

## *50. Letter to Professor Shamus ( January 10, 1995)*

"Dear Professor Shamus,

"I want to thank you for your kind words about my essay. Given my criticism of your course, I find them all the more remarkable.

"As is usually the case in such instances, I feel a bit guilty. You see, I was fully prepared to suffer what I have already suffered at the hands of a couple of other professors who, as you probably know, I ran afoul of. In my opinion, they have used indirect as well as direct means to show their disapproval. I challenged their authority and no doubt they believed so much in it and so little in mine that they felt justified in doing so.

"Furthermore, I think that, with respect to the assignment you marked and made some appreciative comments on, I put myself in a vulnerable position. All the more then am I appreciative of your not exhibiting any resentment. Writing the essay as I did, that is, as a series of aphorisms, was certainly not the safest way to go about it. In short, it was less the business of exhibiting my knowledge of the subject than exploring my reaction to the author's thought. The latter is of course a much more personal approach than is normally encouraged.

"So a new perspective has been added. A bit of sorrow too in contemplating how it might have been under different circumstances."

What am I to make of the fact that, a couple of years later, a blind referee made some smarmy comments about this essay and, unkindest cut of all, claimed that it had no literary merit? Should I think that he was upset by my attempt to get it published in a scholarly journal, even one that was relatively modest and put out by graduate students? That he couldn't simply criticize it on a philosophical level? That he felt compelled to attack it where he thought the heart of its presumption lay?

Is my war against professors or, more properly, the all too professional a bit of paranoia? Should I be on guard against the Rousseauian type of persecution complex? I have no proper answer to these questions apart from turning the matter over and over and exposing every doubt that registers in my psyche as subjective truth and every certitude that registers there (whether it be a certitude for anyone else or not) as an objective one.

Surely a sign of literary merit is to keep on track. To bring unity to diversity and vice-versa. Did the blind referee who evaluated my essay say anything that specifically demonstrated a lack of this?

Like many professors, he no doubt was in a hurry and so, resting on the authority that was vested in him, he scanted this and other matters. I suppose that nothing more than a heightened sense of moral obligation would have led him to do otherwise.

A heightened sense of moral obligation! Something like I obviously believe I have. But directed towards telling the truth and not necessarily going much further.

In one way the Merleau-Ponty essay was this attempt. Perhaps its alleged lack of literary merit was simply its being too obviously and obtrusively so.

*– Perhaps art tells the truth of the whole simply by telling the truth of the part. In which case trying to tell the truth of the whole artfully and as the whole (that is, mainly as a philosophical attempt) would smack of the immodesty and presumption that art manages to avoid.*

In philosophy everybody is seeking their answer to this or that and nobody wants to be closed off or closed in by the conflicting answer of another.

*– Let's not get sidetracked. I want to hear more about his exploits at Concordia.*

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