

40. Statement of Purpose (1993)

"Such a statement as requested by the philosophy departments of various universities to indicate how and why and under what circumstances I have come to make the decision which is the present aim and business of my life – such a statement must needs be, in order to give the true and proper measure of myself, an account both characterized by and taking note of a certain rapturous involvement with candour. With words that test the bounds of formality, propriety, and convention. Therefore let it be put down that I'm no average applicant for graduate studies in neither the necessarily advantageous nor disadvantageous light of being forty-two years old. Neither is it necessarily an advantage for the purpose of picking a prime candidate that he be one who has spent so many years marching to the beat of his own drum, nor is it necessarily a disadvantage that he has acquired a wealth of diverse and not particularly academic or scholarly experiences. Some of the best artistic minds have been sharpened solely on the whetstone of this world and a certain open-eyed way of living in it. Unfortunately, mine resisted this honing operation and remained a blunt instrument insofar as the creation of an artistic work was concerned.

"This admission of failure and taking a drubbing in the early rounds of my life should not be construed as anything like an admission of being a spent force or a seeker, desperate in his decline, of solace and safeguards. On the contrary, I feel myself to be immensely solid, vital, and still-actualizing or being actualized. But I do admit that, on the other hand, it is as a kind of *artiste manqué* that I approach academia in general and philosophy in particular. However, apart from the latter already being an important part of my life, what speaks to me most loudly and singularly is that my aim remains forever high and that, as I have come to believe strongly, the admirable precision and honesty of the greatest artists can be carried over and dwell in the realm where appearances are penetrated rather than painted. Where the main order of business is the conceptualization rather than the imaginative presentation of truth.

"Now I like to think that the above state of affairs holds the potential for some sort of scholarly work and investigation as well as the potential for some sort of *unscholarly* work. At least I hold with Friedrich Nietzsche that the cultivated, self-assured, even, let us say, academic self often stands in need of its own harsh critics and acute observers. I will not elaborate on this here. I will simply say that I wish to bring myself wholly into my work and combine certain proper goals and interests in the university setting with the freest, most open, and most courageous kind of expression.

"What are my specific academic interests? It is hard for me to answer such a

question without first stating that my highest interest is personal and creative, without first acknowledging that I find myself still groping, still searching for the various signs of my particular way. To put down that I am attracted to Continental Philosophy and particularly to its manifestation in Postmodernism; to have it out that I have read and reread the works of Friedrich Nietzsche; to say that I treat all great literature as a text by which to grow and prosper; to mention theological, theatrical, linguistic, and even literary interests in the critical sense – what is all this but to admit a lifelong aversion to academic specialization?

“To conclude then: I have no interests of the highly specialized sort except those which grasp and excite me at a specific time. What I like to think I have instead is a new kind of force and momentum, a new kind of revitalizing power within me. But, again, I cannot say too much about this except that, if it not handled carefully, it is likely to prove an unattractive and unwelcome guest. So I will confine myself to summing up the situation in the following way. I know that it takes tremendous strength to survive putting one’s self at odds with an aroused and even slightly antagonized majority. But if one wants to be a hero and, following Nietzsche’s example, turn one’s serpents into dragons, then one must combat not simply what is mean or petty in the day-to-day but have the strength to will it transfigured.”

– *Pygmalion-like self-image? Is that what he called it? There’s certainly enough evidence to show —*

– *How else can he undertake a hard and difficult task? It’s absolutely necessary to —*

– *Flaunt it?*

– *No, but to keep it alive, keep it upright, keep it before him like a bright burning star.*

– *Oh, that’s very moving. Almost Zarathustra-like. But while it may sound like music to your ears, it’s intolerable to mine.*

First premise of a rule of modesty even in our greatest pride: we always have the potential to be what we criticise and even condemn.

– *Oh, there! You see? He’s not pretending to be a hard-and-fast rock but only the opportunity to stand like one.*

I was always one who could have been tempted into professionalism if the offer had been good enough.

– Well, he doubles back on himself. I suppose that's part of his complicating and over-complicating. Part of his tightrope act or whatever you call it. And I suppose his narcissism is part of it too. He's gambling it won't make his subject unbearable to the many who really don't care for this sort of thing.

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