

Beyond Science and Supermen: Bellow and Mind at Mid-Century

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It's bad to be less than human and it's bad to be more than human. What's more than human? . . . Caesar, if you remember, in the play wanted to be like a god. . . . Can a god have diseases? So this is a sick man's idea of God. Does a statue have wax in its ears? Naturally not. It doesn't sweat either, except maybe blood on holidays. If I can talk myself into it that I never sweat and make everybody else act as if it was true, maybe I can fix it up about dying, too. We only know what it is to die because some people die and, if we make ourselves different from them, maybe we don't have to?

—Bellow, *The Victim* (1947)

“So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?”—True and false is what human beings say; and it is in *language* that they agree. This is no agreement in opinions, but rather in form of life.

—Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 241 (1953)

What do we mean by mindedness? Contextualizing a field he has often criticized as unwilling to contextualize itself, Richard Rorty has recently singled out the decade of the 1950s as a watershed in Anglo-American philosophical responses to this question. Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (1951), Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), Sellars's "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (1956)—with the appearance of these seminal texts, says Rorty, analytic philosophy began to evolve from its earlier, positivistic form into its later, "post-positivist" phase, one that was "beyond" empiricism and rationalism.¹ As Rorty himself would ruefully admit, many analytic philosophers certainly continue to ask what he would consider outdated questions about mind and knowledge. Still, excluding the researchers puzzled by what it is like to be a bat or by the possible existence of zombies, a survey of some of the major figures in contemporary philosophy of mind bears out Rorty's judgment about Sellars, Quine, Wittgenstein, and the importance of the 1950s.

With his gift for syntheses, Rorty, for one, has made regular reference to all three philosophers.² Traces of Sellars can be readily located in John McDowell and Robert Brandom, and echoes of Quine can be heard throughout the work of Donald Davidson, Hilary Putnam, and Daniel Dennett.³ For his part, Wittgenstein has influenced all these thinkers, but an account of his legacy would force us to extend this list to include others, such as Charles Taylor, Annette Baier, and Stephen Toulmin.⁴

Whatever the local differences between these various “post-positivistic” philosophers (and, coming from different backgrounds, they inevitably exhibit a number of important differences),⁵ the common thread running through all their work is a hostility towards the modern Cartesian tradition. All of these philosophers, that is, are suspicious—in a way that, as should become clear as my discussion goes on, is both similar and importantly different from their more celebrated continental counterparts—that the characteristically modern quest for certainty, the search for a “method” that will unequivocally distinguish mere dreams and appearances from indubitable knowledge, is ultimately a philosopher’s invention. Most immediately, this suspicion forces a reexamination of what the Cartesian tradition considers the paradigm of certainty, i.e., the self-certainty of the conscious subject. Whereas Descartes presents what has been called a “subjectivist-individualist” picture of a person, in which the individual is the locus of self-conscious thought and the ground of moral autonomy,⁶ philosophers working after Wittgenstein, Sellars, and Quine are deeply skeptical of first-person “introspection”: self-understanding emerges not through some inner mental gymnastics, but through the shared linguistic and social habits of a particular community. This in turn demands an attention to the historical contingencies of knowing and acting, and leads us to seek not proofs and axioms, but thick descriptions of our ordinary language and folk psychology—the messy group of ordinary words and practices through which we learn to make sense of ourselves and others, and through which, in Wittgenstein’s phrase, we come to turn our spade.

Now, implied in Rorty’s account of the development of this postwar, postpositivist perspective is a belief that he makes explicit elsewhere in his work, namely that developments in the history of philosophy have little bearing on other domains of culture. Different cultural practices, he often suggests, have different histories and rhythms, and we should not see any single practice as providing the “foundation” for the others. Thus, for example, Rorty’s frequent struggle to distinguish what he sees as arcane problems in semantics from what he sees as consequential political debates.⁷ And Rorty’s resistance to describing all cultural activities as part of a seamless web deserves to be taken seriously; in a world without a God’s-Eye point of view, Quine’s distinction between “moderate” and

“strong” holism is important to bear in mind.⁸ When, however, the question is how mindedness was conceived and envisioned in the course of the twentieth century, the claim that philosophical arguments constitute a marginal exercise unrelated to other cultural spheres is misleading. For the developments that Rorty sketches in the history of Anglo-American philosophy in fact bear striking family resemblances to certain developments in the history of Anglo-American literature, resemblances that—thanks largely to the peculiarly self-secluding nature of contemporary English-language philosophy—have gone almost completely unrecognized. Specifically, the descriptions of mind that philosophers began to give in the middle decades of the century have important parallels, I think, in the picture of mind implied by particular fictional texts of the same period.

The figure on whom I want to concentrate here is Saul Bellow, a writer who not only came to prominence in the 1950s, but whose work could be said, like that of his philosophical contemporaries, to struggle with fundamental elements of the Cartesian legacy. In identifying the convergence between Bellow and postpositivist philosophy of mind, I do not of course mean to imply that, like Wittgenstein and others, Bellow was deliberately responding to Descartes’s *Meditations*, let alone to Russell or Ayer. Indeed, epistemology is not something for which Bellow has shown much concern. If he has an opinion about the subject at all, we can surmise it from his amusing anecdote about Richard Wright’s immersion in phenomenology under the tutelage of Parisian existentialists: “Seeing Wright in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, deep in a thick, difficult book, I asked him why this was necessary, and he told me that it was indispensable reading for all writers and that I had better get a copy of my own. I wasn’t quite ready for Husserl. As often as possible I went to music halls and the Cirque d’Hiver.”⁹ But, if Bellow was far removed from the philosophy departments of Cambridge and Harvard, the Cartesian legacy was nevertheless as unavoidable in his milieu as anywhere else. As his anecdote about Wright reminds us, the 1950s was the height of American culture’s fascination with French existentialism, a time when Sartre’s intensely Cartesian themes—the never-ending gulf between Ego and Other, the passionate rejection of social and psychological determination, “*L’homme est ce qu’il se fait*”—found a remarkably receptive American audience.¹⁰ It was the 1950s that saw the appearance of James Dean and the Beats, figures who arguably embodied the Sartrean longing, described in Mailer’s *Advertisements for Myself* (1959), “to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on that uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self,” to “open the limits of the possible for oneself, for oneself alone, because that is one’s need.”¹¹ In addition to this existentialist backdrop, Bellow was intensely aware, too,

that he was working in the shadow of literary Modernism, a movement that can be understood as having updated Cartesian demands for autonomy and self-responsibility into a set of aesthetic ideals. As Robert B. Pippin has observed, the emphasis in the first decades of the twentieth century on radical aesthetic experimentation, on the autonomous and *sui generis* nature of both the artist and the work of art, on the emptiness of routinized bourgeois culture, could be understood as a demand that we as individuals finally live up to the ideals of modernity, that we kick away once and for all the vestiges of dependency and tradition and custom.¹² It is helpful to keep in mind, in this context, that Bellow's earliest fiction was written at the very moment when the last Modernist monuments—*Finnegans Wake*, *Doktor Faustus*, the *Pisan Cantos*—were being put into place. As Marcus Klein observed in the early 1960s, there is a significant sense in which Bellow's work emerges "after alienation"—after, that is, the strategy of discontent, the romance of estrangement, that marked so much of early twentieth-century literature.¹³

So if Bellow and his Anglo-American philosophical counterparts emerge from different environments, they could fairly be said to converge on a quite similar set of issues, a similar set of dissatisfactions with their respective Cartesian surroundings. A great advantage of turning to Bellow's fiction, however, is that it allows us to make explicit something that often goes unexplored in strictly philosophical discussions, namely, how the critique of the Cartesian picture of mind might also entail an reexamination of the ethical picture with which the subjectivist-individualist concept of a person has often been associated.¹⁴ It is not coincidental that, in my sketch of Bellow and his literary-cultural context, my descriptions have shifted somewhat from mind to morals, from words referring to *consciousness* and *knowledge* to ones referring to *action* and *value*. For if Bellow has taken little interest in modern epistemology, he has shown a keen awareness of modern ethical questions. At the heart of his work—and this is especially true of *Henderson the Rain King*, the 1959 novel on which I shall be focusing here—is what Chick, the narrator of *Ravelstein*, identifies as "the challenge of modern freedom, or the combination of freedom and isolation which confronts you": the challenge, that is, of leading a meaningful life when the world has withdrawn, when a person is described not as part of an ordered cosmos or *polis* or spiritual order, but rather as an autonomous knower and agent.¹⁵ As I understand it, the picture of understanding and knowledge that emerged in postwar, postpositivist philosophy of mind is important because it provides us with a third position beyond the extremes of objectivism and subjectivism that are Descartes's legacy; they allow us, as Putnam has said in a discussion of the pragmatic undercurrents in Wittgenstein, a way of being *both* anti-skeptical *and* fallibilistic.¹⁶ But as I shall suggest

here, pictures of mind are often closely allied with pictures of ethics, and what we take to be moral goods are often implied in accounts of what we take to know. And Bellow's fiction in particular, I want to argue, can be understood not only as giving thick descriptions of such a third model of mind, but also as a means of taking the discussion further, allowing us to imagine a third position beyond objectivism and subjectivism in the domain of ethics as well.

Of Plantations, Persons, and Other Matter

To elaborate these analogies between Bellow and postwar Anglo-American philosophy, I begin with a thought experiment.

Imagine a young agronomist is given the following instructions by his new boss at the Ministry for Agriculture: "Inspect and survey banana plantation X, and report on the operations of the owners." That afternoon he arrives at plantation X and dutifully begins recording what he observes. He takes careful note of the soil composition and assesses with a measuring tape the width of the well-formed trunks. The trees are enumerated carefully, mapped according to which patches are in the shape of trapezoids and which in the shape of rectangles. After several hours of this painstaking work, the agronomist sees a house, approaches it, and peers through a window into what looks like a living room, where two people are visible. One, a young-looking, dark-skinned boy, is holding a tray and stepping towards the other, an older, light-skinned female, who is seated on a couch. The agronomist dutifully repeats to himself his instructions, and—once again—inspects, surveys, and begins to record the state of affairs, identifying (for short) the woman as "A . . ." and the servant as "the boy":

To the left, the office door has remained wide open. . . . But the slats of the blind are too sharply slanted to permit what is outside to be seen from the doorway.

It is at a distance of less than a meter only that, in the successive intervals, in parallel bands separated by the wider slider slats of gray wood, the elements of a discontinuous landscape appear: the turned wood balusters, the empty chair, the low table where a full glass stands beside the tray holding the two bottles, and then the top part of the head of black hair, which at this moment turns toward the right, where above the table shows a bare forearm, dark brown in color, and its paler hand holding the ice bucket. A . . .'s voice thanks the boy. The brown hand disappears. The shiny metal bucket, immediately frosted over, remains where it has been set on the tray beside the two bottles. . . .

Clearly our agronomist has a methodical mind and a patient eye. The meticulous care he takes in diagramming the details of the scene, moving attentively from the half-drawn window blinds to the physical details of the house to the various bodies in motion, displays precisely the kind of care and precision one finds in the best scientific descriptions. So why, when he finishes his two-thousand-page report on banana plantation X, does the Minister berate him for his work and fire him immediately?

The answer, of course, is that when the Minister told the young agronomist to inspect, survey, and record the state of affairs at plantation X, she meant only the *relevant* state of affairs—relevant, that is, to bureaucrats and statisticians at the Ministry of Agriculture. One could easily imagine a case in which the description given of the woman and servant would be just right; it might be helpful as a script for a puppet show, for instance. But determining how the owners care for the plantation, how they estimate harvests, how they strategize and what they plan—the kinds of things a Ministry of Agriculture would want to know—would have required an idiom vastly different from the one used to enumerate the trees and gardens. Specifically, the kind of vocabulary required for the task would be one capable of attributing the mentalistic categories we routinely ascribe to persons but far less frequently to banana trees and soil. As the passage stands, it lacks awareness of our folk psychology: concepts such as beliefs, intentions, expectation, pain, dreaming, knowing, or desire, that vast group of terms that we learn when we learn language, and that we use every waking minute in order to predict and describe human and other behavior.¹⁷ Rather, the persons in the agronomist's description are picked out by the motions of certain body parts, body parts themselves marked off, strikingly, not by possessive adjectives but by impersonal definite or indefinite articles: "the head of black hair" that suddenly turns, "a bare forearm" and "its paler hand" that bring the bucket, "the brown hand" that disappears when the work is done. While persons are usually thought of as the paradigmatic class of entities to which both material and psychological predicates are attributable, the agronomist's account of them uses precisely the same terms he would use to describe the growth of a banana tree's leaves or the faltering health of an orange grove. This rejection of mindedness is perhaps most startling in the short sentence that reports the woman's verbal response: "A . . .'s voice thanks the boy." It is not difficult to picture body hair or even forearms and hands as "things" in the world, on a par with balustrades, tables, and ice buckets. But it is more unusual to detach a voice from a seemingly animate entity, especially if that voice is successfully performing complicated acts such as expressing thanks. Whether or not this unusualness betrays an insidious metaphysics is difficult to say.

For now, it is enough to point out that something seems badly amiss when recognizable speech is detached from conventionally articulate bodies, as in this sentence about "A . . .".

So the young agronomist fails at the Ministry of Agriculture. But if he ever decided to publish his study of banana plantation X as a novel, he might have more success; he might even be praised as a groundbreaking artist. Praising is precisely what Roland Barthes did in a well-known essay for Alain Robbe-Grillet, himself a former agronomist and statistician who—truth be told—actually wrote the above passage in *La jalousie*, his celebrated 1957 novel about French colonials in Africa.¹⁸ Presaging his later claims about the death of the author, Barthes described Robbe-Grillet's writing as a rejection of the "traditional novel," which has been "secularly instituted as an experiment in depth"—"social depth with Balzac and Zola, 'psychological' depth with Flaubert, memorial with Proust"—and so has been concerned always with "the degree of man's or society's *inwardness*."¹⁹ Robbe-Grillet, by contrast, records "man's direct experience of what really surrounds him without his being able to shield himself with a psychology, a metaphysic, or a psychoanalytic in his combat with the objective world he discovers" (591). And the objects of this world, according to Barthes, are absorbed wholly by their "optical natures," their "sheer existence," rather than their human-imposed "function." Thus, just as the persons in the above passage are picked out by their motions rather than their purposes, a plate of food would in Robbe-Grillet's texts be described not as "so-and-so's dinner," an object with "an alimentary function," but rather as "three thin slices of ham laid across a white plate" (583).

Barthes's celebratory assessment of Robbe-Grillet's project was bolstered by the series of polemic essays that Robbe-Grillet himself wrote in the late 1950s and collected in *Pour un nouveau roman* (1963). Because the world, as Robbe-Grillet declares, "is neither significant nor absurd," but "*is, quite simply,*"²⁰ his novels attempt to overcome traditional novelistic conventions of "character" and "story." Whereas Balzac had written in a period "that marked the apogee of the individual," the cult of the "human" must today give way to something "that is less anthropocentric."²¹ Though skimpy on the details of this historical situation, Robbe-Grillet is confident that, were its "anthropological atmosphere" fully expunged, we would begin to see through the self-delusions that our language imposes upon us. Metaphor, for instance—in an argument that was later to make Paul de Man famous—would then seem a "figure that is never innocent," an "anthropomorphic analogy" betraying a "total metaphysical system" that believes "there is only one answer to everything: man."²² No longer protecting ourselves from the world through "animistic or protective adjectives," human beings would no

longer mystify “crude reality,” the “clear and smooth” objects that are “neither dubiously glittering, nor transparent” (“Futur,” 20).

Like, then, the eager agronomist I have imagined, Robbe-Grillet’s account of the world tries to ignore the different stances we routinely adopt towards different entities, especially the propositional attitudes routinely (though not exclusively) assigned to persons. To highlight the role of propositional attitudes in our thinking, Dennett has proposed a mini-thought experiment: “Imagine perceiving two children tugging at the same teddy bear and not having it occur to you that they both *want* it.”²³ This is precisely what Robbe-Grillet asks us to do for a couple hundred pages, and almost fifty years after *La jalousie* appeared, the difficulty of such imaginings is what makes the text still striking to the unprepared reader. But for all its startling qualities, for all the challenges it presents, my association here between *La jalousie* and the agronomist’s report is meant to suggest that Robbe-Grillet’s work is in fact representative of a long-standing tradition. The wish to strip away from the world all vocabularies of intentions and beliefs, the hope to purge the perceptual world from the “signification” ascribed to it by human beings, the accompanying drive, as Barthes says, to “exhaustively interrogate the object, from which all lyric impulses are excluded” (590)—such claims betray the eliminativist assumptions and aspirations driving these two heroes of the twentieth-century avant-garde.

By “eliminativist” here I mean the belief that anthropocentric properties could or should be filtered out of our understanding of the world, that the universe—including us—is best pictured as a causally governed, extended, physical mechanism rather than an animate organism replete with disembodied agents. In literary studies, this kind of stance has of course been most commonly associated with the antihumanism of Derrida, Foucault, and others in the 1960s and 1970s who subjected terms like “presence” and “the Subject” to critical scrutiny (and who, not surprisingly, often greatly admired Robbe-Grillet). But in identifying Robbe-Grillet and Barthes as eliminativists, I mean to broaden our points of historical and philosophical reference. One thinks, for example, of Skinnerian behaviorism, in which behavior is explained not by reference to intentional idioms but by accounts of environmental conditioning.²⁴ Or one thinks of contemporary neuroscientists who believe that our commonsense descriptions of psychological phenomena are as bogus as medieval alchemy, and that concepts such as “wanting” and “hoping” and “thinking,” and the ontology they evoke, will eventually be displaced by a completed map of the brain.²⁵ As in these various projects, what I have quoted in the passage from *La jalousie* are not disembodied agents or ghostly intentional states—beliefs, desires, hopes, etc.—but the quantifiable “crude reality” absorbed by the senses, especially

the eyes: matter, size, shape, color. Indeed, not only is it unsurprising to learn of Robbe-Grillet's background in agronomy and statistics, it is also unsurprising to hear in his voice the same triumphal, deflationary swagger that has often characterized the various philosophies I have mentioned.²⁶

Not everybody, however, has found the search for a more "basic account" of "crude reality" a terribly plausible idea.²⁷ Just two years after *La jalousie* appeared, Eugene Henderson, the hero of *Henderson the Rain King*, describes the world in many of the same terms as Robbe-Grillet. Near the beginning of that book, Henderson, the wayward descendant of a distinguished upper-class family, describes a stunning revelation that came to him one day while working around his house:

Beside my cellar door last winter I was chopping wood for the fire . . . and a chunk of wood flew up from the block and hit me in the nose. Owing to the extreme cold I didn't realize what had happened until I saw the blood on my mackinaw. Lily cried out, "You broke your nose." No, it wasn't broken. I have a lot of protective flesh over it but I carried a bruise there for some time. However as I felt the blow my only thought was *truth*. Does truth come in blows? There's a military idea if ever there was one. I tried to say something about it to Lily; she, too, had felt the force of truth when her second husband, Hazard, punched her in the eye.²⁸

Henderson might be said to be committing himself here to a particularly harsh form of physicalism: reality is not only a matter of the causally governed arrangement of intentionless things in the world, but is most robustly real when things smack one in the face. Indeed, throughout the book, Henderson makes his connection to the eliminativist tradition even more explicit than Robbe-Grillet's narrator. "The world of facts is real, all right," he claims at one point, "and not to be altered. The physical is all there and it belongs to science" (167).

And, to a certain extent, this materialist sense of "the world of facts" lends a swagger to Henderson in much the same way as it does for Robbe-Grillet and others in the eliminativist tradition. This is most evident when he arrives in Africa and is confronted with the superstitions of the tribes he encounters—the "pish-posh" Arnewi fear of the frogs occupying their cistern, for example, or the sacred duties of the Rain King that he himself, smirkingly, comes to carry out. But this skepticism in fact appears long before Henderson sets foot in Africa, as in his dealings with his wife Lily. Despite her second husband's punch in the eye, Lily is said to be habitually "moralizing" with naïve "ideas of goodness" (150), and simple-mindedly hopes the two of them can "end each other's solitude"

(80) with a set of maxims Henderson dismisses as sentimentalism: "one can't live for this but has to live for that; not evil but good; not death but life; not illusion but reality" (16). Though he never goes too deep into the particulars of microbiology or physics, Henderson is a thorough-going modern physicalist who, like the philosophical eliminativists or the narrator of *La jalousie*, is wary of seeing a universe of significations, of ascribing moral values and a "metaphysical system" to the world of "purely physical data," and of proclaiming, in Robbe-Grillet's phrase, that "man is everywhere" ("Nature," 48).

Where Henderson would have picked up such a materialist sensibility is debatable, though it is helpful to recall that his creator was, in the 1930s and 1940s, trained in sociology and anthropology as both an undergraduate and graduate student.²⁹ Social scientists may never be accepted uncontroversially by the entire scientific community, but in bolstering claims to universality, they at least think of their work not only as interpretations of the meanings of behavior, but also, like the natural sciences, as analyses of causal determinations that yield scientific results.³⁰ So Bellow arguably learned from his sociological and anthropological training something like what Robbe-Grillet might have learned from agronomy and statistics in precisely the same years—that, as the latter put it, the "omnipotence of the person" is a problematic notion, that "personality" is not necessarily, as it was for Balzac, "both the means and the end of all exploration" ("Notions," 28). For both, the special kind of unextended "spiritual substances" imagined by Descartes, and the kind of humanism it ultimately engenders, is deeply problematic.

But it is here, I think, that the comparisons between Robbe-Grillet's naturalism and that of Bellow begin to come to an end. For what is even more telling than their physicalist sense of the world is the stance their speakers are led to adopt toward that physicalism. For Robbe-Grillet, "the world around us," the world "without signification, without soul, without values," presents to us "a smooth surface"—an apt phrase indeed in relation to our passage from *La jalousie*, with its quasi-geometric survey of the physical scene. To Henderson, by contrast, an attention to the "world of facts" entails a keen awareness not only of smooth surfaces, but also of surfaces that appear to us a great deal *less* than smooth. Truth, recall, comes for him violently, "in blows." The physical world, that is, appears not in sterile or smooth optical images, but in frequently brutal perceptions of destruction, death, and disintegration. It is in this light, I think, that the novel's constant attention to the messiest and most grotesque aspects of creaturely existence should be understood. The frogs in their "home medium" of the Arnewi cistern sit "with eyes like ripe gooseberries, submerged in their slums of ooze" (107). His farm "stank of swill and pigs and the mashes cooking, and dung," and sows "eat their young

because they need the phosphorus" (21). A wild cat abandoned by a tenant on his estate once "fought all the barn toms and gave them septic scratches and tore out their eyes" (91). And, most jarringly, on what Henderson calls the "day of tears and madness"—the day that drives him to travel to Africa in search of spiritual peace—Miss Lenox, an old woman who helps around his house, drops dead in his kitchen, absurdly, as the "eggs were still boiling" (39). "You, too, will die of this pestilence," he concludes somberly: "Death will annihilate you and nothing will remain, and there will be nothing left but junk" (40).

Ooze, dung, septic scratches, pestilence, junk: it is the incessant attention paid to these aspects of "reality" that distinguishes Henderson's picture from that of Robbe-Grillet's narrator. To be sure, Robbe-Grillet's fiction contains more than its fair share of the grotesque. One of the most well-known recurring images in *La jalousie*, for example, is that of Franck, A . . . 's would-be lover, crushing a caterpillar so mercilessly against a wall that A . . . herself seems distraught. But as with every description in the novel, the cool, passionless accounts of the squashed caterpillar are meant to suggest that the scene is not "in itself" disgusting nor Franck's action oddly barbaric. Judgments such as these, Robbe-Grillet suggests, are "merely" a character's or reader's valuations toward "the facts." In *Henderson*, however, distinctions between "the facts" and "our values" are not so facile. Our self-descriptions, the book suggests through Henderson's anxious voice, are in practice not "mere" to us, and the possibility that the "most basic" or "factual" description of a person would place him or her on a par with junk and ooze and dung is portrayed as devastating to a person's self-image and sense of purpose. If the world (including ourselves) is constituted "actually" by mere atoms in the void, if objects (including ourselves) are "ultimately" just complicated masses of mindless cells, it is not clear what happens to some of our most influential conceptions of a human being, most of which, of course, have depended in large part upon certain important distinctions: animate and inanimate, human and nonhuman, person and junk. But confronted with a starkly eliminativist vision, such conventional categories—categories that have traditionally helped give life direction and meaning, clarify one's relation to other persons, give one a meaningful place within the cosmos—are liable to seem flimsy and groundless, forever "reducible" to a state of things themselves devoid of human meaning. Without the guidance of religious customs, without the shelter of an ethnic tradition, without a clear role in the *polis*, without the promise of Romantic self-unity,³¹ Henderson dramatizes the kind of disorientation that can ensue with the loss of our traditional self-conceptions. Whereas Robbe-Grillet rests content with the dismantling of traditional "humanism," the starting point for *Henderson* is the very real difficulty of

knowing what comes next—knowing, that is, what to make of human beings once their conventionally conceived “functions” have been stripped away. “What should I concentrate on?” Henderson asks Willatale, the wise woman of the Arnewi tribe. “Marriage and happiness? Children and family? Duty? Death? The voice that says *I want?* . . . So, in short, what’s the best way to live?” (81). If, in other words, “clear and smooth” surfaces are the grounds of our ontology, if the “objective world” in its “sheer existence” makes up “reality,” what is to be done? Can physical measurements, “optical natures,” and nerve endings give us purposes and goals? Where do we go from here?

Natural Superhumanism

In drawing a contrast between Bellow and Robbe-Grillet, I obviously do not mean to suggest here that Bellow was deliberately responding to *La jalousie* when he came to write *Henderson*. But the contrast between these two post-war figures is also not without significant historical underpinnings. Not only are Bellow (born 1915) and Robbe-Grillet (born 1922) close contemporaries, and not only did they come to literary prominence in the same years, and not only do they share a background in scientific research, but Bellow himself lived in Paris in the 1950s, and was not unfamiliar with the intellectual debates the city was offering at the time. Moreover, the kinds of questions I have raised about Robbe-Grillet’s philosophical and fictional eliminativism were precisely those that Bellow himself raised during his 1976 Nobel Prize speech. Quoting Robbe-Grillet’s commendatory comments about the presentation of “entities” rather than “individuals” in much modern fiction, Bellow rightly noted that the hypotheses of his French contemporary were “not new.”³² Telling us “that we must purge ourselves of bourgeois anthropomorphism and do the classy thing that our advanced culture requires,” Robbe-Grillet is said to represent the belief that art’s traditional human interests are marginal to the affairs of a modern, industrialized, scientific society. But, said Bellow, the fact “that the death notice of character has been signed by the serious essayists” rather than (on the whole) novelists themselves “means only that another group of mummies—certain respectable leaders of the intellectual community—has laid down the law” (“Nobel,” 91). A proper response to our modern situation, Bellow went on, would ask whether many twentieth-century artists have lost touch with the way we actually live our lives, would put under scrutiny the “marked contempt for the average reader and the bourgeois mass”—and, one might add, our ordinary language—that has characterized so many twentieth-century intellectuals (“Nobel,” 94). “The sense of our real powers,” Bellow suggested, “powers we seem to derive from the universe itself, . . . comes and goes. We are reluctant to talk about this because there is nothing we can prove, . . . and because

few people are willing to risk the embarrassment. They would have to say, "There is a spirit," and that is taboo" (97). As part of humanity's struggle "with collective powers for freedom," and as part of the individual's struggle "with dehumanization for the possession of his soul," the writer should abandon the obscurantism of a self-declared vanguard, must "come again into the center" of the culture and explore "the essence of our real condition, the complexity, the confusion, the pain of it" (96-97).

In responding to Robbe-Grillet, the "Nobel Lecture" displays Bellow's characteristic sensitivity to intellectual history, and poses many important questions about Robbe-Grillet's work, but it is in itself not wholly satisfying. For one thing, with its appeal to "powers" and "spirit," it clearly indicates how the theistic undercurrent that had always been present in Bellow's work—an undercurrent that once inspired Iris Murdoch to place him among the "mystics" of postwar fiction—had grown more outspoken by the mid-seventies.³³ But this is a secondary problem in the present context. Whatever its place in his later fiction, a specifically religious stance is as difficult to construe in *Henderson* as in any of the postwar philosophers to whom I have been comparing him.³⁴ A more important problem with the "Nobel Lecture," however, is the one-sidedness of Bellow's picture of Robbe-Grillet—a one-sidedness I myself have endorsed up to now. For while Bellow's account of Robbe-Grillet's scientism is accurate, it is not wholly true that Robbe-Grillet evades the questions I raised above, questions about how we are to live after physicalism has disintegrated most of our traditional self-conceptions. In singling out the eliminativist grounds of Robbe-Grillet's fiction, Bellow ignores the fact that his French contemporary betrays a distinctive set of moral goods, and that the great interest of Robbe-Grillet's work of the 1950s is the way in which these goods are mixed with his intensely physicalist impulses.

We can begin to make Robbe-Grillet's goods explicit by making an obvious point: the "objects" under the most intense scrutiny in his books are, and are identified as, *persons*. While our passage from *La jalousie* casts its cold eye as much on the venetian blinds as on any of the actors, it is the interpersonal relationships—most particularly those between A . . . and her would-be lover, Franck—that are the dominant interest throughout the novel. It is worth remembering that Robbe-Grillet did not have to do this, that there are plenty of stories to tell about objects which in our usual reckoning lack a complex web of intentional attitudes: cell biologists tell tales about mitosis, geologists chronicle rock-formation, and Robbe-Grillet himself, as I've noted, spent a good portion of his early adult life writing reports on soil composition. Next to these kinds of projects, the abiding focus of Robbe-Grillet's fiction remains as decidedly anthropological as anything in Balzac. The simple fact that he writes

novels—or, as in his later career, film scripts—says something important. Like most people called novelists, Robbe-Grillet evidently accepts that there is little humanly useful or edifying to say when we tell stories about molecules rather than about things within our ordinary, middling range of human perception.

A larger point about Robbe-Grillet's moral goods, however, can be brought out if we ask ourselves a simple question: who is it that *sees* all the scenes in the book? As commentators have long noted, the pun that is lost in English translation of the title—“*jalousie*” in French can mean either “jealousy” or “venetian blind”—is a clue to the workings of the text, a signal to the reader that the scenes recorded so meticulously and descriptions so obsessively repeated (the conversations of A . . . and Franck, the men building the bridges, the caterpillar crushed on the wall) emerge from a particular point of view: the jealous husband of A . . . who, gazing from behind the blinds, is the unspecified thing not “to be seen from the doorway” in the opening sentences of the passage I quoted. The vision presented in the book, that is, is not disengaged and neutral—a “view from nowhere,” in Thomas Nagel's phrase³⁵—but rather one from a distinct perspective, indeed a most singular point of view, that of a man supposedly on the verge of madness. And this is something Robbe-Grillet himself has gone to great lengths to point out about his work generally. Unlike Balzac's books, he says, with their roaming omniscient narrators, the *nouveau roman* is always told through the perspective of an actual person, someone who is “*always engaged . . . in an emotional adventure of the most obsessive kind, to the point of often distorting his vision and of producing imaginings close to delirium.*” For all the apparent eliminativism of the *nouveau roman*, it can, in fact, rightfully be said to aim “only at total subjectivity,” to represent “the purest expression of human subjectivity that exists.”³⁶

The particular vocabulary shaping these claims about “total subjectivity” emerges in large part from Robbe-Grillet's extensive reading in phenomenology, which, thanks to Sartre's great prestige, had of course gained considerable renown in post-war intellectual circles. (Recall here Bellow's anecdote about Wright, which I noted at the beginning of my discussion.) When, for example, Robbe-Grillet describes in one of his essays the “absolute reality” of a seagull he once imagined while taking a walk, and then claims that such seagulls were “somehow more real *because* they were now imaginary,” one hears obvious echoes of Husserl, who similarly sought to “bracket off” the “objects of consciousness” that are “constituted” by the mind, regardless of the actual empirical existence of these objects.³⁷ Husserl, who died in 1938, never lived to see the emergence of the *nouveau roman*, and it is unclear whether he would have endorsed all the interpretations of his younger French admirer. But it is

Robbe-Grillet's understanding of phenomenology that allows him to shift from a radical eliminativism, on the one hand, to a radical Idealism on the other. It allows him, in other words, to subsume a radically physicalist picture of mind under a drastically different one that makes the individual subject not just the locus of thought and will, as Descartes would have it, but the very maker of worlds: "I do not transcribe," he announces at one point, "I construct" ("Réalisme," 140). Reality is not "out there," as if we were mere spectators, but rather something we ourselves constitute through our perceptions and words. To cite one recent study of Robbe-Grillet, his narrators are not merely trying to make sense of and cope with their environments, but actually "inventing the real world."³⁸

So what is taken with one hand in Robbe-Grillet's mid-century essays is emphatically given with another. Whereas one side of Robbe-Grillet ignores the mentalistic predicates we routinely ascribe to persons, the second side can be said to ignore the material predicates that are also employed, focusing attention exclusively on the mind's constitution—or, as we'd say today, "construction"—of the world. Moreover, to recall Robert B. Pippin's remarks on the Cartesian legacy within Modernism, his analogy between the supposed autonomy of mind and that of the work of art, mindedness in Robbe-Grillet is said to find its fullest expression in the artist. Art, that is, is granted *the* central role in human cognition: his attacks on anthropomorphizing analogies or mystifying significations are followed again and again by outlandishly Nietzschean celebrations of the artist's creative powers. The true artist, says Robbe-Grillet, "renounces the used-up formulas and attempts to create his own way of writing" ("Notions," 26). Rejecting "prefabricated schemes people are used to," with "their ready-made idea of reality," he or she "invents quite freely, without a model" ("Notions," 30). Indeed, not only does the artist invent without a model, but—and the biblical allusion here is telling—"he must create a world, . . . starting from nothing, from the dust" ("Notions," 42). True art is "self-sufficient," it "creates its own equilibrium and its own meaning," and can thus be described as "*the most important thing in the world*" ("Notions," 36). Pronouncements such as these, along with the trail of symbolic patterns that critics gradually began to pick out in Robbe-Grillet's novels, ultimately forced Roland Barthes himself to confess that there were in fact "two Robbe-Grilletes": one the "*choseiste*" and material-minded "destroyer of meanings" that Barthes himself had praised (and Bellow, in the "Nobel Speech," criticized), the other a "humanist" playing with sources, archetypes, echoes, and literary traditions.³⁹

Predictably enough, this doubleness led a few of Robbe-Grillet's early readers to sense some kind of self-contradiction at work.⁴⁰ But the two positions are by no means unrelated, conceptually or historically.

Indeed, what Barthes called the “second” Robbe-Grillet is best understood, I would argue, as a response to the “first,” and the entire dynamic expressed in this movement—the rapid shift between radical eliminativism and radical Idealism—is what we might call “natural superhumanism.” Such a stance inevitably means that anthropocentrism is never excommunicated from Robbe-Grillet’s work: boosted by a bit of phenomenology, it is simply displaced from the characters to the author, the maker of a unique “individual world” (“Notions,” 42). And it is through this natural superhumanism that Robbe-Grillet not only magnifies the dualism that Descartes introduced, but also becomes representative of much twentieth-century thought and art. Since the end of the nineteenth century, of course, the prestige of the natural sciences has meant that many of the projects seeking to carve a gulf between the voluntaristic self and causal nature have sought support in a specialized, quasi-scientific terminology. The most famous example of this dynamic—and this will be important when we return in a moment to Bellow—is Freud, who gave technical descriptions of “the unconscious” even while this domain itself operates nonnaturalistically, as a primal force partly or fully (depending upon one’s interpretation) beyond our abilities to predict and control. And one could say similar things about Husserl, whose “eidetic reductions” were supposed to form a technical *Wissenschaft* qualitatively different from the natural sciences. Each of these cases of natural superhumanism are importantly distinct, of course, but the goal in each is roughly the same: to preserve the ghost in the machine, to salvage a space for individual particularity by adopting and adapting the very sorts of causal vocabularies threatening it. Whether the privileged term is “unconscious” or “idea” or something else (e.g., “*élan vital*,” “pure experience,” “*Erlebnis*”), they are each, we might say, looking for ways to update Descartes’s pineal gland, to find a nonnaturalistic “seat of the soul” that physicists and microbiologists and neuroscientists cannot murder to dissect. As the French philosopher Luc Ferry has suggested in a discussion of the avant-garde, an all-too-typical response to “the fractured subject,” the melodramatic decomposition of the ego into a tangle of instincts and drives, has been an equally melodramatic swing towards what he calls “hyperindividualism,” the search for “an infinite liberty” that will retain our sense of purpose and meaning once and for all.⁴¹ Or, to echo Schlossberg, the wise man whom I cite in one of my epigraphs, one might be especially driven to be “more than human” when face-to-face with the threat of being “less than human,” might ignore one’s own sweat and earwax and impending death if one is told that a life, when put under a microscope, is lousy and cheap.⁴² Out of the abyss of the nihilist arise the Promethean longings of the *Übermensch*.⁴³

The Case for Being the Sungo: For and Against

Is the best response to a virulently eliminativist picture of a person a virulently superhuman one? I want to argue here that it is not, and in fact that this is a misguided dichotomy. But in order to spell out why, I need to return to Bellow and take a much more extensive look at *Henderson the Rain King*. If Bellow's "Nobel Lecture," as I have indicated, emphasizes the materialist dimension of modernity at the expense of an equally modern Idealism, *Henderson* is an extraordinary book in part because, as I understand it, it avoids this one-sidedness and dramatizes the full range of natural superhumanism. Not only, that is, does the text vividly display the threats arising from a simplistic form of physicalism, but it even more dramatically entertains the temptation towards the radical Idealism that all too commonly arises in response. Rorty, recall, credits Wittgenstein, Sellars, and Quine with taking us "beyond" empiricism and rationalism—beyond, that is, the misguided hope that knowledge and certainty will be found once and for all either in the world (sensations, impressions, causal processes, etc.) or in the head (in ideas, logic, language, etc.). As I understand it, something identical happens in *Henderson*. The great interest of the novel, as in Bellow's philosophical contemporaries, lies in the way it keenly perceives the paradox of the radicalized modern: from the claim that only "the facts" (objects in the world, atoms in the void) are real, it is not a far leap to the claim that only our "values" (our creations, our words) are real.

Now, given that Bellow is a writer of fiction rather than a philosopher, these problems are played out most significantly at the level of aesthetics—of, that is, his work's style and manner and action. But to set up a discussion of these matters, I want first to look at an important series of dialogues and dramas that take place within the story of *Henderson* itself. The chief way in which the Idealist picture of mind appears in *Henderson* is the arguments made by Dahfu, the Wariri tribal king with whom Henderson has extended philosophical conversations in the latter half of the book. For one thing, Dahfu is critical for Bellow at the practical level of plot. As someone who is partly Westernized, as someone who has traveled widely and lived abroad and studied medicine at a university, Dahfu is both inside and outside the Wariri community, and is thus able to act believably (and believability, as I'll suggest, is a central question in the book) as a guide through some of their different tribal practices. What is most significant about Dahfu, however, emerges in his philosophical reflections on human "self-making." Throughout the narrative, Dahfu seeks to convince Henderson that the state of one's body is directly tied to one's mental state, that a change in one's thoughts or temperament necessitates a change in one's physical constitution. *Our minds make us*, and what we imagine as possibility can be readily transformed into actuality:

"The career of our specie," he said, "is evidence that one imagination after another grows literal. Not dreams. Not mere dreams. I say not mere dreams because they have a way of growing actual. . . . All human accomplishment has this same origin, identically. Imagination is a force of nature. Is it not enough to fill a person full of ecstasy? Imagination, imagination, imagination! It converts to actual. It sustains, it alters, it redeems! . . . What *Homo sapiens* imagines, he may slowly convert himself to." (271)

There is a lot one can say about such a passage, but the first thing to note here is how these remarks about a "force of nature" that "converts to actual" function in Dahfu's mind-body theories. On the one hand, Dahfu seems to count himself a modern materialist, criticizes his tribe for "living in the old universe," and describes himself proudly as a "reader of science and sympathy" (271). The substance of the reading material he gives to Henderson—medical articles and scientific reprints—"had to do with the relation between body and brain" (246), a topic worthy of the eliminative materialists I mentioned earlier. And it is presumably this familiarity with modern physicalism that makes Dahfu seem to Henderson worthy of respect; he does not seem, as Henderson puts it, as blatantly "irrational" as the other traditional tribes (87). On the other hand, however, Dahfu falls squarely within the tradition of natural superhumanism, drawing upon science not out of eliminativist commitments, but rather in order to legitimate some nonnaturalistic or, in Robbe-Grillet's phrase, deeply "anthropological" project. When, for example, Dahfu claims provocatively that "you are in the flesh as your soul is," his choice of words is telling: a wish to retain the concept of "soul" is at least as embarrassing to the reductive materialist as a wish to retain the concept of "spirit," the word Bellow notes in the "Nobel Lecture" is "taboo" to moderns. "Body and face," Dahfu says elsewhere, again making a sudden leap from a naturalistic to a nonnaturalistic vocabulary, "are secretly painted by the spirit of man, working through the cortex and brain ventricles three and four" (268). Indeed, it is significant in this context that, for all his interest in science, Dahfu never gives any indication that he finds far-fetched any of the Wariri traditions—the reincarnation of the king's soul into a maggot, the transfiguration of the maggot into a lion, the heir's hunt for the lion, etc. He simply wants to make them look properly Newtonian.

So we are back to the scientifically charged Prometheanism of Robbe-Grillet: "I do not transcribe, I construct." The particular foundations of Dahfu's natural superhumanism are not found in phenomenology, as they are for Robbe-Grillet's theorizing, but rather in post-Freudian psychoanalysis. As many commentators have noted, Dahfu's character is likely based upon Wilhelm Reich, the radical psycho-revolutionary whom Bellow once

read with great interest, and who blew up to illuminating extremes the mixture of voluntarism and scientism that Freud had endorsed.⁴⁴ Enthralled early on with Freud's technical vocabulary—"blocks," "cathexes," "displacements"—Reich in the postwar years pushed Freud's hypotheses about "sexual energy" to their logical extremes, "discovering" the physical reality of the libido in what he called "orgone energy," which he saw as "*a visible, measurable and applicable energy of a cosmic nature.*"⁴⁵ ("Visible": Reich identified it as green in color.) In human beings, orgone energy was supposed to manifest itself in human plasmatic currents and to propel them to expressive movement, but unfortunately this energy is clogged up by human muscular structure or "armor," which, in Reich's terms, develops as a "block against the breakthrough of emotions and organ sensations."⁴⁶ Only with orgone therapy could this muscular armor be broken down and one's "orgasmic potency" fulfilled. Artists in particular held a key place in Reich's scheme, their "genital character" providing the best evidence for the occult forces he describes: "That which is 'natural' in man, which makes him one with the cosmos, has found its genuine expression in the arts, particularly in music and painting."⁴⁷

It is no surprise, given such claims, to see how popular Reich became among writers of the day.⁴⁸ The particular sources for Dahfu, however, are ultimately less important than the fact that they enact the same dynamic found in Robbe-Grillet, masking what Ferry would call a "hyper-individualism" through appeals to quasi-materialistic entities and forces. What readers have long seen as the most central scenes in the book—the scenes in the den with Atti the lion—revolve around a struggle to achieve what Dahfu calls the "utterly dynamic" "transformation of human materials" (236). "I intend to loosen you up," Dahfu tells Henderson, "because you are so contracted. . . . This makes you extremely contracted and self-recoiled" (264). The goal of the efforts to get Henderson to roar, breathe, and walk on all fours like a lion is to "break down" the perceived gaps between "inside" and "outside." Only in uncoiling the stuff *inside*, what Dahfu calls (in a classic black box) "the flow of vital energies" (268), can a person act on the *outside* with "high conduct." Only with the release of (another black box) "vehement forces" (271) can new body-personality types emerge, the "sweet cheeks and noble demeanors" overcome "the fighting Lazaruses" and "mad laughers" (269). Only when Henderson can "be the beast," "snarl greatly," and "feel the lion" will he learn to "experience with deliberate luxury" (260).

From Dahfu's argument about the purely mental constitution of the body, at least one major corollary follows, and this concerns the conflation of metaphoric and literal. "Now look, Mr. Henderson," says Dahfu at the beginning of their tutoring with Atti, "I wish you to picture that you are a lion. A literal lion" (267). This is an important demand when one recalls

one of the things that drives Henderson to Africa in the first place: "there was a disturbance in my heart, a voice that spoke there and said *I want, I want, I want!* It happened every afternoon, and when I tried to suppress it it got even stronger. It only said one thing, *I want, I want!*" (24). Henderson's "inner voice," we might say, expresses a longing to literalize one's metaphors, make public what is idiosyncratic and original, and the great attraction of Dahfu's demand that he "picture" being a lion is that Henderson's eccentric imaginings can finally be made part of the public domain, there for anyone with whom one comes into contact. Dahfu holds out the hope, that is, of actualizing (making real, common) what is originally only possible (private, singular), and thus generating, so to speak, an unforeseen explosion in the human protoplasm. In conflating the mental and the material, Dahfu in fact is only updating what is a common way of speaking in his tribe. When appointed Rain King, or Sungo, of the Wariri tribe, Henderson sees himself—following a long line of secular anthropologists "explaining" African religious practices⁴⁹—"dressed up as the Rain King." As Dahfu makes clear, however, the relation between Henderson and his Rain King garb is not one of mere play or possibility or metaphor, but of actuality and literalness. "It is not merely dress" he tells Henderson. "You are the Sungo. It is literal, Mr. Henderson" (211). For Robbe-Grillet in his expressivist mode, the fantasy seagulls could be "more real" than the ones he sees before his eyes, "more real *because* they were now imaginary." Similarly, for Dahfu, imagining oneself as a lion or being the Sungo is not a differentiated activity, detached from the rest of one's existence. One is transformed; metaphorical entities become "real," are built into the world.

Now, Henderson is clearly attracted to Dahfu's visions: he is "swayed," "thrilled" by the King's promise of a "nobility" that is not only unassailable by scientific materialism, but seems actually somehow *grounded upon* scientific materialism. And not without reason. For the same reason that Bellow himself found in Reich (at least initially) a liberation from WASPish social and sexual convention,⁵⁰ Henderson finds in Dahfu's theories an affirmation of human power, assurance that human beings are in some dark, uncertain way more than "junk." As Marcus Klein observed, the "exercise of personality is everywhere in Bellow's world an act of courage." But as Klein also noted, "the rocks upon which simple exulting personality would founder" were also discovered from the start of Bellow's career.⁵¹ While Mailer—not only the arch-Hipster, but also the arch-Reichian—could see in Dahfu "a profoundly sophisticated man with a deep acceptance of magic, an intellectual who believes that civilization can be saved only by a voyage back to the primitive,"⁵² Henderson himself ultimately has grave misgivings.

These misgivings can be clarified by retracing the points enumerated in my outline of Dahfu's position. First and most generally, with regard to Dahfu's mind-body theories, it is clear that Henderson remains far less sanguine about the mind's ability to transform "human material." Whereas Dahfu sees science buttressing his vitalistic visions, Henderson, after being in the lion's den with Dahfu, admits that he "didn't have full confidence in the king's science":

Down there in the den, while I went through the utmost hell, he would idle around, calm, easy, and almost languid. . . . Sometimes as we lay on the trestle after my exercises, all three of us together, he would say, "It is very restful here. Why, I am floating. You must give yourself a chance. You must try. . . ." But I had almost blacked out, before, and I was not prepared to start floating. (273)

Dahfu's claim to be "floating" here is emblematic of his underlying anti-physicalism, and Henderson's resistance is emblematic of his own more consistently physicalist stance, his judgment that, to recall a phrase cited earlier, "the physical is all there and it belongs to science": "True, inside, my heart ran with human feeling, but externally, in the rind if you like, I showed all the strange abuses and malformations of a lifetime" (273). In the end, he has to conclude that Dahfu's "enthusiasms and visions swept him far out" (235).

The most conspicuous evidence of how Dahfu "floats" and is "swept far out" by his "enthusiasms and visions" comes in his death. In accordance with the tribal custom, Dahfu goes out to capture his father, the old king Gmilo, now supposedly in the form of a lion. But as with the Arnewi who refuse to touch the frogs in the cistern, the adherence to certain beliefs—those ignoring the causal and material make-up of the physical world—jeopardizes the believer's ability to cope with the environment. The lion in the scene is violent and uncontrollable, and in Henderson's eyes absolutely "real":

I then tried to tell myself because of the clearness of those enraged eyes that only visions ever got to be so hyperactual. But it was no vision. The snarling of this animal was indeed the voice of death. And I thought how I had boasted to my dear Lily how I loved reality. "I love it more than you do," I had said. But oh, unreality! Unreality, unreality! That has been my scheme for a troubled eternal life. But now I was blasted away from this practice by the throat of the lion. His voice was like a blow at the back of my head. (307)

The “blow” described here should, I think, be read as a cousin to the “blow” Henderson receives from the piece of wood at the beginning of the book, and an indication of how this vision of death is a far greater “reality” than any “force of imagination” Dahfu can conjure. The passage suggests the ways in which Dahfu in his den had overlooked what Henderson calls the untamable, “more cruel aspect of the lion” (316), had overlooked that Atti is a *pet*, a domesticated creature who next to the raging lion in the field was “no bigger than a lynx” (307). Dahfu, that is, studies only one side of the lion’s nature—its elegant manners, its poise, and its self-assured strength—and succumbs to the very fault that Philip Rieff once ascribed to Wilhelm Reich: he overlooks “the cruel imbecilities of nature.”⁵³ Death in Henderson’s description of the lion’s attack is a piece of reality against which nobody can invent any solution, and while imagination may be, as Dahfu calls it, “a force of nature,” the lion here is a far more uncontroversial and immediately impinging “force.” If, that is, one needs special training in an ancient tribal ritual to describe “imagination” as a “force of nature” that “converts to actual,” then considerably less is required to recognize a ferocious lion as a threat to one’s mortal life. Next to the quite undeniable forces represented by the lion, those of the imagination look flimsy, suspiciously like mere human projections. One could of course go a step further here and appeal—as Dahfu himself does—to the idea of immortality, could suggest that death to the materialist is a kind of birth for the nonmaterialist, the final casting aside of this body in favor of another. But this is bound to seem a dead end for someone as naturalistically minded as Henderson, for whom Dahfu is simply neglecting causal pressures and natural imbecilities that are difficult for the mind to evade or redescribe—objects like, say, the bacteria who will eat up one’s body upon death. The mind and its purposes do not emerge from an ether world, but from embodied creatures, creatures forever residing within a world of causes.

And this intuition that Dahfu’s mind-body theories “swept him far out” ultimately leads Henderson to question the understanding of metaphor that I identified above as a corollary to Dahfu’s position. His wariness is most noticeable near the end of the book, as he and his guide Romilayu escape their imprisonment after Dahfu’s death. “Good-by, King,” Henderson says to the lion cub, addressing him as the Wariri would have seen him—as the embodiment of the next king, a form ultimately of Dahfu himself. But Henderson immediately reverses himself. Not only does he decide to bring the cub along, but he also, and more significantly, de-poeticizes his description of him: “This animal is coming with us.” This shift from “King” to “animal” is reiterated when, on the plane back to New York, Henderson describes the cub to the curious flight attendant not as his friend, or even “an enigmatic form of that friend,” but

as something altogether more indirect: "a souvenir of a friend" (333). Moments later an analogous linguistic deflation appears even more explicitly, as Henderson looks out over the clouds: "I couldn't get enough of the water, and of these upside-down sierras of the clouds. Like courts of eternal heaven. (Only they aren't eternal, that's the whole thing; they are seen once and never seen again, being figures and not abiding realities; Dahfu will never be seen again, and presently I will never be seen again . . .)" (333). The distinction here between "figures" and "abiding realities" registers Henderson's suspicions towards Dahfu's expressivist theories of metaphor, and hence, more generally, towards his analogous claim that "a man is really the artist of himself" (268).

Folk Realism and Solidarity

The sketch I have been giving here of *Henderson the Rain King* has presented the text as a kind of philosophical dialogue, with Dahfu representing the voice of Robbe-Grillet-like Idealism and Henderson that of Montaignian skepticism, self-conscious but wary of self-celebration. "Dialogic" is an overused term today, but if it is taken to mean a text with various voices representing positions in a moral or metaphysical argument, then Bellow's book would surely qualify. As one commentator recently noted, Bellow's characters, even the most desperate and damaged by life, are always astonishingly articulate in their self-explanations, and there is no denying Bellow's admiration for that alleged master of polyphony, Dostoevsky.⁵⁴ Describing *Henderson* as a drama of dialogic voices is important because it underlines for us just how central certain philosophical debates are in Bellow's thinking. If dialogic, however, Bellow's books are ultimately not dialogues, but rather what we normally think of as stories, and emphasizing the different "positions" in the book potentially makes it look more schematic than it actually is. "Every time I worked on my thesis," Bellow said once in explaining why he dropped out of graduate school, "it turned out to be a story."⁵⁵ Why he rejected theses in favor of stories, what kind of stories he took to writing, what can be said to emerge from this story-writing—thinking about these aesthetic questions will allow us not only to round out the contrast I have been tracking between Bellow and Robbe-Grillet, but also, and more broadly, allow us to return to my original questions about mind, ethics, and post-war literary and philosophical history.

The matter is particularly interesting in the case of *Henderson the Rain King*, a book readers have long seen as the most experimental in Bellow's oeuvre. At the level of style, Bellow is here at his most freewheeling; the passages I have quoted are enough to get a sense of how the chaos of Henderson's mind bestows a manic touch to Bellow's characteristic

fusion of the vernacular and the highbrow. Even more obviously experimental is what might be called the ontological level of the text, the kinds of entities it treats as real and what it treats as merely fictive. Henderson himself might be singled out as a semi-mythic figure, an unruly mangiant, but clearly the most daring aspect of the novel is the way the scenes with Dahfu tinker with the assumptions of scientific materialism. Indeed, if Bellow has always had affinities with the American Romantic tradition (Moses Herzog is, recall, a scholar of Romanticism), they are nowhere more evident than in *Henderson*. In *Moby Dick* we are led to believe that the "spirit spouts" just *might* exist alongside the real ones; in *The Scarlet Letter* the letter A just *might* have appeared in the night sky before Dimmesdale; and in *Henderson* Dahfu's vitalistic visions look sometimes like they just *might* turn out to be true. Contextualizing Bellow forwards rather than backwards, an analogous description would say his book anticipates postmodernism, its giddiness a rejection of what Bellow has dismissed as the plaintive "*Waste Land* outlook,"⁵⁶ its glimpses of irrealism and parody reminiscent of Nabokov. This kind of argument would be reinforced by noting that no less an avant-gardiste than John Hawkes, in an interview of the early 1970s, once called *Henderson* "Bellow's finest work," or that some readers have seen Henderson himself as a character worthy of John Barth.⁵⁷ Considered in terms of its experiments with style and ontology and character, *Henderson the Rain King* might be said to recall Robbe-Grillet's ideal of a text that resolutely "renounces used-up formulas" and "prefabricated schemes," that "invents quite freely, without a model."

And yet this description seems strained, and forgets that Bellow has just as often expressed his admiration for Dreiser and (Robbe-Grillet's chosen nemesis) Balzac. It is important, that is, to note where the funhouse experiments of *Henderson* finally come to an end. At the level of prose, Bellow's narrator never "renounces" any and all "prefabricated schemes" of ordinary grammar: he never breaks into fragments or resorts to foreign languages, he usually includes intelligible transitions between sentences and paragraphs, and the preference throughout is for colloquialism over obscurantism. Analogously, at what I'm calling the ontological level of the text, Dahfu's theories never stop seeming a little fantastical, and the supernatural spirits of the African tribes are never presented as anything more than mere superstitions. There is little sense, that is, that the text as a whole ever wishes to undermine completely either Henderson's basic causal, physicalist understanding of the world or the ordinary terms we use to describe it. Earthly "facts" of a disenchanted world have long been the bread and butter of the novel as a genre, and this is a tradition that Bellow has embraced. In using the skeptical Henderson as his narrator, rather than the fantasist Dahfu, Bellow can endorse a basically physicalist

vocabulary, a vocabulary with as little room for people to become lions as for wizards to cast spells. It is this underlying physicalism that explains why no sudden and dramatic revolution in consciousness—no Uncaused Cause, we might say—is depicted in the text. As I noted above, all the signs of spiritual “transformation” in Henderson are deeply qualified: his effusive letter to Lily is written when he is drunk, part of it is lost by Romilayu in transit, and, as Philip Roth once put it, Henderson winds up a happy man—“where?”—in the Arctic.⁵⁸ All of which is to say that Bellow’s stylistic and formal choices suggest a certain deep skepticism towards a longing to invent out of thin air or, as Robbe-Grillet would have it, “quite freely, without a model.” Indeed, Dahfu himself might be considered a kind of emissary sent from Robbe-Grillet’s theoretical essays into Bellow’s fictional world, an ambassador arriving to promote expressivist visions, creations (to recall Robbe-Grillet’s remarks about the *nouveau romancier*) “starting from nothing, from the dust.”

As critics have long noted, then, Bellow is clearly a kind of realist. “Realism,” however, is a notoriously murky term, so it is important to get clear about what we mean by using it in relation to Bellow. In using “realism” here, I do not mean to describe Bellow’s work as an example of what Hilary Putnam, in a famous expression, has criticized as “metaphysical realism.” By this Putnam is referring to the belief (one he himself once shared) that truth is a matter of transparent correspondence to mind-independent things, that our words aim to cut the world at its “natural” joints, that, with the proper physics, we could someday give a God’s-Eye view of the universe and a final inventory of the Furniture of the World.⁵⁹ It is roughly this version of “realism,” I would suggest, that has been the target of various attacks by literary theorists from the Frankfurt School to deconstructionists, attacks that identify realism as politically reactionary, or metaphysically naive, or both.⁶⁰ Whether or not these criticisms are true of other “realistic” novels, however, there is little reason to think that this metaphysical realism is in fact the kind that informs Bellow’s novels. There is little evidence, that is, that Bellow aspires to a God’s-eye view of the physical world, investigating it in the spirit of the Logical Positivist or the Zolaesque naturalist for “the way things really are” (whatever this would mean). Rather, I would argue that the “realism” of Bellow’s novels emerges from his careful attention to the habits of our folk psychology and, analogously, our folk physics.⁶¹ The concern of his novels is with the kinds of languages, concepts, beliefs, and social practices by which we make sense of the world, especially ourselves and each other. They investigate chiefly what goes on among *us*, as we try to make sense of that world. As the critic James Wood has noted, for example, Bellow’s work is “densely ‘realistic,’” but “it is hard to find in it any of the conventions of realism”: his words are typically “filtered through a remembering mind,” making his reports of the world something “elegaic,

a branch of consciousness."⁶² And one could point to other characteristics of Bellow's work to make a similar point—his typical recourse to some kind of first-person narration, for example, or his talent for philosophical dialogue, or his penchant for the picaresque. All of which is to say that novels such as *Henderson the Rain King* are very far indeed from unornamented biological or sociological analyses, and suggest a goal somewhat other than "meta-physical realism."

Indeed, to introduce a term of art, we might even call Bellow's characteristic mode *folk realism*, to indicate the extent to which his work attends to our folk psychology and folk physics, to the kinds of mental habits that enable people to interact with, make sense of, learn from, predict, and cope with the world, both with each other and with their physical environment. A negative way of unpacking this statement would be to continue my contrast with Robbe-Grillet. After all, it is precisely the lack of attention to our ordinary sense-making habits that makes *La jalousie* so striking. But it is also what makes his narrator unequivocally insane—as Robbe-Grillet himself admits. All his narrators are, to recall his description, "always engaged . . . in an emotional adventure of the most obsessive kind, to the point of often distorting his vision and of producing imaginings close to delirium." Many readers have followed Robbe-Grillet's appraisal in even more explicitly clinical terms, describing his narrators as "sado-masochistic,"⁶³ "obsessional,"⁶⁴ "schizoid," with "no particular ties, no long-term purpose, no specific beliefs," "outside the concrete forms of his society, and at the same time, outside concrete history."⁶⁵ Such personalities are understandably important for an author who falls so squarely into the tradition of what I have called natural superhumanism. For madness can, as it has since the Romantics, represent a challenge to simplistic causal accounts of a person, can seem evidence for occult forces only dimly discernible to a reductively materialist eye. Seeking to reject all "prefabricated schemes people are used to" and a longing for "his own way of writing," Robbe-Grillet requires an extraordinary personality to act as the speaker of his text, one who is unique, singular, profoundly autonomous, one who conceives the world in an entirely different way than others.

But, romanticisms aside, it is not self-evident why such a personality should be able to tell us more than any other about what is "really real," both about minds and the world. To be sure, one might balk at the clinical descriptions given of Robbe-Grillet's narrators and regard judgments like "sado-masochistic" or "schizoid" as a mere disciplinary effect of power.⁶⁶ But presumably nobody would deny that these narrators are in *some* way unusual or, analogously, that uninitiated readers will find the novels themselves to be in *some* way jarringly strange. To agree to this is merely to say that our folk psychology is not accustomed to dealing with the kind

of unfamiliar personalities and writing that Robbe-Grillet gives us: if we *did* encounter Robbe-Grillet's kinds of persons and language everyday, if our folk psychology *were* well-equipped to cope with them, then the novels would not strike us as so strangely experimental. But it is a long leap from this uncontroversial remark about the strangeness of Robbe-Grillet's stories and characters to the claim that, as Robbe-Grillet suggests, they reveal something definitive and universal about us as human beings, or that they arose, as he also suggests, from some historical and philosophical necessity. Indeed, the same could be said, *mutatis mutandis*, about any other quasi-prophetic picture of mind that privileges madness, the endless indeterminacy of meaning, the deep senselessness of the world, or the fragmentation of the subject as *the* central explanatory concepts for human behavior. Such claims, whether from Robbe-Grillet or elsewhere, are not only dogmatic vestiges of Romanticism, but are also deeply dependent, for their simple intelligibility, on the many ways we in fact do—I include in this “we” anyone reading these sentences now—manage to make sense: manage, that is, to make ourselves comprehensible, to predict and explain the behavior of others, to understand sentences, to see patterns, to cope with changing environments, and to carry out all those capacities that allow us, in Wittgenstein's deliberately prosaic phrase, to “go on.” Indeed, to many readers Robbe-Grillet's texts are bound to seem at best merely a bunch of idiosyncratic fantasies, more avant-garde ramblings. At worst they might even appear the ravings of a totalitarian obsessive, an arrogant set of claims about the human invention of reality.⁶⁷

By contrast, what I am calling Bellow's folk-realistic stance remains largely agnostic about ontology, both of the mind and of the world, and can attend, pragmatically, to how we manage to make any sense of—predict, interact with, learn from, cope with, etc.—ourselves and others. And in the case of Bellow, I would argue, an attention to such habits entails a significant shift away from the atomistic and Idealist aspirations expressed by Robbe-Grillet. This is manifested in at least a couple of different ways. For one thing, Bellow's novels rarely involve the kind of dramatic disconnection and incoherence—inexplicable time shifts, non-causal connectives, fragmented plot lines, obsessive repetitions—that fill the work not only of Robbe-Grillet, but also of the modernists working before Bellow and postmodernists working after. To be sure, as I have implied in my remarks on memory, *Henderson* and other Bellow novels are full of what a narratologist would call anachronies, and these temporal shifts convey the impression of a mind thrust precariously back on its own devices, without a foreordained teleology. But Bellow's work also suggests an awareness that human flourishing, indeed simple biological survival, depends upon how one overcomes such local dislocations and

builds one's life into some kind of more or less coherent unity. When strange things happen to me, when unexpected events befall me, I come to understand them by weaving them into the ongoing story of myself as a whole. And "whole" here means the whole of a lifetime, or part of a lifetime, not just a few minutes or hours. So it is no surprise to see that the series of actions that Bellow's heroes struggle to make into a coherent narrative typically occupy not just a few unusually intense hours or days, but months or even years. Again, systematic teleologies—the sort of life-plans that would say when in one's life to do one thing and when another, the sort of preestablished scripts evident in the African tribes of *Henderson*—are unavailable here. But the impossibility of final systems does not mean we can achieve a view from which to say that everything, "deep down," is "actually" chaos, sheer flux. It simply means any given telos is fallible, that no way of joining a past and present and future "I" is a priori certain, that the ways of maintaining a roughly unified identity over time must be sensitive to particular situations, flexible because non-algorithmic. One might argue that the final chapters of *Henderson the Rain King*, where Henderson successfully improvises an escape from the Wariri tribe, exhibit the rough-and-ready kind of practical reasoning that becomes necessary in lieu of larger, overarching structures of belief. As I've suggested, "transformation" may be too strong a term to describe Henderson's story. But "regeneration," with its connotations of reviving and renewing materials that are previously given, seems altogether suitable.⁶⁸

Let us call this the temporal dimension of Bellow's folk realism, the fact that one major criterion for our concept of personal identity is the ability to pick out a character as it emerges over time. My selfhood and all that is attached to it, including all my responsibilities, would be lost should I not be able to give an intelligible account of how I got from yesterday to today. More than that, however, I am not the only one able to give such an account of my life. For just as a description of a person as a collection of molecules will not help us in efficiently predicting and responding to his or her actions, it would also be difficult to make sense of persons if we pictured them as utterly free-standing egos, self-constituting loci of thought and will, "outside the concrete forms of his society, and at the same time, outside concrete history." Let us call this the public dimension of Bellow's folk realism. In ascribing folk-psychological concepts to persons, we are ascribing not only a range of mentalistic concepts, but also a personal history of some sort, some kind of relation to a family and a species, and some background in a given social context. As Dennett puts it, when you address me, you are addressing not just the entity *I* have constituted, but also what over the years has been constituted by my parents and siblings and friends, among others.⁶⁹ Were the endorsement of and commitment to these kinds of interpersonal ascriptions to break down completely, whether forgotten or

rejected, a person might begin to look to others—to us—curiously empty, as with *La jalousie*, or perhaps wildly self-deceptive, as in the case of Dahfu, fatally “swept far out” by “enthusiasms and visions.” More generously understood, such a being might appear to us as a prophet, supernatural figure, or god. The line between these different interpretations is thin, but the instructive point in each case is the same. If the stability and usefulness of our folk psychology depends upon the web of beliefs we accrue and revise over the course of a life, surely some of the most stable and least-easily-revised beliefs would be those that say persons act in ways typical of other mortal, non-omniscient, non-soothsaying *Homo sapiens*. Anyone who countermanded these truisms would be on the verge of something we currently do not refer to as a person. If, despite the eliminativist, it is true that we really *do* ascribe beliefs and intentions to persons, it is also true, despite the atomistic expressivist, that the beliefs and intentions we ascribe are those befitting what seem to us a fragile, dependent, finite creature embedded in the concepts of a particular culture.⁷⁰

One final point will allow me to conclude my description of Bellow’s distance from the Idealist tradition, and that concerns the kinds of characters that his folk-realistic aesthetic leads him to describe. Unlike a great many post-Romantic writers, including Robbe-Grillet, Bellow has consistently eschewed not only the psychotic and the deity, but the artist as well. Instead, as Daniel Fuchs has noted, Bellow’s heroes tend to be cast as *citizens*.⁷¹ They are recognizable first and foremost not as extraordinary minds that allow them to transcend their time and place, but as active participants in our shared social world. To be sure, Babbitts earn little sympathy in Bellow’s fiction, and his main characters are often brilliantly inventive minds. To recall one Dubliner’s assessment of Leopold Bloom, another citizen-hero, there is “a touch of the poet” about most of his heroes. As also with Bloom, however, this “touch” is never directly from the hand of God. Artists who, like Robbe-Grillet, “construct” when others merely “transcribe,” who seek, like Dahfu, to sustain and alter and redeem, are rarely the sole focus, and rarer still do they receive our total sympathy. For all their inventiveness, Bellow’s heroes are not poets or prophets or madmen, but biographers and historians and scholars who reject the palaces of art in favor of, as Fuchs puts it, “the wildness of current history, the citizen’s arena.” Such heroes have obviously led Bellow to write loose, baggy monsters rather than refined post-Flaubertian gems, and this habit has cost him a certain amount of attention among academics, readers who often prefer to put their technical training to use on sexier, knottier, more densely allusive texts. But for whatever biographical reason—his being the grandson of a Jewish rabbi, his training in the social sciences, his resistance to the highbrow hyper-erudite world of the East Coast literary establishment—Bellow has always resisted venerating or

divinizing the poet-maker. When Abe Ravelstein complains that Chick, his novelist friend and biographer-to-be, has absorbed the infantilizing modern obsession with “distinctness of observation,” that he forgets that the life of the *polis* “had first claim on our attention,” Chick’s laconic response says much about Bellow’s own aesthetic project: “His severity did me good.”⁷²

I have taken the liberty in these last few pages to use the pronouns “we” and “us,” and this is not entirely accidental. For just as in the debates between King Dahfu and Henderson, what is at stake in Bellow’s work are not only questions about the role art actually plays in our thinking, but also moral questions about how to conceive of our personhood generally. Is art the making of worlds, starting, in Robbe-Grillet’s words, “from nothing, from the dust”? Is it true, in Dahfu’s words, that “man is really the artist of himself”? And is the close link between personhood and mindedness evidence that we are, each of us, in some deep sense “self-makers”? In his thorough-going materialism, in his attention to our folk psychology and folk physics, in his choice of characters, Bellow ultimately suggests, like the postpositivist philosophers with whom I began, that the answer should be no. He answers this way not out of some puritanical or Platonic hostility; he is, just like Robbe-Grillet, a novelist himself, and his negative answer is always qualified. In his hands, however, art becomes less a celebration of the artist’s singularity and genius than a sensitive display of the common words we lean upon everyday. And in bringing us, in Wittgenstein’s terms, “back to the rough ground” of our messy everyday practices, to the kind of agreements constituting our “form of life,” he points the way, much like Wittgenstein himself, towards a substantially different picture of a person than that given to us by the various strands of modernity: one creative yet dependent upon the histories around it; one inventive yet grateful for the words that are given to us. Foregrounding human finitude, Bellow highlights space for mutuality. Setting limits to the prophet, to the poet, to the artist, he begins to make room for solidarity.

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NOTES

1. See Rorty’s introduction to Sellars’s *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), esp. 1–3. One should note here that Rorty might also have mentioned other, chiefly British figures whose work in the late 1940s and 1950s was important to the turn he describes, figures such as Ryle, Austin, Anscombe, Strawson, and Winch.

2. Sellars and Quine are major players in Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). Wittgenstein is invoked in that text as a model of "edifying" philosophy, and later plays an important role in, among other places, *Irony, Contingency, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

3. See, e.g., McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Brandom, *Making It Explicit* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) and *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Putnam, *Realism With a Human Face*, ed. James Conant (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Dennett, *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987) and *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991).

4. See, e.g., Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Baier, *Postures of the Mind* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985); Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), *Return to Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

5. Davidson, Rorty, and Dennett, for example, have all questioned what they see as Quine's residual empiricism; Taylor has tried to accuse Davidson of a similar fault; McDowell's *Mind and World* begins as a criticism of Davidson; Rorty has been called a relativist by Putnam, and has accused Dennett of latent scientism; Dennett has cited Taylor as a major influence, but shown little concern for Taylor's moral questions; and so on.

6. The phrase "individualist-subjective" is taken from Christopher Gill, *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy: The Self in Dialogue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), esp. 1–17.

7. For Rorty's distinction between philosophy and politics, and the analogous one between public and private, see especially *Irony, Contingency, and Solidarity*.

8. See my "Resenting the Novel: Remarks on the Foundations of Cultural Studies" (forthcoming). Quine's handy distinction is made in "Quine Speaks His Mind," in *Key Philosophers in Conversation: The Cogito Interviews*, ed. Andrew Pyle (London: Routledge, 1999), 22.

9. *It All Adds Up* (New York: Penguin, 1995), 106.

10. For a sense of Sartre's influence on American thought, see, e.g., Ann Fulton, *Apostles of Sartre: Existentialism in America, 1945–1963* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999).

11. Norman Mailer, "The White Negro," in *Advertisements for Myself* (1959; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 339, 354.

12. See his *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), esp. ch. 2.

13. *After Alienation: American Novels in Mid-Century* (New York: World Publishing, 1964).

14. Though Rorty, Toulmin, and Putnam have written on ethics, Taylor and Baier are the most important exceptions to this generalization about philosophers of mind. See Taylor's *Sources* as well as "Overcoming Epistemology," in *Philosophical Arguments*, 1–19; and part two of Baier's *Postures*.

15. *Ravelstein* (New York: Viking, 2000), 132.
16. *Pragmatism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 21.
17. On the idea of folk psychology, see Dennett, *Intentional Stance*; John D. Greenwood, ed., *The Future of Folk Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). An ongoing debate in philosophy of mind is whether or not the folk psychological concepts we ascribe to human beings should be considered "original" or "intrinsic," in contrast to the "secondary" or "derived" intention of computers, vending machines, and other entities displaying qualities of mindedness. But I shall be bracketing off these questions in the present context.
18. Alain Robbe-Grillet, *La jalousie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1957), 51–52. For Robbe-Grillet's background in agronomy and statistics, see Ben Stoltzfus, *Alain Robbe-Grillet: Life, Work, and Criticism* (Frederickton, Nebraska: York Press, 1987), 9.
19. "Littérature objective Alain Robbe-Grillet," *Critique*, 86–87 (July–August 1954), 590–91. Henceforth cited parenthetically by page number. This essay is reprinted in *Essais critiques* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964), 29–40.
20. "Une voie pour le roman futur," in *Pour un nouveau roman* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1963), 18. Henceforth cited parenthetically as "Futur."
21. "Sur quelques notions périmées," in *Pour un nouveau roman*, 29. Henceforth "Notions."
22. "Nature, Humanisme, Tragédie," in *Pour un nouveau roman*, 53. Henceforth "Nature."
23. *Intentional Stance*, 8.
24. B. F. Skinner, *Science and Human Behaviour* (New York: Macmillan, 1953).
25. See, e.g., Paul Churchland, *A Neurocomputational Perspective: The Nature of Mind and the Structure of Science* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).
26. The similarities between the "end of man" talk in continental thought and analytic philosophy is oddly unappreciated. For some passing reflection on this topic, see Richard Eldridge's editorial introduction to *Beyond Representation: Philosophy and Poetic Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Owen Flanagan, *Self-Expressions: Mind, Morals, and the Meaning of Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6–7.
27. On the logical difficulties of eliminativism, see especially Sellars's *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*.
28. Saul Bellow, *Henderson the Rain King* (1959; New York: Penguin, 1986), 22–23. Henceforth cited parenthetically by page number in the text.
29. On Bellow's training in the social sciences, see James Atlas, *Bellow: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 2000), 48–57.
30. Cf. Raymond Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, vol. 2, trans. Richard Howard and Helen Weaver (New York: Basic Books, 1967), 193.
31. The significance of Henderson being the first non-Jewish hero in Bellow's work is made nicely by Bruce Michelson, "The Idea of Henderson," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 27 (1981), 314. Ted Billy, in "The Road to Excess: Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King*," *Saul Bellow Journal* 3.1 (Fall 1983), 8–17, has read the repeated phrase *I want, I want* as an allusion to Blake. Whether or not this specific point is true, Henderson's relation to the Romantic tradition is relatively clear.
32. "Nobel Lecture," in *It All Adds Up* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1994), 91. Henceforth cited parenthetically as "Nobel."

33. See the title essay of Murdoch's *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Peter Conradi (New York: Penguin, 1997), 221–34. For a good discussion of how the religious interests always expressed in Bellow become more pronounced after *Mr. Sammler's Planet* in 1970, see Ellen Pifer's *Saul Bellow Against the Grain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

34. Of the thinkers I've referred to, only Putnam and Taylor have, to my knowledge, described themselves as religious believers (the former is a practicing Jew, the latter a practicing Catholic).

35. *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

36. "Nouveau Roman, homme nouveau," in *Pour un nouveau Roman*, 117–18.

37. "Du réalisme à la réalité," in *Pour un nouveau roman*, 139. Henceforth "Réalisme." For recent assessments of Robbe-Grillet's readings in phenomenology, see Nelly Wolf, *Une Littérature Sans Histoire: Essai sur le nouveau roman* (Geneva: Droz, 1995), 33–36; Marjorie H. Hellerstein, *Inventing the Real World: The Art of Alain Robbe-Grillet* (London: Associated University Presses, 1998), 10–12; Gerald Prince, "The Nouveau Roman," in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Holier et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 989; Stolfus, *Alain Robbe-Grillet*, 11.

38. Hellerstein, *Inventing the Real World*.

39. See the "Forward" to Bruce Morrissette's *The Novels of Alain Robbe-Grillet* (1963; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971).

40. See, for example, Bernard Dort, "Des Romains 'innocents'?" *Esprit* 26.2 (1958): 100–110; J. M. Cocking, "The 'Nouveau Roman' in France," *Essays in French Literature* 2 (1965): 1–14; John Updike, "Grove Is My Press, Avant My Garde," *New Yorker* 43.37 (November 4, 1967), 223–28.

41. Ferry, *Homo Aestheticus: L'Invention de goût à l'âge démocratique* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), ch. 5.

42. Bellow, *The Victim* (1947; New York: Penguin, 1996), 120.

43. With more space one could trace the curious mixture of physicalism and anti-physicalism in other modern experimentalists. A particularly interesting comparison would be with Beckett, a figure often invoked in early discussions of Robbe-Grillet. As any theater or film director who has struggled with the prickly Beckett estate can attest, Beckett insisted strenuously on exact rendering of his works and vigilantly guarded over any and all aspects of their staging and performance. This, ironically, for plays obsessed with meaninglessness, fragmentation, contingency, and the impossibility of human control.

44. On Bellow's interest in Reich, see Atlas, *Bellow*, 166 ff.; Hal Cohen, "A Secret History of the Sexual Revolution: The Repression of Wilhelm Reich," *Lingua Franca* (March 1999), 30–31; Daniel Fuchs, *Saul Bellow: Vision and Revision* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1984), 115–16; Eusebio L. Rodrigues, "Reichianism in *Henderson the Rain King*," *Criticism* 15 (1973): 212–33. Fuchs, 111 ff., has suggested that Paul Schilder, another radical, post-Freudian therapist-thinker should be seen as a model for Dahfu, as well.

45. *Character Analysis* (3rd ed.; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971), 341.

46. *Selected Writings: An Introduction to Orgonomy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), 10.

47. On Reich, see Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), ch. 6; and Paul Robinson, *The Freudian Left* (New York: Oxford

University Press, 1969), ch. 1. Interest in Reich's work has petered out since his death, but it is worth noting that it has not gone away entirely: the therapeutic movement known as "bioenergetics" was developed by some followers of Reich and still claims many adherents.

48. See Cohen, "A Secret History," 30 ff., for a summary of Reich's influence on Mailer, Ginsburg, Burroughs, Bowles, and others. One might note, too, that Reichian meditations (ironized) float through the mind of Moses Herzog as well: "The erotic must be admitted its rightful place, at last, in an emancipated society which understands the relation of sexual repression to sickness, war, property, money, totalitarianism. Why, to get laid is actually socially constructive and useful, an act of citizenship." See *Herzog* (New York: Viking Press, 1964), 166.

49. On this point, see Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), ch. 6.

50. A liberation he had earlier found in studying anthropology: "Anthropology students were the farthest out there in the 1930s. . . . Radicalism was implied by the study of anthropology, especially sexual radicalism—the study of the sexual life of savages was gratifying to radicals. . . . It gave young Jews a greater sense of freedom from the surrounding restrictions." See Gloria L. Cronin and Ben Siegel, *Conversations With Saul Bellow* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1994), 28.

51. *After Alienation*, 62, 60.

52. *Cannibals and Christians* (New York: Dell, 1966), 127.

53. Rieff, *Triumph*, 159.

54. Adam Phillips, "Bellow and Ravelstein," *Raritan* 20 (2000), 2. On Bellow's relation to Dostoevsky, see Fuchs, *Saul Bellow*, ch. 2. I am aware here that the long-standing dichotomy between the "monological" Tolstoy and "dialogic" Dostoevsky has come under pressure by various Bakhtinian scholars, and that the latter's dialogic virtues have as a result come to seem less paradigmatic. But I ignore this debate as secondary.

55. Cronin and Siegel, eds., *Conversations*, 4.

56. Cronin and Siegel, eds., *Conversations*, 202.

57. Hawkes's assessment is from *The Contemporary Writer: Interviews with Sixteen Novelists and Poets*, eds. L. S. Dembo and Cyrena N. Pondrom (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972), 9. On Barth and Bellow, see Beverly Gross, "The Anti-Novels of John Barth," in *Critical Essays on John Barth*, ed. Joseph J. Waldmeir (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980), 30–31.

58. "Writing American Fiction," in *Reading Myself and Others* (New York: Farrar, 1975), 133. "Transformation" is a word used in by Pifer in *Saul Bellow Against the Grain*, ch. 6, which is a good example of a reader underestimating the ambiguities of the book. A similar overly rosy response might be noted in Rodrigues, who in "Reichianism in *Henderson the Rain King*" claims the story shows how Henderson's psyche and plasma are now free of armor plates.

59. *Reason, Truth, and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

60. For the Frankfurt School critique, see the debates in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Ronald Taylor (London: NLB, 1977); for a deconstructionist opinion of the "classic realist text," see Colin McCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

61. Drawing a parallel to folk psychology, Dennett has pithily described “folk physics” as “the system of savvy expectations we all have about how middle-sized physical objects in our world react to middle-sized events.” That is: “If I tip over a glass of water on the dinner table, you leap out of your chair, expecting the water to spill over the sides and soak through your clothes. You know better than to try to sop up the water with your fork, just as you know you can’t tip over a house or push a chain.” See *The Intentional Stance*, 7–8.

62. James Woods, “Give All.” Review of Atlas’s *Bellow: A Biography. The New Republic*, November 13, 2000.

63. John J. Clayton, “Alain Robbe-Grillet: The Aesthetics of Sado-Masochism,” *Massachusetts Review* 18 (1977).

64. Didier Anzieu, “Le Discours de l’obsessionnel dans les romans de Robbe-Grillet,” *Les Temps Modernes* 21 (1965): 608–37.

65. See Zevedî Barbu, “‘Choseisme’: A Socio-Psychological Interpretation,” *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 4 (1963): 137–38.

66. See, for example, Raylene L. Ramsay, “The Sado-Masochism of Representation in French Texts of Modernity,” *Literature and Psychology* 37.3 (1991): 18–28. Ramsey denounces Robbe-Grillet’s work as a “criminal project” that is “clearly imprisoned within the ideology in power,” but also, curiously, tries to argue that it is “carried beyond the gendered social self in [his] new textual organizations, perhaps indeed revolutionary in a feminist sense” (27).

67. Clayton draws this conclusion in “Alain Robbe-Grillet,” 116.

68. The topic of narrativity, identity, and practical reasoning is a large one. Of the many important voices who have profited my own thinking on this matter, I will here single out Dennett, *The Intentional Stance*; and Taylor, *Sources*, ch. 2.

69. *Consciousness Explained*, 429.

70. A critic might respond that my description of the extraordinary consciousness is culturally parochial, and that I’m betraying my own all-too-Western secularism: after all, holy figures (gods-made-flesh, saints, shamans, etc.) are routinely said to defy what I am apparently presenting as universal maxims of folk psychology. But the very specialness of such figures drains the objection of most of its force. Even if *some* entities are said to defy the folk-psychological beliefs I’ve mentioned here, surely not *everyone* can be attributed such properties without those properties losing their honor or interest. The majesty of Christ, Mohammed, Zeus, Shiva, or even their various priests depends on a contrast with other lowly creatures (us) whose peers will generally characterize them in the kind of terms I’ve listed here.

71. Fuchs, *Saul Bellow*, 9, 22.

72. Bellow, *Ravelstein* (New York: Viking, 2000), 97–98.