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"TENDERNESS FOR THE FINITE": REFLECTIONS ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF JOSEP FERRATER MORA

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We begin our conversation with Ferrater not by surveying the long list of his publications, but with a story because it is illustrative of one of his major philosophical concerns: the question of meaning and reality.[1] This question arises because man is dependent and needy, his capacity to know does not embrace the knowable, and this gap between our capacity to know and what can be known is vast and the more and more we attempt to master the knowable, our ability to do so becomes ever more remote. Only in the renunciation of the attempt to master knowledge can we find refuge from that agonizing fact that we are not the master of facts, but we can be, and must be, the source of meaning. We have the need to project purpose, to recognize the fact that we cannot only comprehend sensible reality, but we can think ideas, we can not only be determined by and in empirical reality; we can grasp our freedom through metaphysical ideas; we belong not only to the world of cognition, but equally to the realm of ideas. We are beings who can comprehend the fact that reality depends upon how we think it, although we can assume that it is not antagonistic to thinking, we can also assume that it does not take its meaning solely from our projections of purpose. We are, therefore, continuously changing and modifying our interpretations and our va-

[1] For a recent bibliography see: Reine Guy, "La Théorie du sens chez José Ferrater Mora", in *Philosophes ibériques et ibéro-américains en exil*, Toulouse, 1977, 115-16. Two additional works should be mentioned: *De la materia a la razón*, Madrid, 1979; *Ética aplicada: Del aborto a la violencia*, Madrid, 1981. This last volume was written with Priscilla Cohn.

lues; the world is continuously yielding new perceptions and possibilities; we face ever new and different revelations in the smallest as well as in the most extensive reality. We confront reality, think differently of it when distanced from it; closeness causes it to escape because we lose a sense of its dimension and significance. Space and time are conditions, in which and through which, meaning comes forth or fades away; they are perspectives, in which and through which, being is transformed into meaning.

Ferrater is not hesitant to admit that men of literature, at times, are more perceptive of philosophical questions than are philosophers. *Being and meaning, el ser y el sentido*, are contrasts that reveal apparent conflicting realities. The greater the being, the less the meaning; the greater the meaning, the less the being. But theoretical statements seem to have less impact than the telling of a story, "El hechizado" ("The Bewitched") of Francisco Ayala.[2] The Indian González Labo tells of his long journey to the court of Charles II, where he envisioned that he would see the center of world power, the heart of that vast Spanish empire that encircled the globe. His journey took him through the riches of a world filled with goods, events, and anxieties. As he aproached the end of his adventure, he was even more fascinated by the multiplicity of rooms and antechambers; it was as if he were at the navel of the universe, the proper place for "la Realidad". In the presence of "Su Majestad", he was even more startled by the luxuriant splendor of the hall in which He was seated. Suddenly an incongruence became apparent: the rich clothing of His Majesty stank of the odor of urine. Yet, it had its reason. Finally a deeper truth was revealed, and this he told at the end of his story with a few words. Seeing an unknown person at the door, the little dog was startled and His Majesty was disturbed, but then he saw the head of his dwarf and he was quieted. Doña Antoñita approached Him.

[2] *El Ser y el sentido*, Madrid, 1967, 292-93.

His Majesty gave his hand to kiss, but a monkey jumped upon it and played around him, demanding his attention and wanting to be petted. I then understood and left in silence.

The story tells much of the difference between being and meaning. The being of the king was identical to his power, which extended throughout the world, but the richness and splendor of his outward form corresponded little to the smell of urine that radiated from his body. His dwarf, his little dog, his monkey occupied his time and the concern of this mighty and powerful king. One could only withdraw in respectful silence. How vast the contrast between being and meaning, between the magnificence and splendor of the king as symbol of world power and the poverty of the reality displayed in the dwarf-jester, the monkey, and the dog. Here being overwhelms meaning, reduces it to silence; it reduces man to withdrawal and inactivity.

This problem can be approached from another perspective. Franz Kafka created a world in parables and paradoxes. Only in these do we comprehend the relationship between meaning and being, a relationship revealed only in parable or in paradox. In "An Imperial Message" Kafka relates a parable: the Emperor sends a message to a humble servant, far from the palace, and to this servant alone. He whispers the message in the ear of his servant, who must repeat it to the Emperor, who is dying. The messenger begins his journey bearing the sign of the Emperor, but the palace is so vast, the multitudes so great, that he only dreams of reaching the open fields and how he would run if he could only escape the palace and its infinite rooms and crowds, but the task is hopeless. "Nobody could fight his way through here, least of all one with a message from a dead man. But you sit at your window when evening falls and dream it to yourself."[3]

[3] *Parables and Paradoxes*, New York, 1972, 14-15.

This parable tells another story. Here we are confronted with meaning which cannot penetrate being, for which being has no capacity of receptivity, a being that remains resistant, that can be penetrated only in dreams but refuses, in its mass and impenetrability, the possibility of a message which would set aside its impenetrability and autonomy. The source of meaning is dying, the messenger has a hopeless task, the message from a dying man can find no response in a world of being, in a world where meaning has died and where it survives only in remembrances and dreams. Man is crushed in being; he either dreams or he leaves in silence. But this can become a parable and in reality gain the world; but again there is a loss, for parable has become reality and you have lost. Kafka outlines this paradox:

> If you only followed the parables you yourselves would become parables and with that rid of all your daily cares. Another said: I bet that is also a parable. The first said: You have won. The second said: But, unfortunately, only in parable. The first said: No, in reality: in parable you have lost.[4]

We win in reality, in parable we always lose. Parable is the perennial conflict between being and meaning, deciding nothing but opening everything. To have victories we remain in reality, to think in parables we remain with paradoxes open to the changing, the possible, and the probable. The parable is freedom, the overcoming of fixity, reality emerges in the creativity of the imagination, in the negation of being, in the refusal and denial of every given and determined object to perpetuate its fixity and become demonic, destructive of all forms of life. The parable is the source of incongruity, that incongruity of experience in which "Nothingness is a permanent possibility of the real",[5] a possibility which

[4] *Ibid.*, 11.
[5] *El Ser y el sentido*, 292.

makes it impossible to grasp experience as a totality, but to comprehend it as always emerging and developing. The parable is a source of ongoing interpretation, it refuses the oppressive character of being which reduces to silence the man who stands before it. We are reminded of another short parable of Kafka which shows another aspect of Ferrater's tenderness for the finite, a tenderness which sees in finitude infinite possibility and development, a multiplicity and multiformity which defies, yet challenges the imagination, denies explanation but is open to an ever-widening comprehension, the source of an ever-renewed thinking.

Kafka relates a parable, "Before the Law":

> Before the Law stands a doorkeeper on guard. To this doorkeeper comes a man from the country who begs for admittance to the Law. But the doorkeeper says that he cannot admit the man at the moment. The man, on reflection, asks if he will be allowed then, to enter later. "It is possible" answers the doorkeeper.[6]

The man grows older, the guard grows more gruesome and forbidding. Older and older the man grows, his life becomes identified with the doorkeeper. Finally, weak, stiff, and dying, he asks, "How does it come about then, that in all these years no one has come seeking admittance but me?" The doorkeeper replies, "No one but you could gain admittance through this door, since this door was intended only for you. I am now going to shut it."[7] The Law can suffocate, overwhelm, and destroy; there are realities which cannot be approached and whose nearness overpowers us, reduces us to silence and finally to death. The divinity burns the mouth of the prophet; man cannot see God face to face; God appears in a whirlwind; we can only see his back, attempts one after another to point out the awesome power of being which can suppress, dimin-

[6] *Parables*, 61-65.
[7] *Ibid.*, 65.

ish, and finally end our capacity to think, to give meaning, to redeem our place in the universe. Whatever comes forth in such gigantic force eliminates that dialogue of being and meaning, reducing either one to the other or the latter to the former. It is this reduction which brings the human experience to the respectful silence of nonbeing, to the death of being before the all-encompassing; this experience destroys that inexhaustible and enchanting quality of incertitude and precariousness which is embraced and emerges in finitude, the rejection of all glib theoretical and abstract generalizations and conceptualizations that stifle its uniqueness.

Ferrater tells us that

> the meaning of an expression is not the being of the expression; the meaning of life is not the being of life; the meaning of an act is not the being of this act and so on.[8]

What Ferrater has grasped more deeply than other philosophers of our age is the parabolic and paradoxical nature of experience. He has that tenderness for the never-ending possibilities that lie in reality, the feeling for its mobility, its capacity to be transformed and transfigured, to be comprehended as symbol and metaphor, and to be grasped as the continuous flow of meaning which is ever emerging from symbol, from parable, and from paradox. Kafka tells of a man who orders his horse from the stable:

> The servant did not understand me. I myself went to the stable, saddled my horse and mounted. In the distance I heard a bugle call, I asked him what it meant. He knew nothing and heard nothing. At the gate he stopped me asking: "Where are you riding to, master?" "I don't know," I said, "only away from here, away from here. Always away from here, only by doing so can I reach my destination." "Yes."

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[8] *El Ser y el sentido*, 271.

I answered, "Didn't I say so? Away-From-Here, that is my destination." "You have no provisions with you" he said. "I need none," I said, "the journey is so long that I must die of hunger if I don't get anything on the way. No provisions can save me. For it is, unfortunately, a truly immense journey."[9]

The journey of Ferrater has been an intimate and long one through the labyrinth of the human experience, approached from a multitude of perspectives and designs, the richness of meanings reflecting the grandeur of man's imaginative capacities to overcome the limits of his knowledge, to realize in himself that mastery of the realm of meaning which is the ground of that finite-infinite dialectic which is characteristic of our refusal to be silenced in being, demanding that right of transcendence which challenges every fixity which attempts to determine and control empirical reality.

At the end of a novel by the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier there is a scene characteristic of Ferrater's thought:

At the end of his life Ti Noel understood something fundamental: that man never knows for whom he suffers and hopes. He suffers and works for people whom he will never know, and in turn they will suffer, hope and work for others who neither will be happy, since man desires a happiness beyond that which is given him. But man's greatness is to wish to better what is, by imposing upon himself tasks. In the heavenly kingdom there is no greatness, no conquest because there everything is fixed hierarchy, the clear unknown, existing endlessly, impossibility of sacrifice, only tranquility and pleasure. Yet, weighed down with pains and tasks, beautiful in his misery, capable of loving within his torments, man alone can find his greatness, his highest realm in the kingdom of this world.[10]

Meaning, Ferrater tells us, "is not in reality because it is the true reality in one of its fundamental dispositions; it is the ontolo-

[9] *Parables*, 189.

[10] *De la materia a la razón*, 188-89.

gical disposition of realities". Meaning is a fact which is not deduced from anything but itself; it is a primordial given. Meaning is, because man can realize it, the expression of that natural dialectic of being and meaning, in and through which, man emerges as man. Yet this emerging reveals also the possibility of hiding, of withdrawal, of falling back into nonbeing, into silence. Man stands between meaning and being, between silence and discourse, between anonymity and action. He is like the man who is thirsty and stands before a spring from which he is cut off only by a clump of bushes.

> But he is divided against himself: one part overlooks the whole, sees that he is standing here and that the spring is just beside him; but another part notices nothing, has at most a divination that the first part sees all. But as he notices nothing he cannot drink.[11]

If we believe that all genuine human activity results in significant action, in the capacity to transform and transfigure, to create in parable, symbol, and metaphor, then we realize that meaning is not only the tool of man, but the reality in which man discovers himself. "El sentido produce el sentido" sounds like a formula with which we can now easily define Ferrater's thought, but the expression is more because it is not a definition, nor is it an explanation; it is a thought, an embracing comprehension which continuously yields meaning; it has symbolic reality. But, like the parable of the spring, there is a seeing and a nonseeing, a desire to comprehend and the refusal to comprehend. Ferrater's philosophy is a journey through the infinite variety of the human experience; it is parabolic and paradoxical only because experience does not clearly and precisely yield itself to our cognition and its orga-

[11] *Parables*, 185.

nizing conceptualizations. It is an experience which we are forced to think and structure with the imagination, knowing that every moment of thought is only a preparation for a new and different moment; knowing that identity and nonidentity are joined in identity opens vast possibilities for the imagination and for thinking, which must reflect upon this imagination in its infinite possibilities. This is neither an esoteric nor an exoteric perspective; philosophy is the expression of freedom in which man discovers what it is to be human. This discovery he makes in his social, political, and theoretical speculations, actions, and relationships; he discovers in language, already-formulated structures which express meanings and in which he unveils the structured meaning of reality. The reality, which he believes he structures with language, is already a reality structured with meaning which is realized and embodied in the language that he develops and employs to express meaning. Language actualizes the *descriptibilidad* of the world analogously to how knowledge actualizes its *cognoscibilidad*.[12] Ferrater touches the most profound aspect of the human experience, realized in that intimate and natural dialectic of subject and object, of structure and structured, of finite and infinite; it is the experience that emerges from negation, i.e., from freedom.

The words of Ferrater awaken in us thoughts which embrace a philosophy of experience justifying neither subject nor object, but revealing an all-encompassing reality in which they are embraced like identity and nonidentity in thought and action. The all-encompassing is a primordial reality which is ever emerging in that intercourse of subject and object transcending both but realized in them. Gaston Bachelard spoke of the same phenomenon when he said:

[12] *El Ser y el sentido*, 275.

...it must be admitted that fright does not come from the object ... fright is born and reborn ceaselessly in the subject, within the reader's soul. The narrator has not confronted his reader with a frightening situation, rather, he has put him in a fright situation. He has stirred the fundamental dynamic imagination ... in short, the imagination is sufficiently vivid in the subject to impose its visions, its terrors, its sorrows. ... The dynamic imagination is a primary reality.[13]

The soul of man has already in it all that it is induced to bring forth; it is not a mere reaction to the object but a world of dreams, frights, transfigurations, and transformations preceding the realities which awaken and bring them forth from their primordial ground. Experience remains the consequence of the emerging forms incited in the soul by external reality.

If Ferrater teaches us something about the labyrinth of the human experience, it is that there is always something more that can be said; experience is parabolic, open to meanings; it refuses definition; it awakes in thought; there is in man the need to ask about purpose; man is, in and through the fact of meaning, teleological, i.e., he has an inherent desire to organize his world in terms of an end or purpose. Kafka illustrates this with a short parable:

It was very early in the morning, the streets clean and deserted. I was on my way to the station. As I compared the tower clock with my watch I realized it was much later than I had thought and that I had to hurry; the shock of this discovery made me feel uncertain of the way, I wasn't very well acquainted with the town as yet; fortunately, there was a policeman at hand, I ran to him and breathlessly asked him the way. He smiled and said: "You are asking me the way?" "Yes," I said, "since I cannot find it myself." "Give it up! Give it up!" said he, and turned with a sudden jerk, like someone who wants to be alone with his laughter.[14]

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[13] *On Poetic Imagination and Reverie*, Indianapolis, 1971, 14-15.

[14] *The Complete Stories*, New York, 1972, 456.

The parable reminds us that the "way" is not prescribed; it is the task which befalls each of us to discover both in ourselves and in external experience. The ways are there; they have always been there, visible or not, knowable or unknown, comprehensible or incomprehensible; the ways are not imposed, their reality depends upon our capacity to bring them forth.

> Many people prowl about Mount Sinai. Their speech is blurred, either they are garrulous or they shout or they are taciturn. But none of them comes straight down a broad, newly made, smooth road that does its part in making one's strides long and swifter.[15]

The visible and the invisible, the comprehensible and the incomprehensible, that dialectic of subject and object which bears within itself its other, not as an opposition or a contradiction, but as a moment of the self, reflecting upon the objectivity of subjectivity and the subjectivity of objectivity, it is this dialectic which mirrors the meaning which is characteristic of reality, not a meaning which we inject into it, but a meaning which is its being and which our reflection reveals.

Man, Ferrater tells us, is in the world "like a physicist in his science, a revolutionary in his cause, a lover in is love".[16] Man must find his place in the world, a world that is growing, whose vast dimensions are as yet only glimpsed at, whose place in it man is forever discovering and rediscovering. This revolutionary nature of man is to be seen primarily in his imaginative powers, which we comprehend as an inner "fire" with the power to transform and transfigure all that surrounds it. It is a power difficult to control and to limit, for in man and in mankind it exhibits never-ending forms and structures. "Imagination", Bachelard tell us,

[15] *Parables*, 45.

[16] *El Ser y el sentido*, 283.

is the true source of psychic production. Psychically, we are created by our reverie — created and limited by our reverie — for it is the reverie which delineates the furthest limits of our mind. Imagination works at the summit of the mind like a flame, and it is to the region of the metaphor of metaphor ... that we must look for the secret of the mutuant forces ... This is the very problem of creative life: how to have a future while not forgetting the past; how to ensure that passion be made luminous without being cooled?[17]

Imagination is the "fire" which is both subject and object, which is like the lover whose love is the source of the love with which the beloved loves the love with which it is loved, and the lover loves and transfigures the love of the beloved. The power to integrate subject and object is in perpetual evolution and development; it reveals that infinite force of imaginative thinking which in every moment of realization rises to transcendence, goes from particularity to universality and from finitude to infinitude. Ferrater has made it possible for us to grasp experience in its vital intensity and intimacy because he has made every moment of its realization the source of his interest.

Ferrater's thought is motivated by a refusal and rejection of all absolutisms. If we mean by absolutism that demonic fixity, the attempt to determine a value or a being so as to allow it to be totality, then we realize that absolutism is the denial of that dialectic of freedom which affirms that negation is the ground of all reality; whatever is can be negated, the negation of negation is the freedom, in which and through which, man moves from potentiality to actuality, endeavors to find meaning, makes action possible, and gives to life that self-criticism which makes it possible to move from immediacy to mediacy and to reason. Ferrater believes that life stands between the poles of being and meaning, but we may think that being and meaning are dialectical moments of the same

[17] *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, Boston, 1964, 110-11.

reality, the reality which emerges in the freedom rooted in negation. There is an "interest of reason" which Kant says is

> impelled by tendency of its nature to go out beyond the field of its empirical employment and to venture in a pure employment, by means of ideas alone, to the utmost limits of all knowledge, and not to be satisfied save through the completion of its course in a self-subsistent systematic whole.[18]

Reason understands itself to be "interested", to be practical. What this means for man is that his life is not limited to the realm of phenomena, to that of empirical reality, to the organization and definition of the given; he is not encompassed in a realm of facts which reduces him to knowledge; he has the capacity to think, to act, to judge, which he must do because the realm of facts is always incomplete and must be interpreted and given purpose. It is not what something *is* that is important, but what something can and ought to be; the question is always the significance or meaning of the *is*, its purpose as action and judgment. Meaning leads to action, the purpose of man in the world is to do, to change reality, to transfigure and transform, to create through the imagination a world that is yet to be, but can be and should be. What is essential to man is not knowledge, but action, the judgment in terms of action, the moral judgment which is conscious of itself as judgment, not arbitrariness and whim, but judgment for action in terms of moral responsibility. Meaning is possible because there is being, and being is comprehensible because there is meaning.

Ferrater tells us that his purpose has been the study of "reality", i.e., the world that is, assuming that there is no reality that transcends this reality, that the reality that is, is the realization of reality, the realization of what is and what is not, but can be, i.e., it is the identity of identity and nonidentity. Thus, reality is the

[18] *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N.K. Smith. New York, 1950. B825.

ground of the reality that is, as well as the reality that is not. What becomes clear and should be clear is that being, the being of things, is comprehensible only if being is meaning and belongs to a reality that already has meaning, which precedes being "because fact and the given are only revealed to the one who questions them in the search for meaning".[19] A philosophy of meaning must assume that prior to being there is reality which is receptive to meaning, and from the perspective of this reality what is called being is meaning. When fact and the given are thought in terms of purpose and end, then we are no longer dealing with being, but with meaning, with that indissoluble bond of being and meaning. We therefore discover that only meaning has being, and when the verb *to be* is properly used with being it says meaning *is*. With a comprehension of this grounding of meaning in being and being in meaning we arrive at a philosophy of meaning "because what is, does not refuse to give its meaning to the one who seeks this meaning".[20] Similar to the parable and the paradox, the meaning is given when it is sought, when thinking is the search for meaning, when we are aware that meaning is and can and should be unveiled, discovered, and revealed. The philosophy of meaning responds to man's need to act and to judge, to know that the reality in which he lives and thinks is receptive to meaning because it is already meaningful, because what is can be denied, and from this negation arises the reasonable discourse of reality, the purpose of philosophy.

Ferrater asks us to investigate what is, but we are aware that what is leads to the possibility that we learn to no longer see what is not. Let us illustrate this with a parable from Kafka.

[19] E. Weil, *Problèmes kantiens*, Paris, 1970, 105.
[20] *Ibid.*, 106.

When I meet a pretty girl and beg her: "Be so good as to come with me" and she walks past without saying a word. This is what she means to say: "You are no duke with a famous name, no broad American with a Red Indian figure... So why, pray, should a pretty girl like myself go with you?"[21]

Yes, we can each go in our own directions, understanding and caring little for the other, believing that the meaning which we have conferred upon our lives is complete, but the other does the same with equal assurance of his completeness.

Between the poles of being and meaning lie the realm of experience, realms of maximum being and minimum meaning, realms of maximum meaning and minimum being, realms where we move from good to evil and those in which we move from evil to the good, realms where being and meaning intersect, realms of the understanding, in which and through which, the historical experience of man reveals the struggle for power, the force of deception, violence, and the diabolic. The philosopher learns from literature, politics, history, from fables, parables, and satire the nature of man and the experiences which emerge from it. Ferrater's thought sends the reader in all directions. La Fontaine, that wonderful poet of *Fables* and the *Contes et Nouvelles*, tells us a fable of the lamb and the wolf illustrating that perennial struggle with the doctrine of "might is right". He says:

> Might is right: the verdict goes to the strong
> To prove the point won't take me long
> A lamb was once drinking
> From a clear stream when a foraging wolf came slinking
> Out of the woods, drawn to that quarter of the countryside by hunger. How dare you muddy my drinking water! said the beast of prey in anger.
> You shall be punished for your insolence. Your majesty,

[21] *Complete Stories*, 383-84.

answered the lamb, I beg you not to be angry but to
think calmly about it. Here I am, relieving my throat
of dryness at least twenty yards downstream from your
Highness, and in consequence I cannot be in the least
guilty of sullying your royal drink. But you are,
said the pitiless beast.
Besides, I know you spoke ill of me last year. How could
I have done this? I wasn't even here, the lamb
replied. I'm still at the teat of my mother. If
it wasn't you it must have been your brother.
I haven't got one. Well, then, one of your sheep;
For you and your shepherds and damned dogs keep mak-
ing it harder and harder for me to eat. But now
Revenge is mine — and revenge is sweet!
Whereupon he dragged the lamb deep into the forest
and had his meal. There was no right of appeal.[22]

In the realm of the sensible, man is not free; he is determined like all phenomena by his historical situation, determined by time and space, determined by a myriad of conditions, relationships, and modes. Man's freedom belongs to his supraempirical reality, free in terms of the moral law and its immediacy and presence, free in terms of reason, the universal, free because he is the embodiment of the "fact of reason", which

has no need of deduction which would be inconceivable, given the fact that such a deduction supposes a law above the law. It *is* and since it *is*, man is free; there is only law for a free man.[23]

Experience stands not only between being and meaning, but between freedom, the supraempirical, and the empirical, between the

[22] "The Wolf and the Lamb", in *Selected Fables*, New York, 1979, 18-21.

[23] E. Weil, "Faudra-t-il de nouveau parler de moral? in *Savoir, faire, espérer: Les Limites de la raison*, Brussels, 1976, 276.

understanding and the "fact of reason", between the organization of the sensible and the need to know reason as the immediacy of freedom, to know that reality is meaning and that being is meaning because it already belongs to a reality that is meaningful. Every aspect of experience is meaningful because we can assume that freedom is, that every condition can be denied, that even though there is no correspondence between the demands of the moral law and the morality of the historical condition, we are, nevertheless, compelled by reason – if we have committed ourselves to reason, a commitment we do not necessarily have to make – to realize the moral in the historical.

Every aspect of human life, be it the historical, the literary, or the scientific, is rooted in the need to discover and unveil purpose. If we are capable of transforming or transfiguring experience into the parabolic or the paradoxical, translating it into the fable or the tale, or if we seek the meaningful in the speculative and the hypothetical, we are in search of purpose, given to the fact that we are not in control of the facts and need to speculate and think, that the experience which we encounter yields more to an imagination that can interrogate it, create metaphors and symbols, an imagination that is awakened by the world about it and is realized through it. The problem of meaning is correlated to the commitment to meaning, a commitment which we must assume because the assumption is a conscious and reasonable decision. We are even more aware of the problem of meaning in the realization that the course of historical events has little relationship to the expression of the moral law and the freedom and universality it establishes as fact. From this perspective we must come to terms with philosophical faith; it is in this faith in the moral law that we challenge the course of history, the violence, the struggle for power, and the diabolic knowledge which it manifests. This moral faith is the strength which the philosopher expresses in his search for univer-

sality, his refusal to accept the formulae of might is right or the *omnium bellum contra omnes*. This faith is in the reasonableness of reality, the fact that freedom *is* and that universality is the perspective from which and to which empirical reality is judged and acted upon. Whatever field of human endeavor we turn to, we find in the thinking scientist, historian, or man of literature that faith in meaning and purpose which makes the human endeavor significant for man.

George F. Kennan, ambassador, historian, thinker, has forced us to think and rethink our position in the world. We cite him not to line up behind his political views, but because his works create that communication among men which makes discourse, reasonable discourse, possible. In an article "Western Decadence and Soviet Moderation" he makes the following observations:

> Poor old West: succumbing feebly, day by day, to its own decadence, sliding into debility in the slime of its own self-indulgent permissiveness; its drugs, its crimes, its pornography, its pampering to youth, its addiction to bodily comforts, its rampant materialism and consumerism — and then trembling before the menace of the wicked Russians, all pictured as supermen, eight feet tall, their problems all essentially solved, with nothing to think about except how to bring damage and destruction to Western Europe. This persistent externalization of the sense of danger — this persistent exaggeration of the threat from without and blindness to the threat from within: this is the symptom of some deep failure to come to terms with reality — and with one's self.[24]

Whatever be said for Kennan's perspective, for his moral position demanding that we pay attention to the moral quality of our lives and the life of the nation, it is the moral problem which is the heart of his thinking, and although it may seem strange that this voice of puritanism resounds through the land, we must apprecia-

[24] *Decline of the West? George Kennan and His Critics*, Washington, D.C., Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1978, 8-9.

te the call which it utters, demanding that we look into ourselves and find justification for our struggle with Soviet power from a moral concern with the quality of our social and political lives. We are asked to consider what we are defending and why we should defend. Socrates walked through the marketplace and with irony asked men to face the purpose and values of their lives. Committed, as men devoted to the problem of meaning and values, men who wager their existence on moral discussions from a universal point of view, we cannot but take seriously the challenge which Kennan throws to us. Ferrater, in all his books, and we must mention his latest, *Applied Ethics: From Abortion to Violence,* has made it clear that ethical questions are the permanent concerns of men who are dedicated to a more humane world where not only the rights of man, but of animals and nature are respected and considered. Ethics, he tells us, do not and should not belong only to the philosophers. Agreeing with Aristotle, Ferrater believes it would not be prudent if it were so.

> Ethics can and must also be in the hands of the biologist, ethnologist, sociologist, anthropologist, economist, etc.; in fact, it can and must be in the hands of everyone because everyone has an interest in it. Everyone means the entire human species together with all other living beings. Nothing less.[25]

This last statement of Ferrater gives us insight into what we have called his tenderness for the finite, for all living beings; no longer are the animals excluded, no longer is nature put aside, but all life is precious and meaningful, and this is Ferrater's fundamental ethical conviction and faith. The education of man is rooted in the preciosity of life, in the commitment to the universality of the moral law and the freedom which it embodies, a freedom linked to the struggle for the rights of all living beings.

[25] *Ética aplicada*, 40.

From parable to paradox, to fable, to satire and critique, we have been sent in all directions by Ferrater's thinking about being and meaning. We have not attempted to repeat what he has to say; the reader can do that on his own. We have dialogued and discoursed with him; this is the true and genuine philosophical experience which the works of Ferrater make possible. He doesn't impose upon us; he requires that we listen to him and think for ourselves; in that he causes us to think, he has performed his philosophical task; that we think because of him is our obligation; that he has centered the ethical problem at the core of the philosophical concern, brings us into the genuine discourse of philosophy. Ferrater has identified philosophy with human action; he has made us aware of our responsibility for social and political life; he has called our attention to that deeper concern for all life, for the need to comprehend not only a thinking which conforms to existent values, but one which does not, and revolts from it, seeking to awaken new dimensions of moral reality which correspond to an ever-growing awareness that man and world are expanding, and this expansion must be correlated with a moral consciousness equal to its task.

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