continental European traditions of existentialism and phenomenology (especially to such thinkers as Nietzsche and Heidegger), and secondarily — with regard to the psychological import of the novels — to the depth psychologies of Freud and Jung.¹³

The yield of a comparison with existential philosophy — which restrictions of space have allowed me to do no more than hint at here — is bilateral. If philosophical achievement contributes to a novelist's stature, our appreciation of Woolf's work may be enhanced by articulating the congruence of its philosophical elements with a fully elaborated philosophy of existence. On the other hand, existential philosophy cannot be imparted adequately through conceptual thought alone (a reason why so many existential philosophers have adopted a literary or poetic style of writing); such philosophy calls for exemplification in imagery and narrative, so that the reader can be brought to an *experiential* rather than a merely intellectual understanding of the issues. And since there appears to have been no influence operating between Woolf and the existential thinkers, the surprising congruence of many of their ideas suggests that they may be approaching from different disciplines and directions some of the same truths about human existence.

Supposing Virginia Woolf is the unsuspected Diotima of modern European lovers of wisdom — what then?

1. S. P. Rosenbaum, "The Philosophical Realism of Virginia Woolf," in S. P. Rosenbaum, ed., *English Literature and British Philosophy: A Collection of Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Jaakko Hintikka, "Virginia Woolf and Our Knowledge of the External World," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 38 (1979): 5-14.
2. Hintikka, p. 13. Cf. also the letter of January 23, 1916, in which Mrs. Woolf writes to a friend: "I hope to go [to Bertrand Russell's lecture] next Tuesday, more to see the audience than to listen, I'm afraid."
3. That demonstration of influence is not invariably a sterile exercise is shown by an essay by Jean Wyatt entitled "The Celebration of Eros: Greek Concepts of Love and Beauty in *To the Lighthouse*," *PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE* 2 (1978): 160-75. Professor Wyatt's reminder of the extent of Woolf's knowledge of and enthusiasm for Greek literature and myth, together with her demonstration that the central concerns of *To the Lighthouse* reflect the major themes of Plato's *Symposium*, serves greatly to enhance the reader's appreciation of the depth of the novel's topics.
4. See, especially, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *The "Soul" of the Primitive* (New York: Macmillan, 1928), and the posthumously published *Notebooks on Primitive Mentality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), in which the author elaborates his understanding of *participation* and modifies it in response to the considerable criticism provoked by his earlier formulations.
5. Lest the primitive's psychic identification with natural phenomena around him seem too outlandish an idea, let me draw attention to a physical analogue in modern biology — namely, the discovery that almost half the dry weight of our bodies is "notself," consisting of organelles, organisms whose DNA is totally *different* from that of animal cell nuclei and *identical* with the DNA of organelles in the cells of animals and plants. See Lewis Thomas's essay, "Organelles as Organisms" in *Lives of a Cell* (New York: Viking, 1974).
6. Instead of further elaborating the notion of participation, I refer the reader to Owen Barfield's insightful history of its vicissitudes in his *Saving the Appearances* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965).
7. Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970).
8. Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1969). References are to this edition.
9. The connection between death and the engulfing ocean is not peculiar to Mrs. Ramsay: her husband is later (pp. 68-69) presented with the same image; and almost at the end of the book (p. 294) Lily Briscoe, the character most empathetic with Mrs. Ramsay, hears a wave fall on the beach, with similar import.
10. Erich Auerbach has pointed out the limits of the narrator's knowledge in his essay "The Brown Stocking," which is the final chapter of his *Mimesis: the Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953).
11. In this case James's sister Cam later has a corresponding fantasy of him as "James the lawgiver, with the tablets of eternal wisdom laid open on his knee" (p. 251).
12. On the question of truth, Woolf's position is antithetical to Mr. Ramsay's and close to Nietzsche's perspectivism. In her essay "On Not Knowing Greek," in *The Common Reader*, First Series (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1972), she writes: "*Truth is various; truth comes to us in different disguises; it is not with the intellect alone that we perceive it. . . . truth is to be pursued with all our faculties*" (p. 34, emphasis added).
13. Attention has been drawn occasionally to possible resonances with the work of some Continental philosophers and psychologists, but the topic has nowhere been fully elaborated. I am currently working on a depth-psychological approach to Woolf's fiction and also on showing its remarkable affinity with aspects of the philosophies of both Nietzsche and Heidegger.