

keting: "No one will ever possess the art of speaking . . . unless he acquires the ability to enumerate the sorts of characters to be found in any audience, to divide everything according to its kinds" (273d-e). It is foolish to indiscriminately scatter words on those who will not know what to do with them. Socrates wishes to prevent disorders of address.

Socrates' views on speechmaking, then, parallel his views on love. Just as it is wrong to yield indiscriminately, it is wrong to speak words to those not suited for them. The soul of the speaker and of the hearer need to be closely knitted. Loose coupling between soul and soul, body and body, is the problem in each case. Indiscriminate dissemination is bad; intimate dialogue or prudent rhetoric that matches message and receiver is good. Speeches not appropriate to audiences can bring dangerous harvests. For Socrates the specificity with which expression fits recipient is the criterion of goodness in communication. "Spurious rhetoric turns out to be the phantom image of justice; genuine rhetoric is the science of *eros*."²⁶ Bad rhetoric is a parody of justice because it is blind, like justice, to the individualities of the listeners; good rhetoric is erotic because of its care for their particular souls. Rhetoric concerns the many, *eros* the one, but in their true forms for Socrates, both involve a reciprocal coupling of speaker and hearer, a closed communication circuit.²⁷ Socrates thus conceives of mass communication as a kind of dialogue writ large: no stray messages, furtive listeners, or unintended effects are allowed.

Writing, for Plato's Socrates, creates just this kind of scatter. Writing can never achieve such a fit with its audience, and in its pretense of mutual care, writing comes in for many of the same critiques as Lysias's speech on love. Writing may claim to address its reader one-on-one, but in fact it is indiscriminate in its care. Like speeches read aloud without understanding or youths exploited for sexual favors without love, writing is ignorant of soul and careless in distribution, disseminating words insouciantly. As ever, the dramatic turns of the dialogue enact the philosophical argument itself. Socrates puts the charge that writing destroys memory in the mouth of Thamus, king of Egypt, in a dialogue with Theuth, the supposed inventor of writing, one of many acts of ventriloquistic quotation in the dialogue. For it is precisely writing's ability to throw voices that Socrates sees as most suspicious, even when speaking

26. Seth Benardete, *The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy: Plato's "Gorgias" and "Phaedrus"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 2.

27. As Aristotle says, *Rhetoric*, 1356b, the art of rhetoric concerns itself with types,

in his own voice. The famous long passage criticizing *graphē*, writing, spells out the themes of this book:

You know, Phaedrus, writing shares a strange feature with painting. The offsprings of painting stand there as if they are alive, but if anyone asks them anything, they remain most solemnly silent. The same is true of written words. You'd think they were speaking as if they had some understanding, but if you question anything that has been said because you want to learn more, it continues just to signify that very same thing forever. When it has once been written down, every discourse rolls about everywhere, reaching indiscriminately those with understanding no less than those who have no business with it, and it doesn't know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not. And when it is faulted and attacked unfairly, it always needs its father's support; alone it can neither defend itself nor come to its own support. (275d-e)

Socrates provides a checklist of enduring anxieties that arise in response to transformations in the means of communication. Writing parodies live presence; it is inhuman, lacks interiority, destroys authentic dialogue, is impersonal, and cannot acknowledge the individuality of its interlocutors; and it is promiscuous in distribution. Such things have been said about printing, photography, phonography, cinema, radio, television, and computers. The great virtue of the *Phaedrus* is to spell out the normative basis of the critique of media in remarkable clarity and, even more, to make us rethink what we mean by *media*. Communication must be soul-to-soul, among embodied live people, in an intimate interaction that is uniquely fit for each participant. As Lysias's speech denies the difference between a lover and a nonlover, so writing has no notion of the receiver's soul.

Socrates' critique of writing thus is not just a flourish toward the end of an elaborate dialogue, but a logical outgrowth of the argument that good and just relations among people require a knowledge of and care for souls. The paradox of writing's being denounced in a written dialogue may in fact perform the unity of the piece.²⁸ Distortions in communication for Socrates arise from the disappearance of a personal nexus. Because writing can live on far beyond the situation of utterance, it can mean many things for many people. The clients of sophists such as Lysias are at best transmitters, ignorant of the messages they bear. (No wonder we call one kind of contemporary Sophists ghostwriters.)

28. Mackenzie, "Paradox in Plato's *Phaedrus*"; see also Nehamas and Woodruff, "Introduction," xlvii-xlviii.

Writing lacks the shape or *sōma* necessary for genuine speech. Writing, understood on the model of love, is fundamentally unfaithful. The dilemma ever since has been how to secure the sure signs of personal fidelity or presence in an impersonal and fickle medium.

Socrates' final critique of writing returns to the erotic subtext of the dialogue by discussing the pattern in which intellectual "seeds" (*spermata*) are implanted by various modes of discourse. To write is to broadcast; to teach via dialectic is to implant in a durable medium. The man with real knowledge will, says Socrates, carefully sow his knowledge, which he compares to seeds (276c).²⁹ Just so, a wise farmer sows seeds where they will bear fruit and eventually reproduce; a farmer plants "gardens of Adonis" only for amusement.³⁰ Wise teachers, in the same way, plant their seeds in the fertile soil of the disciple's soul, whereas a foolish teacher writes them down, which is to risk scattering them abroad. One-on-one teaching is the legitimate brother to writing. It is a "discourse that is written down, with knowledge, in the soul of the listener; it can defend itself, and it knows for whom it should speak and for whom it should remain silent" (276a). For Socrates the soul is a "medium" more durable than papyrus, which explains the notion, quite curious to our ears, that oral teaching could be a kind of writing more durable than writing per se. Words written in a disciple's soul are fertile, can take root in others via oral teaching, and defend themselves in debate; written words, in contrast, are sterile and incapable of generation. Socrates wants question-and-answer intimacy rather than broadcasting; fertilization rather than panspermia.

Socrates is worried, in short, about paternity and promiscuity. The erotic word is not the problem, just the wrong kind of eros. He does not condemn writing per se any more than he condemns rhetoric. As Derrida summarizes, "The conclusion of the *Phaedrus* is less a condemnation of writing in the name of present speech than a preference for one sort of writing over another, for the fertile trace over the sterile trace, for a seed that engenders because it is planted inside over a seed scattered wastefully outside."³¹ Socrates gives a patriarchal vision of the process of reproduction, inasmuch as the key question is the seed rather than the gestation; he figures philosophical instruction as a kind of reproduc-

29. The comparison of words and seeds is ancient: see Pierre Guiraud, *Sémiologie de la sexualité: Essai de glosso-analyse* (Paris: Payot, 1978), and Stuart Schneiderman, *An Angel Passes: How the Sexes Became Undivided* (New York: New York University Press, 1988).

30. These gardens were cultivated during Adonis's festival in early summer, the season in which the *Phaedrus* is set; they consisted of sprouts of lettuce and fennel whose short lives symbolized the short life of Adonis and the transience of beauty more generally.

31. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 149.

tion without women.³² In contrast to the praise of dissemination we will find in parables attributed to Jesus, Socrates is alarmed at the dispersive properties of the written word. This line of argument taps into an archaic set of anxieties: secured paternity versus polymorphous promiscuity. For Socrates, as for many thinkers since, dialogue (fertile coupling) is the norm; dissemination (spilled seed) is the deviation. As elsewhere in the Platonic corpus, Socrates appropriates images of female reproduction (calling himself a midwife who delivers the ideas with which all men are pregnant) as his preferred model of intellectual birthing over the indiscriminate irresponsibility of a Lysias. In short, Socrates faces two kinds of "AI": the artificial intelligence of the written text, which simulates a caring teacher, and the artificial insemination of its distribution, which makes paternity undecidable. Writing for Socrates is something like an intellectual sperm bank: conception can occur between anonymous partners whose junction can be manipulated across great distances of space and time. The written word unleashes a cloud of idea spores that float through space, waiting to germinate and take root wherever they can. Both kinds of AI parody the full erotic presence and mutuality that Socrates calls for in philosophical lovers. With such reproduction as writing affords, distinctly personal contact between souls can never be ensured.

Writing on papyrus, as opposed to writing on souls, is for Socrates a kind of cheating eros. It pretends to be a live presence but in fact is a kind of embalmed intelligence, like the mummies of ancient Egypt, whence writing supposedly came. As with all new media, writing opens up a realm of the living dead. The papyrus may bring "Lysias" himself, but it is a Lysias who exerts an erotic spell at a distance without any possibility of interaction. Socrates would perhaps agree with John Milton, with a shiver, that "books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them."³³ Here the *Phaedrus* foreshadows the blossoming of a wide array of discourses in the second half of the nineteenth century about the leakage of the human soul into new media of recording and transmission (see chapters 4 and 5). Socrates, as much as Kafka, has discovered the ghostly element between people.

Socrates' vision of communication, again, is not simply about media—the goodness of speech versus the badness of writing—but about the symmetry and tightness of the relationships in which they are em-

32. In his vision of male-to-male procreation, Socrates indulges in the dream of masculine *autarkeia*, or self-sufficient reproduction: see DuBois, "Phallocentrism."

33. John Milton, *Areopagitica*, Great Books of the Western World, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, vol. 32 (1644; Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), 384.

bedded. For Plato's Socrates, the medium is not a mere channel but a whole series of relationships. The critique of writing on papyrus as opposed to writing on souls maintains the deeper theme of the dialogue: two are needed for love or wisdom. Writing, like rhetoric, can sever this mutuality, leaving behind odd parts of the whole body of discourse: words that wander abroad like dispossessed spirits or radio broadcasts transmitted to the great audience invisible. The specter of disembodiment, like the ghostly Lysias captured on the papyrus, returns.

Though other scholars have adduced much richer accounts of the dialogue's unity than what I offer here, I read the *Phaedrus* as a normative grid of communicative forms. The first half of the *Phaedrus* concerns eros, communication to the one; the second half concerns rhetoric, communication to the many. The dialogue begins and ends with deviant forms: personal rhetoric (Lysias's speech) and mass eros (writing). Both feign care for specific individuals but are in fact indiscriminate in address, open to any comer. Neither is, to Plato's way of thinking, the utterance of a soul in freedom; they occur only under constraint. Neither is a "live" enunciation; both are curiously artificial, even inhuman. Lysias addresses his beloved as an individual, though he is really addressed only as one of a crowd of eligible lovers. His stance is that of Kierkegaard's seducer, except that the seducer's professions of unique love are done serially rather than en masse.³⁴ The written word is deviant for inverse reasons: even if addressed to an individual, it can couple with unspecified readers. The speech of the nonloving lover is indiscriminate in transmission; writing is indiscriminate in reception. True eros, however, is dyadic, just as philosophic rhetoric is based on knowledge of kinds of souls. In each case, soul and word must be matched. Even in public address, Socrates proposes close correlation between the speech and the audience; the careful crafting of discourse can approximate the intimacy of dialogue on a large scale. If personal rhetoric and mass eros are the deviations, personal eros and public rhetoric are the norms.

Socrates' model of the proper and pathological forms of communication resounds to this day. We are still prone to think of true communication as personal, free, live, and interactive. Communication for the *Phaedrus*, when it goes well, can be the mutual discovery of souls; when it turns bad, it can be seduction, pandering, missed connections, or the invariance of writing, "signifying the very same thing forever" (275d).

34. Søren Kierkegaard, "The Seducer's Diary" (1843), in *Either/Or*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 1:301-445.

Plato via Socrates clearly saw that a new medium is not just a matter of repackaging old contents but a shift in the meaning of voice, word, body, and love. Perhaps the first treatise on communication, the *Phaedrus* is about messages lost in transit and illegitimate couplings. Plato's Socrates is our first theorist of communication—which also means, of communication breakdown.

Dissemination in the Synoptic Gospels

The synoptic Gospels evaluate dissemination in a way quite opposite from the *Phaedrus*, and they rest on a quite different vision of love and of communication. Like the *Phaedrus*, the synoptics feature a rhetoric of sowing and harvesting; unlike that of the *Phaedrus*, this rhetoric often celebrates dissemination as desirable and just. The parable of the sower—the archparable of dissemination—presents a mode of distribution that is as democratically indifferent to who may receive the precious seeds as the *Phaedrus* is aristocratically selective. Other parables argue the deficiency of reciprocity and tight coupling compared with an undifferentiated scattering. Socrates in the *Phaedrus* favors dialogue; Jesus in the synoptics favors dissemination. Moral theory has long taken its bearings from a confrontation with these two personalities. Why not communication theory?

Jesus is represented in all three synoptic Gospels (Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 8) as delivering the parable of the sower by the seashore to a vast and mixed audience. A sower, he says, goes forth to sow, broadcasting seed everywhere, so that it lands on all kinds of ground. Most of the seeds never bear fruit. Some sprout quickly (in the equivalent of gardens of Adonis?) only to be scorched by the sun or overcome by weeds. Others sprout but get eaten by birds or trampled by travelers. Only a rare few land on receptive soil, take root, and bring forth fruit abundantly, variously yielding a hundredfold, sixtyfold, or thirtyfold. In a mighty display of self-reflexive dissemination, Jesus concludes, Those who have ears to hear, let them hear!

The parable of the sower is a parable about parables. Like the *Phaedrus*, but on a far more concentrated scale, the parable enacts its point in the form of its saying, performing its own *modus operandi*. The diverse audience members, like the varieties of soils, who hear the parable as told by the seashore are left to make of it what they will. It is a parable about the diversity of audience interpretations in settings that lack direct interaction. It examines the results when sender and receiver, sower and eventual harvest, are loosely coupled. In contrast to the *Phaedrus*,

which at key points is nervous about the folly of scattered seeds and the dangers of promiscuous couplings, the parable of the sower celebrates broadcasting as an equitable mode of communication that leaves the harvest of meaning to the will and capacity of the recipient. The hearer must complete the trajectory begun with the first casting. Though much is thrown, little is caught. And the failure of germination is not necessarily something to lament. Like the second half of the *Phaedrus*, the parable of the sower sorts types of souls (soils) in public address (though not with any programmatic purpose).

The parable of the sower, again, exemplifies the operation of all parables; it is a kind of metaparable. Parables are marked by uniformity in transmission and diversity in reception. Even "parable," from the Greek *paraballein* (meaning "to cast beyond, to place side by side"), suggests casting seeds onto soils or words onto souls. The Greek term *parabolē* can also mean a comparison or an enigma; it is closely related to "problem," both words suggesting something that calls for interpretation.³⁵ The meaning of the parable is quite literally the audience's problem. In other words, when the distance between speaker and listener is great, the audience bears the interpretive burden. Those who have ears to hear, let them hear! It becomes the hearer's responsibility to close the loop without the aid of the speaker. The point of such "indirect communication," said Kierkegaard, "lies in making the recipient self-active."³⁶ Or as Stuart Hall writes of television, the moments of encoding and decoding (production and consumption, roughly) are relatively autonomous, allowing audiences to find meanings wildly divergent from those intended by the producers.³⁷ But this gap between encoding and decoding, I suggest, may well be the mark of all forms of communication. It often takes a new medium and its accompanying disruptions to reveal the gaps that were already implicitly there.

The Gospels have it that the actual audience of this parable was largely mystified, being perhaps stony soil. Later the disciples (and by implication the readers of the Gospel narrative) get the inside scoop in a private audience with Jesus: the sower is not just a mad farmer but is one who spreads "the word of the kingdom." The strategy of speaking in parables turns out to be a cloaking device, a means to keep people

35. In the Septuagint, *parabolē* translates the Hebrew *mashal*, which means both a genre of Judaic teaching (an illustrative anecdote) and something puzzling or astonishing; see, e.g., Deut. 28:37.

36. Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (1848; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 125.

37. Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" (1974), in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979*, ed. Stuart Hall et al. (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 129.

from understanding the doctrine.³⁸ The signal was open to all, but only some perceived the sign. For Socrates the virtue of the living, spoken word is that it is always accompanied with directions for use offered by a guiding father or teacher. In contrast, the sower sends messages whose interpretive cues are hidden or missing, to be provided by those who have ears to hear. The sower engages in a purely one-way act: no cultivation of the fledgling plants occurs, no give-and-take, no instruction as to intended meaning.

Plato's version of Socrates privileges a private and esoteric mode of communication. In the intimate setting of dialectic the receiver is carefully selected by the speaker in advance and carefully brought to understand. Socrates of course will debate all comers in the public spaces of Athens, but he refuses to scatter his doctrinal seeds except for amusement; more to the point, only an elite few were admitted to Plato's academy. Jesus, in contrast, performs a radically public, exoteric mode of dispersing meanings—even though the hearers often fail to catch the hint—in which the audience sorts out the significance for itself (save on those occasions when he decloaks parables for his inner circle). The synoptic Gospels repeatedly undercut reciprocal and hermetic relations in favor of relations that are asymmetrical and public. Though the dream of mutuality has an intense hold on the ways we imagine communication from Plato on, several elements in the Christian tradition offer dissemination as a mode of communicative conduct equal or superior in excellence to dialogue.

The suspension of reciprocity is a point rigorously pursued in some other parables in the synoptic Gospels (there are no parables in the Gospel of John). In Matthew's parable of the laborers, for instance, some workers are hired early in the day to toil all day in the sun for one denarius, a standard day's pay. Others are later hired to work part of the day, and others work only the final hour, but all receive the same payment—one denarius.³⁹ When those who labored all day complain about the injustice of compensation, the master reminds them that they got what they had contracted for, so what business was it of theirs that he paid others the same amount for less work? This parable portrays a uniform response to a diverse event; the parable of the sower portrays diverse responses to a uniform event. In each case the dispenser of the goods (seeds or payment) is invariant and explicitly insensitive to individual differences—much like Socrates' description of the written word,

38. Mark 4:11–12; cf. Luke 8:10.

39. Matt. 20:1–16.

which just keeps signaling the same thing regardless of what inquiry is made of it. There is no proportional adjustment. The impersonality of writing can thus in some cases model just treatment of one's fellows. Justice, in some cases, means treating people by the book. There is something both democratic and frightening about such apparent indifference to merit.

The suspension of fair exchange not only does apparent violence to individual differences but can also occur in the name of care for the individual. In all three parables in Luke 15 about lost objects (the lost coin, sheep, and son), the cycle of *quid pro quo* is derailed. Each parable is a meditation on the paradox that in love the particular is esteemed more highly than the universal.⁴⁰ The first two pair female and male protagonists. A woman, who has lost one of ten coins, sweeps the house till she finds it and then celebrates with her friends. Similarly, a shepherd leaves his flock of ninety and nine to hunt for a lost sheep and also rejoices when he finds it. These are homely tales of ordinary human behavior, but the insight consists in the way everyday action is moved by something more or less than the rationality and reciprocity of exchange. What cost-benefit analysis would predict that someone would take greater joy in one coin than in nine? What business strategy would have a shepherd abandon ninety-nine sheep for one? The passions operate according to strange arithmetic.

It is no less strange for a father to rejoice in his errant son and to ignore the dutiful one, as occurs in the parable of the prodigal son. The forgiving father showers gifts on the returning wastrel—a ring, a robe, sandals, a party and fatted calf, and an embrace. Though the prodigal son plans to confess his wrongs to his father and offer to work only as a servant, he never has a chance. He is interrupted before he can begin by a father who is deaf to all explanations. By the standards of reciprocity and the norm of attentive listening the father's refusal to listen is wrong, just as Socrates reproaches the written word for refusing to engage in dialogue or as the workers reproach the master for insensitivity to the varying amounts of work done by individual laborers. But the father's deafness cannot be a failing in the world of the parable. The father is so taken with joy that nothing can stop the celebration. He is indifferent to whatever explanation his son may have. His forgiveness sweeps even the faintest notion of confessional dialogue out of the picture. If there is any proportionality in the parable, it is that the father is

40. Søren Kierkegaard [Johannes de Silentio], *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay (Lon-

as prodigal in his gifts as his younger son was in his sins. The welcome home celebration is an act of sheer expenditure, not of reciprocity.

Of course the older brother, whom the father fails even to inform about the party and who overhears the music and reveling, is outraged at the unfairness of such a welcome. He, who has slaved faithfully for years in his father's service, never once received such treatment. His is the cry of reciprocity: his rationality is based on merit and fair pay, not on extravagance. "But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!"⁴¹ This is the eternal complaint of economics against love. Though the older brother is quite a different figure from Lysias, both are worried about the mania that overtakes those who love. According to Luke 15, part of what it means to be a father, shepherd, or householder is to know when to go beyond rationality, reciprocity, or fairness—to know, in short, when love triumphs over justice. As with the *Phaedrus*, the frenzy of love has its place.

These are messy doctrines, and doctrines about messes. Socrates disdains waste (specifically, wasted *spermata*); Jesus celebrates it. The practice of the sower is wasteful. He lets the seeds fall where they may, not knowing in advance who will be receptive ground, leaving the crucial matter of choice and interpretation to the hearer, not the master. The prodigal is the wasteful son, though the tale is about an apparently wasteful father as well. In a larger sense, the whole narrative of redemption of the Christian Gospels centers on a wasteful act. The son of God dies for every living creature, most of whom will not accept, appreciate, or even know of the sacrifice. As a means of spreading seeds widely, dissemination is excellent, but it is not an efficient means of securing a good harvest. Indeed, godlike love—known as *agapē* in the New Testament—is often figured as broadcasting. "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you . . . that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."⁴² In this well-known passage from the Sermon on the Mount Jesus invites his hearers to transcend the intense but limited affections of family and friends for a love as indiscriminate as rainfall, one that embraces all humanity alike, including one's enemies. The Epistle of Peter likewise proclaims that God is "no respecter of persons." A more recent translation reads, "God has no favorites," but more literally, it means that God does not take people

41. Luke 15:30 RSV. Note the elder brother's renunciation of kinship: "this son of yours."

42. Matt. 5:44–45 KJV.

by their faces.⁴³ Love is supposed to be universal and indifferent to personalities. Scattering and impersonality can be good things. *Agapē*—or Christian love—is supposed to be mass communicated.⁴⁴

Plato's celebration of reciprocity marks out one recurring option in our deliberations about the justice of varying modes of communication. But the celebration of dialogue also risks missing the defects in the notion of reciprocity. One-way communication is not necessarily bad. Reciprocity can be violent as well as fair. War and vengeance obey a logic of strict reciprocity as much as do conversation and trade. Justice demands an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Its underlying logic says, one turn deserves another. This crime, we say, warrants that punishment; this commodity, that price. If nothing but reciprocity governed social relations, life would be a monotonous round of quid pro quo. Social life would be a cycle of payment, rather than of gifts. Without reciprocity life would be grossly unfair. With only reciprocity, it would be desolate. If no question could be left unanswered and every question was posed with the demand for a response, what boredom and tyranny would result. A just community rests at once on the rationality of tit for tat and on its suspension. Reciprocity, crucial as it is, needs other principles: hospitality, gift giving, forgiveness, and love. To live among others is necessarily to incur obligations; to be mortal is to be incapable of paying them all back.

Even the Golden Rule is not about returning favors, but about the radical otherness of selves. George Bernard Shaw tried to undermine the Golden Rule: "Do not do unto others as you would that they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same."⁴⁵ Shaw's mischievous variant still captures a key part of the maxim. Especially if paired with the injunction to turn the other cheek, the point of the Golden Rule is to treat the other as a self. The command is not to react to the other's provocation, but to treat people invariantly whatever their deeds and deservingness. Whether kissed or slapped, one is supposed to remain the same way, like Socrates' written word, as invariant as a sundial. This is the dead end of quid pro quo. This doctrine has a superficial resemblance to Stoicism's ethic of unresponsiveness, but there is no Stoic *apatheia* or tranquillity in the Golden Rule. Instead there is active care or, to

43. Acts 10:34; cf. Rom. 2:11, Eph. 6:9. The word is *prosōpolēmtēs*. Cf. Lev. 19:15.

44. A 1920s Louisville church, impressed by radio, posted a sign, God Is Always Broadcasting. Erik Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States to 1933* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 104.

45. George Bernard Shaw, "Maxims for Revolutionists," from *The Revolutionist's Handbook*, in *Four Plays by Bernard Shaw* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1965), 483.

speak with Kierkegaard, anxiety. The Christian is supposed to be indifferent to both the consequences of action and the recipient's merit, but not to the other as an irreplaceable creature. The Stoic maintains equanimity via psychic withdrawal; the Christian is called to impartial kindness combined with intense psychic engagement. The Gandhian ethic of passive resistance likewise teaches abstention from reaction. To say, then, that modes of communication that involve a one-way dispersion are necessarily flawed or domineering is to miss one of the most obvious facts of ethical experience: the majesty in many cases of nonresponsiveness.

Moreover, not only is blindness to the personal uniqueness of the other a feature of justice, love is blind as well. Justice involves not only impartial treatment but also a profound sensitivity to the individual case—giving each his or her due. Love likewise is not only individuated care but also undeviating constancy, “an ever-fixed mark.”⁴⁶ Just as the sower represents resources bestowed on all alike, the New Testament also speaks of a minutely particular sort of love that numbers the hairs on the head of the beloved (Matt. 10:29–31); in Adorno's words, “Love uncompromisingly betrays the general to the particular in which alone justice is done to the former.”⁴⁷ Love, like justice, is multidimensional, both general and personal, uniform and differentiated, diffuse and focused. There is an aspect of both justice and love that is invariant and uniform and an aspect that is personal and particular. Justice that is not loving is not just; love that is not just is not loving. Just so, dissemination without dialogue can become stray scatter, and dialogue without dissemination can be interminable tyranny. The motto of communication theory ought to be: Dialogue with the self, dissemination with the other. This is another way of stating the ethical maxim: Treat yourself like an other and the other like a self.

The value of one-way dissemination can be seen in the case of gift giving. As one of the *logia* of Jesus has it, it is more blessed to give than to receive.⁴⁸ The giving end has precedence over the receiving end. Not so curiously, this saying is also directly relevant to the economics of communication. It is more profitable to purvey advertising than to receive it; teachers are paid to teach, but students are rarely paid to learn; one exerts more cultural capital in directing a film than in viewing one. Messages are almost always worth more in dissemination than in recep-

46. William Shakespeare, sonnet 116, line 5.

47. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (1944–51; London: Verso, 1974), 164.

48. Acts 20:35.

tion. Giving can be a form of power, a way to impose obligations. We do not know what kinds of obligations the prodigal son incurred in the great homecoming feast, but that may have been the father's precise point: to impose the privileges and obligations of a son, not a servant. Indeed, a gift always hovers somewhere between unprovoked generosity (one-way) and the call for a later return gift (reciprocal).

As Pierre Bourdieu argues, exchange relations are governed by two dimensions: difference in the object and deferral in time.⁴⁹ If identical objects are exchanged but the transfer is deferred in time, we speak of a loan; if the objects are different and the exchange is simultaneous, it is a trade; and if identical objects are simultaneously exchanged, it is in effect a refusal. A gift must play strategically within the horizons of difference and deferral: it must be different enough in kind and asynchronous enough in time to seem a spontaneous act of goodwill rather than a payment. Bourdieu's great insight is to go beyond the unmasking that a structuralist analysis would perform—showing the participants in gift circuits as simply deceiving themselves about the reciprocity of their actions. In the temporal experience of practice as opposed to the spatial logic of structure, mystification is a possibility. The participant sees a series of unilateral acts, and the observer sees people deluding themselves about a circular exchange system. Misrecognition of the ultimate reciprocity of gift cycles, argues Bourdieu, is not an error but a socially productive strategy that sustains rich networks of mutual obligation. To give or to receive is to disavow obligations that everyone knows—but everyone denies—eventually will have to be met. All gifts come with strings attached, but acknowledgment of that fact is banned. Such failure to recognize allows suspension in the webs of credit and debt. Collective looking away from the mechanism of reciprocity allows something like a higher reciprocity to occur in the long haul. The gift enables a moral economy of loops, suspensions, and deferments, interactions that can be strung out over long expanses of time. It is certainly an economy, but one that plays by rules other than strict reciprocity.

If every social act were moved by indebtedness, we would be sluggish actors indeed. Love and prostitution, gift and payment would be indistinguishable. Lysias, with his call to do kindness only to those able to return it, would prevail.⁵⁰ Gifts can both arrest and accelerate the cyclical motion of tit for tat. "Overmuch eagerness to discharge one's obligations," as Bourdieu quotes La Rochefoucauld, "is a sign of ingratitude."

49. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). I am grateful to Michael K. Sáenz for advice on Bourdieu.

50. *Phaedrus*, 233e–234a.

The Latin proverb captures the converse, *Bis das si cito das*: You give twice if you give quickly. The giver is not supposed to keep score or respond directly at all. "Don't mention it," we say when thanked. The one-way character of the gift is not a deficiency but a strength. A system of rotating potlatches—celebratory feasts given publicly to the community—is as viable a way of organizing social life as is direct tit for tat. The horrors of broken dialogue can also be the blessings of just treatment. In some settings we would like to be treated as unique individuals (with family or friends); in others we want to be treated exactly the same as any other human (in court or the market). One's personal uniqueness can be a hindrance to justice and the basis of love. A life without individuated interaction (dialogue) would lack love; one without generalized access (dissemination) would lack justice.

Taking gifts as our analogy for communication shows that something more than reciprocity must prevail. Those strange and distended forms of dialogue that happen when people correspond over great distances of time or space are not just uncanny and bizarre, as many in the nineteenth century thought, recently confronting the lightning lines of the telegraph or the death-defying tracings of the photograph, but are the shapes in which we live and move among other people all the time. Clearly there is nothing ethically deficient about broadcasting as a one-way flow. Nor are the gaps between sender and receiver always chasms to be bridged; they are sometimes vistas to be appreciated or distances to be respected. The impossibility of connection, so lamented of late, may be a central and salutary feature of the human lot. The dream of communication has too little respect for personal inaccessibility. Impersonality can be a protective wall for the private heart. To "fix" the gaps with "better" communication might be to drain solidarity and love of all their juice.

It is tempting, given compelling studies of the contrast of eros and *agapē*, to overestimate the differences between Socrates and Jesus.⁵¹ Likewise, the Platonic and Christian traditions have known a long confluence. Both Socrates and Jesus want to transcend a narrow rationality—Socrates in the name of a higher mutuality, Jesus in the name of a higher scattering. Both see love as a kind of blessed madness. Platonic eros,

51. Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros: A Study of the Christian Idea of Love*, trans. A. G. Hebert, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1938–41); Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, trans. Montgomery Belgion, rev. ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1956).

after all, involves the soul intensely (it is the soul that sprouts wings), just as Christian love for the neighbor makes care for his or her body essential. The delirious exuberance of eros—sheer delight in the other without regard for compensation or return—is, as a long line of Christian mystics have seen, an instructive model for the unconditional love of God and neighbor, oblivious to any eventual payback.⁵² Likewise, Socrates rejects any notion of love, such as that espoused by Lysias, that shirks the welfare of the beloved. Though it is easy at first glance to say that eros involves sexual passion for the body as *agapē* involves spiritual care for the soul, closer inspection melts down the contrasts between the concepts.

There is, however, a final important difference. Socrates does not ultimately countenance love for the imperfect or the particular. At the end of his speech in the *Symposium*, Socrates argues that truly philosophical love moderates the “violent love of the one” by raising us on the ladder of love to an impersonal love of beauty in general. “Personal beauty is but a trifle.” Philosophy provides “the science of beauty everywhere.”⁵³ The mortal, singular other is ultimately an unworthy object of love, a stance that harbors a frightening chilliness for which Alcibiades bitterly reproaches him later in the *Symposium*.⁵⁴ Love that cannot be generalized or universalized is, for Socrates, not love at all. He could not agree with Kierkegaard that in love the particular is higher than the universal.

The parables invite an embrace of the frail stuff we are made of, not a flight from it. Platonic eros is attracted by beauty; love in the synoptic Gospels is attracted by need, even, in the case of the parable of the good Samaritan, by disgust or impurity, for the wounded man lying in the road is portrayed as looking like a corpse.⁵⁵ Socrates imagines the lover as being drawn by the most eternal and splendid portion of the beloved; the Gospels point to the spell cast on the lover by the most fragile and imperfect portion. The fundamental question is whether the epitome of love should be the love that occurs between equals who are present to each other in body and soul or the love that leaps across the chasms. If the former, then communication will be conceived of as a flight toward unity; if the latter, it will be conceived of as making do with the frag-

52. Catherine Osborne, *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), chap. 4.

53. Plato, *Symposium*, in *The Works of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Modern Library, 1956), 377–78.

54. Martha Craven Nussbaum, “Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher,” *New Republic* 205 (16–23 September 1991): 34–40.

55. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), treats the centrality of abjection to Christianity.

ments we find in ourselves and others. The Gospels know a kind of individuality strange to the classical Greeks: one marked by agony and duress.

The *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* figure love as the yearning for oneness; the synoptic Gospels as compassion for otherness. The one favors symmetry, circles, and reciprocity; the other, difference, ellipses, and suspension. Socrates exalts the soul's rapturous flight toward the heavens, tickled by beauty and trailing clouds of glory; the Gospels enjoin a descent into the pains and wounds of the other. "Socrates" wants to admit no impediments to the marriage of true minds; the parables teach that the impediments are precisely what give us reason to love. Broadly speaking, Christianity calls for a love based not in comradeship (as in Aristotle's notion of *philia*), the desire for beauty (*eros*), or the "natural" ties of the clan or city, but in the recognition of the kinship of all of God's creatures. Socrates' idea of love includes the "type of soul" of the beloved or of the audience of speeches but has little notion of the uniqueness of each soul in itself. The beloved becomes a substitute for the far vaster ocean of celestial beauty. The open casting of the sower results in the most individualized and idiosyncratic harvests possible, each recipient hearing as he or she will. Platonic *eros* passes through the particular to arrive at the general; Christian *agapē* passes through the general to arrive at the particular. Does love arise from the transcendence of the flesh or from its touch? Should we think of communication as perfect contact or as patience amid the imperfections? The contrast of dialogue and dissemination boils down to the mercy we can muster for human folly.

In sum, though reciprocity is a moral ideal, it is an insufficient one. The Christian doctrine of communication is a doctrine of broadcasting, of single turns, expended without the expectation that one good turn deserves another. Love is rare that occurs within a relationship of perfect equality. Parents do not love their children because their children reciprocate equivalently. The Gospels celebrate gifts given without care for reimbursement and depict *agapē* as occurring in relationships of impossible recompense. The Samaritan and the wounded man, Christ and the leper, God and humanity—the members of each pair are radically asymmetrical. The injunction in the Sermon on the Mount to give alms in secret aims to keep good works from becoming a public opinion racket. One is not supposed to anticipate the response, only to act. Take no thought, God loves a cheerful giver: such maxims are meant to postpone deliberation on consequences indefinitely and to keep exchange logic at bay. Caring for animals, children, or the planet, for example,

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does not depend on the capacity to communicate on an even footing. Infants, though quite incapable of direct communication, are invariably radiant to their parents and others; the avidity with which they receive affection helps account for their remarkable magnetism.

There is, in sum, no indignity or paradox in one-way communication. The marriage of true minds via dialogue is not the only option; in fact, lofty expectations about communication may blind us to the more subtle splendors of dissemination or suspended dialogue. Dialogue still reigns supreme in the imagination of many as to what good communication might be, but dissemination presents a saner choice for our fundamental term. Dissemination is far friendlier to the weirdly diverse practices we signifying animals engage in and to our bumbling attempts to meet others with some fairness and kindness. Open scatter is more fundamental than coupled sharing; it is the stuff from which, on rare, splendid occasions, dialogue may arise. Dissemination is not wreckage; it is our lot.