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Hermeneutics and Loyalty

ROBERT S. CORRINGTON

The current obsession with language and with written texts has blunted the generic drive of hermeneutics and its more legitimate quest for a categorial structure that is truly responsive to the various dimensions of meaning manifest in the ongoing human process. More important, this artificial constriction of the scope of interpretation theory has made it increasingly difficult to develop a proper social and political horizon within which acts of interpretation can find legitimation and transparency. The deeper emancipatory forces of nature and history remain bereft of a proper location for their appearance in nondestructive social orders. As a consequence of this, hermeneutics is all too frequently allied to those forces that would foreclose the evolution of shared values and meanings. As a corrective to this self-imposed alienation, hermeneutics needs to find an emancipatory stance that will allow it to go beyond linguistic and textual artifacts toward the horizontal structures and powers of nature and worldhood. The concept of loyalty, as the fundamental access structure of the human process, will provide the means by and through which hermeneutics can reclaim its legacy.

While it is clear that meanings, whether expressed in signs or not, are to some degree a product of human manipulation, it should be equally clear that meanings are found, assimilated, and encountered, before their transformation by constitutive acts. To ignore the assimilative dimension of the human process is to privilege the much narrower and less powerful manipulative dimension. Further, it ignores the sovereignty of nature and its infinite semiotic and interpretive wealth. The human process receives its direction and measure from a nature that cannot be reduced to the "sum" of all actual and possible categorial projections. Meanings evolve, as do organisms, and both must pay heed to antecedent conditions that govern and locate all products and their subsequent forms of legitimation. If the class of meaning events is larger than the class of truths, then it follows

that validation emerges from the indefinitely ramified web of meanings made and meanings found. It does not follow that validation is a concept that functions outside of hermeneutics.

The individual interpreter thus lives within antecedent natural structures and forces that exert their own forms of compulsion. Gadamer's focus on the fusion of historical and temporal horizons, while not inappropriate, needs to be located within a more encompassing naturalism that provides access into the innumerable dimensions of the nature that makes it possible for history and temporality to prevail at all. By the same token, Heidegger's stress on the giving of language as the self-giving of Being needs to be gathered into the emancipatory forces of the worldhood that such language struggles to serve. These emancipatory forces drive toward hermeneutic and social transformation and cannot be inverted to serve rigid and self-justifying powers.

No interpreter can hope to fully prescind from the compulsive orders of nature and history. To interpret is to respond to felt lines of convergence within orders not of the self's own making. Cultural artifacts, whether linguistic or not, serve to present and preserve generic traits of prehuman and prehermeneutic orders. Of course, such artifacts also represent momentary or enduring expressions of personal and social manipulations of this natural material. Any isolated trait may participate in both human and prehuman configurations and thus convey greater interpretive value than a similar trait that is not so constituted. No meaningful act of interpretation can take place unless it fully participates in the orders of nature that empower it. The individual interpreter is always permeable to that which transcends meanings known or orders encountered. Analogous to the encompassing power of nature and history is the clearing provided to the individual by the structures of the community of interpretation. Such a community, no matter how fragmented its manifestation in time, lives as the origin and goal of all hermeneutic acts. The community is rooted in the vast evolutionary matrix of nature but is not restricted to the conditions of origin or empowerment. It lives between the antecedent realm of natural transaction and the hermeneutic kingdom in which all meanings will become known to finite interpreters. As such, the community of interpretation serves both origin and the deeper impulses of expectation that gather the traces of origin into the kingdom of hermeneutic transparency. The enabling condition for the finite interpreter is thus the community that lives as the sphere of transparency and eventual validation.

We have thus exhibited a generically incremental series moving from the least generic order of the individual interpreter to the more encompassing order of the community of interpretation, which in turn finds itself embedded in the innumerable orders of a nature that forever lies be-

yond the reach of all finite hermeneutic acts. The tensions between and among these orders are all integral to the evolution of shared meanings. Insofar as contemporary hermeneutic theory attempts to prescind from these tensions and flee to the illusory security of the alienated individual, it violates the very meaning structures that enable the self to have and endure meanings at all. Natural and communal orders govern and locate all personal transactions and, under the proper conditions, empower such transactions to overcome the forces of alienation that constrict personal meaning horizons.

The community of interpretation has traits that are distinct from those merely derived from the sum of all finite interpreters. These traits are deeply wedded to sign systems and meaning horizons that vastly eclipse the sum of all individual hermeneutic acts. Further, the community encompasses the horizontal plenitude of its members by providing the seed bed for all emergent horizons and their internal configurations. The power of origin, itself derived from the orders of nature, is gathered under the deeper power of social expectation that both supports and humbles all horizons. Origin without the governing power of expectation is demonic. Expectation without the antecedent gift of origin is willful and without embodiment.

The community is sustained by the loyal deeds of its interpreters who struggle against the opacity and reticence of natural and conventional sign systems. While any given sign system will have its own telos and movement toward totality, such a system will also contain innumerable traits that are recalcitrant to human analysis and articulation. The sheer hermeneutic and semiotic drift that characterizes the human process works against the counter movement of transparency and validation. Loyalty, as the constantly self-renewing attitude of radical openness, serves to rescue sign systems and meaning horizons from their own tendencies toward opacity. More important, loyalty is the fundamental social attitude that struggles toward the transformation of meanings into truths. In the words of Josiah Royce, "Truth seeking and loyalty are therefore essentially the same process of life merely viewed in different aspects."¹ Loyalty is social in that it seeks to reinforce and secure other genuine loyalties rather than to impose an alien and private cause onto the evolution of the community of interpreters. For Royce, loyalty to loyalty is more basic than mere loyalty to a cause. The principle of loyalty provides an existential grounding for the Kantian categorical imperative, which would ask us to transform private maxims into a truly universal law. Any given loyalty, insofar as it excludes other genuine loyalties, must surrender its idiosyncratic claims to the deeper social impulses of a transpersonal loyalty.

The community of interpreters provides a categorical clearing within which the individual interpreter can maximize the depth and scope of so-

cial communication. Hermeneutic acts are protected against premature closure by the loyal deeds that empower and guide each community toward the ideal of shared horizons and values. On a higher generic level, any given community of interpretation will be the locus of an indefinite number of other communities. The individual loyal interpreter has the social obligation to translate the horizontal values of each of these communities into some sort of reasonable and sharable perspective. No such higher order translation will be successful if it is not facilitated by democratic structures. Hermeneutics and radical democracy entail each other.

The relations between nature, communities, individuals, and sign systems are infinitely complex. Nature is the all-encompassing actuality within which history, social orders, and finite selves are included. The emancipatory power of loyal and democratic communities comes from a nature that is itself a hermeneutic process through and through. Nature exhibits emancipatory tendencies in the evolutionary processes that create room for greater organic complexity and a richer spectrum of response. Evolutionary success can be defined in terms of hermeneutic competence to derive leadings and meanings from situations fraught with tension and possible breakdown. Human interpretive communities intensify processes that are operative in other orders of nature. It does not follow from this that nature is constituted by mental acts or monads of proto-consciousness. The doctrine of panpsychism, defended by such thinkers as Peirce, Whitehead, and Hartshorne, privileges those traits constitutive of the human process and fails to understand how those precarious traits are embedded in vast and oft-times hostile natural forces.

Loyalty has previously been defined as an access structure that enables the human process to become permeable to other horizons of value and meaning. A few further words are in order concerning the inner logic of this access structure. As noted, loyalty is not fulfilled if it is seen as loyalty to a specific cause. Beyond such limited loyalty lies the content-free loyalty that is directed to the furtherance of the cause of loyalty per se. In denying that loyalty to loyalty has a positive and pregiven content, we are asserting that it lives as a mobile region of intelligibility within which possible allegiances can appear. Any such appearance must satisfy the stringent criterion that it become emancipated from antecedent and finite embodiments. A commitment is allowed to function insofar as it points beyond itself toward the ultimate hermeneutic kingdom in which all loyalties will become transparent to the origins and goals that sustain them. In the words of Royce, "And so, a cause is good, not only for me, but for mankind, in so far as it is essentially a *loyalty to loyalty*, that is, is an aid and a furtherance of loyalty in my fellows. It is an evil cause in so far as,

despite the loyalty that it arouses in me, it is destructive of loyalty in the world of my fellows."²

Evil causes reinforce the solipsistic tendencies of the isolated hermeneute who wishes to impose an insufficiently generic sign system onto the emergent horizontal structures of other selves. In the misplaced drive to become free from all origins, whether those of nature or of socially communicated perspectives, the solitary hermeneute removes himself or herself from those emancipatory structures that alone make transparency and democratic justice possible. It is not often noted that the quest for justice and true parity between and among selves is internally tied to the health and strength of those hermeneutic acts that refuse to privilege or condone the falsely autonomous self. Does this emphasis on communal justice impose its own form of control on the individual and thereby betray a dangerous paternalism? Put differently, is the principle of loyalty to loyalty simply a mask for the intolerance of difference? Can a genuine principle of radical alterity be combined with the emphasis on the evolution of shared perspectives and meanings? In what follows, I hope to show that genuine otherness is not threatened by the emancipatory structures of the community of interpreters.

Royce argued that the growth of individuality was only possible in the framework of social contrast in which the difference between the I and the not-I was clarified and deepened. The discovery of a personal center of will and action coincides with the awareness that other points of will limit the reach of the self. From this primal discovery unfolds the deeper hermeneutic understanding of the uniqueness and ultimate sovereignty of the other. The other, as a center of autonomous will and loyalty, helps in the very definition of the personal and social dimensions of my own finite self.

In allowing the other the freedom to live in and through specific loyalties, the realm of difference is preserved from the encroachment of an imperial transpersonal loyalty. At the core of the other self is a domain of mystery that cannot be penetrated by any hermeneutic act on my part. This hidden core cannot become fully transparent to the community of interpreters any more than it can become unhidden to the self that "contains" it. Within each self is its own otherness that points toward a more radical domain of alterity within which the richness of the human process is sustained.

In pointing toward the otherness within each self and between and among all social selves, it is important to note that such alterity does not negate or destroy the forms of presence that serve hermeneutics. The communication of shared meanings requires that signs and their referents, however

ambiguous or attenuated, emerge before social inquiry to serve the needs of validation. A hermeneutics of suspicion that would overturn or unmask each presence cannot participate in the quest for social justice because of its denial of any meaningful transcendence. When meanings become filtered through loyal social selves, they abide as stable and reliable traces of that which transcends the sum total of all hermeneutic acts. Otherness and transcendence belong together in an eternal polarity. The evolution of shared values and meanings is one form of transcendence. As such, it does not negate or cancel that radical alterity that lives in the heart of the community of interpreters.

Loyalty to loyalty thus preserves both identity and difference but in alternative respects. Identity is preserved insofar as collectively generated meanings survive the relentless process of social query and point toward transcendence. Difference is preserved whenever the uniqueness and force of a given loyalty is protected from the destructive power of mere social conformity. The principle of loyalty honors both identity and difference in all their forms.

Thus far we have spoken of the incremental series composed of nature, communities, and individual interpreters. Loyalty to loyalty has emerged as the fundamental access structure that empowers finite interpreters to serve both the antecedent orders of nature and history and the emergent, and to a large extent consequent, orders of the community. What has remained veiled is the depth principle that moves between these three levels of reality. In rejecting panpsychism we have made it clear that the traits of human interpreters (such as self-consciousness, intersubjectivity, and temporality) are not to be projected onto nature as a whole. This temptation being rejected, we must look elsewhere for that empowerment that makes it possible for the community to receive the riches of nature without falling prey to the seductions of undifferentiated origin.

The movement from nature to meaning, and from meaning to truth, is made possible by the presence of what can best be called "Spirit." Spirit, itself without a positive semiotic content, is that dimension of nature that is captured in the phrase, "nature naturing." The Spirit is in one sense a product of nature and in another sense the animating principle within all natural transactions. In the words of Emerson, who was especially attuned to nature in its naturing: "that behind nature, throughout nature, spirit is present; one and not compound it does not act upon us from without, that is, in space and time, but spiritually, or through ourselves: therefore, that spirit, that is, the Supreme Being, does not build up nature around us but puts it forth through us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old."³ Leaving aside the honorific rhetoric, it is clear that Spirit is the animating principle that lives between

and through the great divisions of the world. The unity of Spirit is unique in that it refuses to become encompassed by any finite set of values or meanings. If Spirit is the source of unity within human communities, it follows that Spirit and the life of interpretation belong together. In what remains, we will examine the connections between Spirit, the nature of loyalty, and hermeneutics. Hopefully this will make it possible to find a deeper and more enduring measure for hermeneutics than that which has emerged from alternative paradigms.

The influence of Spirit is felt in the pressure to transcend antecedent horizons and their internal hermeneutic structures. This pressure is the most restless and creative aspect of the community of interpretation and drives each act of interpretation toward an ultimate expectation in which all origins are shriven of their hubris in the face of that which can never be an origin or finite horizon. The fissures opened within triumphalist and self-encapsulated horizons enable their semiotic plenitude to give way to an otherness that speaks from the future. This future is not that of calculated or projected consequences but stands as the total sublation of all present and past acts of meaning. The presence of Spirit manifests itself in the ever receding future that leaves traces of the hermeneutic kingdom. In the not-yet of the hermeneutic kingdom lies the true animating principle of social transformation. All acts of loyalty serve the not-yet that speaks beyond all attained horizons of meaning. To be loyal to loyalty is to experience the grace that comes from the Spirit. In a very real sense, the Spirit is the mediator between the powers of origin and the elusive presence/absence of the hermeneutic kingdom. Spirit, which stands behind and within all forms of empowerment, lives in the between that holds origin and expectation together. The identities emergent from antecedent orders stand under judgment by the alterity of expectation. This judgment forces each origin to acknowledge that which both supports and negates each finite potency. Since all empowerment comes from Spirit, it follows that the radical openness preserved by loyalty is itself made possible by the Spiritual Presence that quickens the life of interpretation.

The Spirit that guides and directs interpretation is the power that overturns merely finite meanings and their illusory self-validation. Spirit breaks through the condescended shells of given horizons and perspectives and thereby makes them permeable to each other in a way that would have been impossible outside of the presence of Spirit. Spirit, as the incarnation of meaning and truth, lives most dramatically in those communities that struggle toward the emancipation of all selves and their attendant horizons. On the deepest level, there is no contradiction between incarnation and otherness. In democratic communities of interpretation, otherness is preserved through the bindingness that is the gift of the incarnation. That

is, the sheer imperative of the other is only felt when his or her meanings become incarnate in my own horizon of meaning. It is only a seeming paradox that the presence of Spirit, always advancing the scope of the incarnation, preserves the genuine otherness of the other. The forces of democracy are strengthened whenever the incarnation of Spirit gently undermines the misguided solipsism that refuses to acknowledge the radical equality of the other.

A democratic hermeneutic community is more than the sum of emancipated individuals. On the deepest level it is the enabling condition for all forms of personal and social liberation. The Spirit is unrelenting in its hostility to forms of domination and privilege. While finite powers frequently establish systems of priority, the Spirit demands absolute parity between and among selves. The structures of origin and the lure of expectation turn toward each other under the impress of Spirit. Origins give the community its hermeneutic wealth. The kingdom of expectation gives the community its concrete sense of justice. The Spirit creates that loyalty which enables all finite interpreters to find an equal place within the evolving community of interpretation.

Notes

1. Josiah Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1908), p. 314.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 118–19.
3. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature, Addresses, and Lectures*, The Riverside Edition (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1883); the essay "Nature" is reprinted from the 1836 edition, pp. 67–68.