AH ANALECTA HERMENEUTICA
INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HERMENEUTICS / INSTITUT INTERNATIONAL D'HERMÉNEUTIQUE

ISSN 1918-7351
Volume 18 (2026)

God, Rhetoric, and the Reciprocity of the Teacher-Student Relationship: A Tribute to Calvin Schrag

Michael J. Hyde
Wake Forest University, USA

Abstract

I develop a narrative whose goal is to disclose the relationship between the three topics that title my project. The narrative begins with a discussion of God's "true" nature based on a hermeneutic assessment of one of the most important moments in the history of Judaism: God telling Its Name to Moses on Mount Sinai. A name grants identity to a given object of consciousness. God's Name contradicts Itself; it thereby poses a conflict that continues today. The consequences of this act introduce a host of topics that grant significance to the central topics of this project that I introduce as my narrative unfolds. These topics include hearing and responding to the call of conscience, experiencing awe, appreciating the value of anxiety, demonstrating the life-giving behavior of acknowledgment, showing a willingness to understand how the desire for perfection requires the ethic of perfectibility, and exhibiting rhetorical and communicative competence in the use of naming, ambiguity, interruption, dialogical interaction, argumentation, conversation, epideictic discourse, storytelling, and eloquence. There are several individuals who are significant for developing my narrative: Calvin Schrag, Moses, Søren Kierkegaard, Annie Dillard, Francis Collins, and Emmanuel Levinas.

Keywords: Calvin Schrag, God, rhetoric, teacher-student relationship, Moses, *Ein Sof*, Søren Kierkegaard, eloquence, Emmanuel Levinas

> There may be future projects, but not one of these projects, should it eventuate, will be a 'final-and-finished' project. This is because in designing our projects, we need to be mindful that they remain works in progress. They are always provisional and open-ended, with the attached caveat, "until further notice." Our projects are never finished. When we die, we die unfinished, and so do our projects.
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> —Calvin O. Schrag[1]

I was a graduate student, colleague, and friend of Professor Calvin Schrag for many years. His books, articles, lectures, and classroom achievements display his interests in the central topics of this essay. Following Schrag's lead set forth in his book *Reflections on the Religious, the Ethical, and the Political,* I turn first to the question of God's "true" nature and begin developing a narrative based on a hermeneutic assessment of one of the most important moments in the history of Judaism: God telling Its Name to Moses on Mount Sinai. A name grants identity to a given object of consciousness. The social and literary critic Kenneth Burke expands on this event of naming when he notes "The mere desire to name something by its 'proper' name, or to speak a language in its distinctive ways, is instructively 'perfectionist.' What is more 'perfectionist' in essence than the impulse, when one is in dire need of something, to so state this need that one in effect 'defines' the situation."[2]

As we will see, God's Name contradicts Itself; it thereby poses a conflict that maintains its status today. In his discussions of religion, Schrag does not mention the moment when God Names Itself and the conflict produced by this speech act. The consequences of this act introduce a host of topics that grant current significance to the central topics of this narrative and that I introduce as the narrative unfolds. These topics include: hearing and responding to the call of conscience, experiencing awe, appreciating the value of anxiety, demonstrating the life-giving behavior of acknowledgment, showing a willingness to understand how the desire for perfection requires the ethic of perfectibility, and exhibiting rhetorical and communicative competence in the use of naming, ambiguity, interruption, dialogical interaction, argumentation, conversation, epideictic discourse, storytelling, and eloquence. There are several individuals who are significant in developing my narrative: Calvin Schrag, Moses, Søren Kierkegaard, Annie Dillard, Francis Collins, and Emmanuel Levinas.

With all I am saying here regarding things to come, I readily admit that what you are about to read is an "unfinished" essay . . . "until further notice." If the notice

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[1] Calvin O. Schrag, *Reflections on the Religious, the Ethical, and the Political*, ed. Michael R. Paradiso-Michau (Lexington Books, 2013), xxxix.

[2] Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays in Life, Literature, and Method* (University of California Press, 1966), 16.

is given and a work is produced, the process would need repeating time and again. A mindful mentor taught me the importance of this lesson. We seek progress in developing our research projects. Progress is an ongoing process in search of perfection.[3] The search continues with what I attempt here.

My narrative begins with a question and others to come. Questions serve a rhetorical purpose: they interrupt the flow of communicative transactions and open us to yet foreseeable ways of thinking and acting. As Hans-Georg Gadamer notes, "The essence of the *question* is to open up possibilities and keep them open. To ask a question means to bring into the open. The openness of what is in question consists in the fact that the answer is not settled . . . Every true question requires this openness."[4] I hope readers remain open to the narrative. Its primary purpose is to keep the conversation going about matters of concern that were introduced to me by a much-prized scholar and teacher and that I extend here.

From God to Rhetoric

God supposedly created the cosmos with a Big Bang approximately 13.7 billion years ago. Evolution began its wonders. Moses appeared on the scene approximately 12.8 billion years later. Why did it take so long? Evolution requires a great deal of time. Perhaps God was tired. Perhaps God had more important things to do. Like what? Aldous Huxley offers a chilling response: "Maybe our world is another planet's hell."

Moses is tending his flock of sheep at the base of Mount Sinai when he hears God's call: "Where art thou?" Moses is being personally acknowledged by God as he hears this call. Moses, in turn, acknowledges God as he responds: "Here I am." For Moses, this exchange of acknowledgment was an awe-inspiring experience. The workings of awe and acknowledgement are related. Scripture would have us believe that our willingness to appreciate and be affected by the workings of this relationship is a "gift" from God, a "call of conscience," a "knowing" (*scientia*) "with others" (*con*). Of course, when God calls it is not simply a demand to know with some other human being, but rather to become aware of the "Otherness" of the Other that transcends the other's existence, the "wholly Other" whose showing of Its truth originates from

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[3] See, for example, Martin Foss, *The Idea of Perfection in the Western World* (Princeton University Press, 1946); John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man*, 3rd ed. (Liberty Fund, 2000); Michael J. Hyde, *Perfection: Coming to Terms with Being Human* (Baylor University Press, 2010).

[4] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York Crossroad, 1989), 299, 261.

what is beyond total comprehension, the "infinity of infinity," what the contemporary philosopher and Talmudic scholar Emmanuel Levinas describes as that which is "Otherwise than Being."[5] God's call is awesome and demands acknowledgement.

The experience of awe is made possible by our wondrous ability to perceive and be moved in remarkable ways by experiences that qualify as being sublime. Awe is incited by the sublime: the remarkable and reverential nature of entities, environments, circumstances, and creative accomplishments. Whether the experience of awe results in cheerful or distressing outcomes, the emotion warrants appreciation for its unequaled capacity to reveal "something more," an otherness, about the reality of our everyday existence. All that we know, think we know, and seek to know is based on the workings of consciousness. Awe is an extraordinary consciousness-raising experience that situates us as witnesses to a momentous revelation of some intended object's truth that warrants acknowledgement. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel emphasizes this point when he notes there is "only one way to wisdom: awe. Forfeit your sense of awe, let your conceit diminish your ability to revere, and the universe becomes a marketplace for you. The loss of awe is the greatest block to insight."[6] The Christian existential philosopher Søren Kierkegaard acknowledges the influence of awe in his life when he writes: "What really counts in life is that at some time you have seen something, felt something which is so great, so matchless, that everything else is nothing by comparison, that even if you forgot everything you would never forget this."[7] The ability to experience awe and acknowledge its wonder is a gift from God acknowledging our ability to acknowledge God.

The workings of acknowledgement are invaluable. What would life be like if no one acknowledged your existence? The question confronts one with the possibility of being isolated, marginalized, ignored, and forgotten by others. The unacknowledged find themselves in an "out-of-the way" place where it is hard for human beings, given their social instinct, to feel at home. The suffering that can accompany this way of being-in-the-world is known to bring about fear, anxiety, sadness, anger, addiction, and sometimes even death in the form of suicide or retaliation against those who are rightly or wrongly accused of making one's life so lonely, miserable, and unbearable. Positive acknowledgement provides an opening out of such a distressful situation, for the act of acknowledging is a communicative behavior that grants attention to others

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[5] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Klumer Academic Publishers, 1991).

[6] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (Noonday, 1978), 78.

[7] Søren Kierkegaard, *Provocations, Spiritual Writings of Kierkegaard*, ed. Charles E. Moore (The Plough Publishing House, 1999), 263-64.

and thereby makes room for them in our lives. With this added living space comes the opportunity for a new beginning, a "second chance" whereby one might improve his or her lot in life as the acknowledgement recognizes something about our being that is felt by others to be worthy of praise and perhaps even remembrance after we are gone. Indeed, have you ever thought about your own death, your funeral, and who might show up to pay their respects? And when thinking about this last matter, have you ever become upset with those people who you believe should have attended the ceremony but did not? Even when we have passed to the most out-of-the-way place there is, we still crave the kindness of positive acknowledgement—the way it brings us to mind and thus, in a sense, keeps us "alive."[8]

Responding to the call's demand to fulfill its obligation to serve the other, the self assumes the task of perfecting itself, which for Levinas warrants acclaim for its "goodness." Goodness is the ongoing call of conscience that lies at the heart of human existence and that forever calls the self into question. Goodness is a constant interruption that raises the moral issue: Are you being just in all that you say and do? Goodness brings the self and others closer together. Goodness promotes the "dwelling place" (*ethos*) of a neighborhood. The other becomes my neighbor precisely through the way its presence "calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question."[9]

Moses' experiences of being awed and acknowledged by the goodness of God intensify as he ascends to the top of Mount Sinai and stands in front of the "showing-forth" of God's partial presence in a burning bush that does not consume itself and symbolizes what in the related Zohar and Kabbalah tradition of Judaism represents the "Limitless Light" (*Ein Sof*) of God.[10] Throughout the rhetorical tradition this disclosive event of any object of consciousness is typically associated with discourse that bestows praise or blame on the actions of others. However, its most original form takes place before any such assessment is made. The disclosing of the truth of some matter of concern defines the most primordial form of epideictic discourse: the "showing-forth" (*epi-deixis*) of the truth of a being's presence in its "saying" to a witness what its existence is. The light of the burning bush is a showing-forth of God's limitlessness. In other words, the showing of God's presence in the light of the burning bush is a primordial demonstration of the epideictic showing-forth of God's infinity.

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[8] Michael J. Hyde, *The Life-Giving Gift of Acknowledgement* (Purdue University Press, 2006).
[9] Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy," *The Levinas Reader*, trans. Seán Hand (Blackwell, 1989), 83.
[10] Daniel C. Matt, *Zohar: Annotated & Explained* (Skylight Paths, 2002); Michael Berg, *The Way: Using the Wisdom of Kabbalah for Spiritual Transformation and Fulfillment* (John Wiley & Sons, 2001).

"Let there be light."[11] Levinas credits this showing-saying event as being the primordial occurrence of language and communication that is active when attending "with all of one's heart" to some object of consciousness. An example of this showing and saying of some truth was evident when I heard a witness during an exhibit of Van Gogh's paintings declare "This picture speaks to me." I should have asked "Of what?" Something godly? Really?

As the bush burned Moses conversed with God, received the Ten Commandments, and learned that at least trying to abide by the teachings of God as present in the challenging demands of the Commandments is worth the effort. Denying the truth of the Word is a sin warranting punishment. Hence, God's command "Walk before me and be thou perfect."[12]

Moses is told that the Jewish people have a future. He then asks for God's "Name" and is told "*Ehyeh-asher-ehyeh*." English renders this reply in a still popular way: "I am who I am." In Hebrew, however, the dynamic of being open to the future is unequivocal: "I shall be who I shall be."[13] God names Itself in an ambiguous way. Ambiguity encourages pause for thought; it is a rhetorical maneuver that interrupts the conditioned and taken for granted ways of understanding the "true" meaning of the matter at hand. God is a teacher of the commitment that is needed to "know" God as much as possible. And being a teacher of such rhetorical maneuvers as epideictic and ambiguous discourse, God is also a rhetorician, although God never admits as much. The basis of the art of rhetoric is simply stated: Using the right words (that are effective enough) in the right way (so a particular audience is receptive to what is spoken or written), and at the right time (when responding to the immediate needs of the audience).[14] How well this rhetorical activity is performed, how evocative, moving, and awe-inspiring it is for witnesses, qualifies this activity as being eloquent.

With the two conflicting interpretations of God's Name a contradiction is apparent. With its repetition of "I am" the interpretation "I am who I am" is commonly understood as a declaration of God's "completeness." God's Name thus speaks of God's "perfection." Jesus admits as much in his Sermon on the Mount when he tells the gathering that they should be "perfect, even as your Father which is in

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[11] *Genesis* 1:3. The King James Version is used for Scripture quotations throughout the footnotes.
[12] *Genesis* 17:1
[13] Gershom Scholem*, Kabbalah*: *A Definitive History of the Evolution, Ideas, Leading Figures, and Extraordinary Influence of Jewish Mysticism* (Penguin Books, 1978), 87-189.
[14] See e.g., Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (University California Press, 1970); C. Clifton Black, *The Rhetoric of the Gospel: Theological Artistry in the Gospels and Acts*, 2nd Ed. (John Know Press, 2013).

heaven is perfect."[15] The future orientation of "I shall be who I shall be," however, calls into question this emphasis of perfection. Rabbi Lawrence Kushner makes much of the problem here as he argues what the future orientation of God's Name requires us to admit: "Here is a Name (and a God), who is neither completed nor finished. This God is literally *not yet*."[16] God's existence is thus understood to be completely incomplete, perfectly imperfect.

God needs a future to remedy this condition. Advocates of the interpretation "I shall be who I shall be" maintain that to achieve this goal God requires human beings to behave in a way that demonstrates such virtues as "goodness." Rabbi Marc-Alain Quaknin thus notes that as human beings accept the responsibility of offering this assistance their "ethic is no longer that of perfection but of perfectibility."[17] God needs our acknowledgement of God's need. Rabbi Heschel's way of phrasing this point is noteworthy: "All of human history as described in the Bible may be summarized in one phrase: "*God in search of man*."[18] The search affirms an essential and honorable need of human beings: the need to be needed. Heschel, again, has a noteworthy way of making the point: A human being

> insists not only on being satisfied but also on being able to satisfy, on *being a need* not only on *having needs*. Personal needs come and go, but one anxiety remains: *Am I needed?* There is not a man who has not been moved by that anxiety . . . The feeling of futility that comes with the sense of being useless, of not being needed in the world, is the most common cause of psychoneurosis. The only way to avoid despair is to be a need rather than an end. *Happiness*, in fact, may be defined as the *certainty of being needed*.[19]

Those who affirm the Name of God as "I shall be who I shall be" avoid the anxiety of not being needed to sustain and advance God's livelihood. They thus may retreat from any interaction with their opponents because they no longer care about how their interpretation conflicts with those who interpret God's name as "I am who I am." The conflict, however, still exists, as does the possibility of experiencing anxiety. This emotion is the result of not knowing what is to come of one's existence or when

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[15] Matthew 5:48.
[16] Lawrence Kushner, *The Book of Words: Talking Spiritual Life, Living Spiritual Talk* (Jewish Lights, 1993), 28.
[17] Marc-Alain Quakin, *Mysteries of the Kabbalah*, trans. Josephine Bacon (Abbeville Press, 2000), 200.
[18] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man,* 136-144. Also see Rabbi David A. Cooper, *God is a Verb: Kabbalah and the Practice of Mystical Judaism* (Riverhead Books, 1997), 67-79; Lawrence Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos* (Stanford University Press, 2003), 55-59.
[19] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion* (Noonday Press, 1951), 193-195.

the end will come. Anxiety brings us face-to-face with our potential for being who, what, and how we are. Anxiety individualizes a human being by disclosing to this being its primordial condition of being open and vulnerable to the possibilities of its future-oriented existence. Kierkegaard writes that "the magnitude of anxiety is a prophecy of how wonderful perfection is."[20] He measures this magnitude in terms of how open we become to the Otherness of the "unknown" when, for whatever reason, the future-oriented trajectory of human existence, its objective uncertainty, calls into question our everyday ways of thinking and acting. For Kierkegaard, the unknown is a sign of God's unfathomable perfection, hence his praise for that emotion that exposes us in the most direct way to the possibility of coming to know something about this ultimate source of truth. If the conflict remains between the differing interpretations of God's Name, then so does the possibility of experiencing anxiety. It's possible that one of the interpretations is incorrect. Kierkegaard makes much of this condition: "Possibility is a hint from God. A person must follow it."[21]

What is being hinted at here? The need to abide by the interpretation of God's Name which emphasizes "I am who I am" or the interpretation of the Name which emphasizes "I shall be who I shall be"? Although advocates of either interpretation may be disgusted enough with each other that they retreat from any effort to deal with this conflict, or are not bothered in opting for retreat because they are satisfied with their respective interpretations, a more rational, respectful, dialogical, and civic-minded way of dealing with the conflict will require the advocates of the differing interpretations of God's Name to engage in the communicative and rhetorical practice of argumentation. The philosopher and argumentation theorist Henry W. Johnstone Jr. tells us why this is the case as he identifies the basic requirements of this practice:

> The individual who attempts to speak and act in such a way as to remain true to himself must come into radical conflict with others who are no less true to themselves but according to different beliefs. He cannot sidestep the conflict merely by withdrawing the expression of his beliefs. Such sudden silence might attend the comic downfall of a buffoon, but could not be the choice of a person of integrity. Nor can such an individual overcome the conflict by using violence to annihilate the opposition. Action of that sort would bring down a tragic fate, for one does not express one's commitment

[20] Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, trans. and ed. Reidar Thomte, in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson (Princeton University Press, 1980), 188.
[21] Søren Kierkegaard, *Provocations: Spiritual Writings of Kierkegaard*, ed. Charles E. More (The Plough Publishing House of The Bruderhof Foundation, 1978), 396.

> at all except in communicating with others capable of taking issue with it. The idea of expression without an interlocutor is just as incoherent as that of commitment without expression.[22]

Elsewhere Johnstone adds this instruction when he notes "Rhetoric is the evocation and the maintenance of the consciousness required for communication."[23] As noted above, the evocative nature of rhetoric is facilitated by eloquence.

Philosophers have long denigrated this rhetorical art by associating it with the use of language to "beautify" one's discourse so as to misdirect and cloud a genuine understanding of the truth of a given matter of concern. A more accurate appreciation of the art, as defined by the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century poet Fenelon, emphasizes how the evocative and potentially awe-inspiring function of eloquence "is made up of the methods which reflection and experience have evolved to make a discourse such as to establish the truth and to arouse a love for it in the hearts of [human beings]. Things which strike and arouse the heart . . . eloquence is just that."[24] Eloquence is an agent for constructing narratives intended to cultivate wise judgment. Eloquence is a way of facilitating wisdom and goodness. Eloquence lends itself to disclosing the truth. Kenneth Burke puts it this way: "The purpose of eloquence is to 'convert life' to its most thorough verbal equivalent."[25]

The rhetorical art of eloquence is present throughout the Scriptures. As in the case of Moses and other disciples who admit to God that they lack the necessary rhetorical competence that enables them to abide by God's demand to "spread the Word" effectively to others, God assures these messengers that God will *teach* them how best to use language to remedy this problem. Remember, God is a rhetorician, and God is a teacher.

God suggests that the use of a "parable" can facilitate the persuasive force of a speaker's or writer's message. A parable is a story that employs the art of eloquence so as to better acknowledge the values of those being addressed and, in so doing, further their willingness to be receptive to the storyteller's primary argument. The effectiveness of a parable is dependent on the storyteller's rhetorical ability to use the right words in the right way at the right time to be as persuasive as possible. An astute demonstration of this ability is a sign of the storyteller's rhetorical competence, which

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[22] Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., *Philosophy and Argument* (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1959), 19.
[23] Henry W Johnstone, Jr., *Validity and Rhetoric in Philosophical Argument: An Outlook in Transition* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), 129.
[24] Wilbur S. Howell (ed.), *Fenelon's Dialogues on Eloquence* (Princeton University Press, 1951), 23.
[25] Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement* (University of California Press, 1968), 167.

is directed toward "the other," to those being called to respond to what the storyteller has to say about some matter of interest.

Here is a contemporary example of a lengthy parable authored by the Pulitzer Prize-winning nature writer and social critic Annie Dillard, who "worships" God, maintains human beings "were made and set here [by God's creation of evolution] to give voice to . . . [their] own astonishment" (Greek: *ekplexis*, also translated as awe), who admits that the endeavor is fraught with the fear of failure, and who is known to employ eloquent irony to keep her readers guessing about the "true" nature of God. Dillard would thus have us ponder the following question: "Could it be that if I climbed the dome of heaven and scrabbled and clutched at the beautiful cloth till I loaded my fists with a wrinkle to pull, that the mask would rip away to reveal a toothless old ugly, eyes glazed with delight?"[26]

Dillard is a teacher. Her readers are her students. "The impulse to keep to yourself what you have learned is not only shameful, it is destructive. Anything you do not give freely and abundantly becomes lost to you. You open your safe and find ashes."[27] Dillard finds "traces" of God in the happenings of nature. Her story details her experience of awe as she watched and reacted to a total eclipse of the sun. The story offers a stunning display of the evocative workings of epideictic discourse and eloquence.

The story begins with a recall: "It had been like dying, that sliding down the mountain pass. It had been like the death of someone, irrational, that sliding down the mountain pass and into the region of dread. It was like slipping into fever or falling down that hole in sleep which you wake yourself whimpering. We are given an indication of what is to come: the loss of not feeling at home; a being-unto-death.

Dillard and her husband traveled from their home to a location high on a hill in central Washington to witness a total eclipse. Many other onlookers would be there, too. "It began with no ado. It was odd that such a well-advertised public event should have no starting gun, no overture, no introductory speaker. I should have known right then that I was out of my depth." Dillard admits that she once witnessed a partial eclipse, but it "bears almost no relation to a total eclipse. Seeing a partial eclipse bears the same relation of seeing a total eclipse as kissing a man does to marrying him, or as flying in an airplane does to falling out of an airplane." Continuing to prepare the reader for what is to come, Dillard tells us that "Usually it is a bit of a trick to keep your knowledge from blinding you. But during an eclipse it is easy. What you see is

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[26]Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (Harper Perennial, 1998), 271.
[27]Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life* (Harper Perennial, 1989), 179.

much more convincing than any wild-eyed theory you may know."[28]A partial eclipse was becoming a total eclipse, a sublime awe-inspiring event. The opening paragraph of Dillard's essay now continues. "The sun was going, and the world was wrong. The grasses were wrong . . . From all the hills came screams. A piece of sky beside the crescent sun was detaching . . . It was an abrupt black body out of nowhere . . . There was no sound. The eyes dried, the arteries drained, the lungs hushed. There was no world . . . Seeing this black body was like seeing a mushroom dried cloud. The heart screeched. The meaning of the sight overwhelmed its fascination. It obliterated meaning itself." Continuing with her description and reaction to this instance of the sublime, she tells us that as the sun disappeared "we saw a wall of dark shadow come speeding toward us . . . It slammed our hill and knocked us out." It felt like "a slug of anesthetic shoot up your arm . . . You can feel the deadness run up your arm; you can feel the appalling, inhuman speed of your own blood." The eclipse spoke of the "universe about which we have read so much and never before felt . . . It was as though an enormous, loping god in the sky had reached down and slapped the earth's face."[29]

The intensity of Dillard's rhetoric is, itself, overwhelming, sublime. She listens and speaks eloquently. Dillard reports that when the sublime event concluded "an odd thing happened . . . we all hurried away. We were born and bored at a stroke." Yes, an extended moment of awe was a terrifying, yet must-see event, but "enough is enough. One turns at last even from glory itself with a sigh of relief. From the depths of mystery, and even from the heights of splendor, we bounce back and hurry for the latitudes of home" with its habits, routines, and mindless conformism that grant much needed and welcomed stability and comfort to the chaos of life.[30]

Dillard and her husband were seated at a restaurant, listening to the repetitions of witnesses asking "Did you see . . . ? Did you see . . . ?" Dillard's descriptions of the eclipse and its effects were intended to display a more carefully crafted and sublime acknowledgment of the awe-inspiring eclipse than what her fellow witnesses were saying about it. She admits her efforts were wanting at times: "In the black sky was a ring of light. It was a thin ring, an old, thin silver wedding band, an old worn ring. It was an old wedding band in the sky, or a morsel of bone.[31] But then a member of the crowd, a student, addressed her with a question regarding a metaphor "which knocked [her] for a loop": "Did you see that little white ring? It looked like a Life SAVER; it looked like a Life Saver up in the sky." "And so it did," admits Dillard. "The boy spoke

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[28]Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters* (Harper Perennial, 1982), 15.
[29] Ibid., 25-26.
[30] Ibid., 28.
[31] Ibid., 18.

well. He was a walking alarm clock. I myself had at that time no access to such a word. He could write a sentence, and I could not . . . All those things for which we have no words are lost."[32]

The showing-forth of a showing-forth, an epideictic discourse possessing stunning eloquence disclosing an awe-inspiring epideictic event and its consequences. The event showed itself as a Life Saver causing a "deadness" in a witness. The contradiction does what an eclipse does: interrupts the normalcy of daily life. The interruption evokes a higher state of consciousness of what is challenging us with the ethical obligation of discovering and using the right words in the right way at the right time so that we can share our experience effectively with others. Achieving this goal is sacred for Dillard:

> In "the depths" of a total eclipse are the violence and terror of which psychology has warned us. But if you ride these monsters deeper down, if you drop with them farther over the world's rim, you find what our sciences cannot locate or name, the substrate, the ocean or matrix or ether which buoys the rest, which gives goodness its power for good, and evil its power for evil, the unified field: our complex and inexplicable caring for each other, and for our life together here. This is given. It is not learned.[33]

What the total eclipse shows and says about itself is far more sublime than the common, well-worn words in a dictionary's definition of the event. Indeed, it is "monsters" forcing you "farther over the world's rim." Dillard witnesses, acknowledges, and is awed by the way the world, in moments of dread, speaks and shows what for her is a "trace" of a truth that makes possible all that our openness to reality enables us to perceive, including openness itself: God.

Whether one believes or does not believe in the existence of God, Dillard warrants being acknowledged as a teacher of rhetoric and how its use of the showing-forth and related workings of epideictic and eloquent discourse facilitate rhetoric's ability to disclose the truth of matters that demand attention. Her teachings also can be demanding. For example, she requests from readers who are willing to become her students that they "Write as if you were dying. At the same time, assume you write for an audience consisting solely of terminal patients. That is, after all, the case. What would you begin writing if you knew you would die soon? What could you say to a

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[32] Ibid., 23-24.
[33] Ibid., 19-20.

dying person that would not enrage by its triviality?"[34] The assignment requires students to display rhetorical competence in discovering and using the right words in the right way at the right time so as to be understanding and respectful of another person in desperate need of acknowledgement. Dillard is committed to enhancing the educational nature and value of this communal phenomenon. She does not want to open her safe and find ashes.

What Dillard teaches her students about how the practice of rhetoric acknowledges the status of "the other" has me recall a defense of the ethical function of the practice offered by the ancient Roman senator, orator, lawyer, and philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero: For "what function is so kingly, so worthy of the free, so generous, as to being help to the suppliant, to raise up those who are cast down, to bestow security, to set free from peril, to maintain men in their civil rights? . . . The wise control of the complete orator is that which chiefly upholds not only his own dignity, but the safety of countless individuals and of the entire State."[35] Like a well-trained and dedicated physician, the ethical and morally oriented rhetor has a significant role to play in maintaining the good health of others who dwell in the communal realm of the body politic. This defense of the practice of rhetoric lies at the heart of the philosophy of civic republicanism. As Robert Bellah and his colleagues remind us, in this philosophy "community means a solidarity based on a responsibility to care for others because that is essential to living a good life." Moreover, civic republicanism, emphasizing as it does the importance of developing a rhetorically competent citizenry, maintains that the authenticity of "public life is built upon the . . . languages and practices of commitment that shape character. These languages and practices establish a web of interconnection by creating trust, joining people to families, friends, communities, and churches, and making each individual aware of his reliance on the larger society. They form those habits of the heart that are the matrix of a moral ecology, the connecting tissue of a body politic."[36]

The philosophy of civic republicanism emphasizes the importance of its followers taking seriously their "responsibility to care for others," to acknowledge what was termed earlier their "need to be needed," which is "essential" to their well-being, "to living the good life," and to encourage them to have a say in determining how this life should be lived. Acknowledging others enhances the chances that with their involvement in the democratic process they will provide those who address them

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[34] Dillard, *The Writing Life*, 68.
[35] Cicero, *De oratore* (1.8.32), trans. H. Rackham (Harvard University Press, 1942).
[36] Robert N. Bellah, R. Madsen, W. M. Sullivan, A. Swidler, and S. M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Harper & Row, 1985), 162, 251.

knowledge of how best to use language in the right way at the right time so that they feel respected and needed to maintain and advance the democratic nature of their being-with-and-for-others. This specific use of language has been referred to several times: the moral and ethical practice of rhetoric. The other calls for the performance of this practice. The other needs to be needed.

From Rhetoric to the Reciprocity of the Teacher-Student Relationship

The philosopher and Talmudic scholar Emmanuel Levinas responds to this need by acknowledging the essential nature of the other as being the basis for developing a philosophy of ethics. Ethical responsibility originates in the "self's" encounter with the other. This encounter, which Levinas maintains is a "teaching" event, is a fundamental aspect of human existence and provides evidence of God's presence on earth.

Levinas's appreciation of rhetoric is both instructive and problematic as he develops his philosophy. Recognizing this deficiency does, however, lend credence to an appreciation of the scope and function of rhetoric. Levinas offers what I take to be his most explicit description of his major thesis when he notes:

> I am defined as a subjectivity, a particular person, as an "I" [or self], precisely because I am exposed to the other. It is my inescapable and incontrovertible answerability to the other that makes me an individual "I." So that I become a responsible or ethical "I" to the extent that I agree to depose or dethrone myself—to abdicate my position of centrality—in favor of the vulnerable other . . . The ethical "I" is subjectivity precisely in so far as it kneels before the other, sacrificing its own liberty *to the more primordial call of the other* . . . I can never escape the fact that the other has demanded a response from me before I affirm my freedom not to respond to his demand.[37]

What I have to say about Levinas' philosophy supports what Colin Davis says about the philosophy: "Levinas might be portrayed as lacking rigor, with notions inadequately defined, to the point that even the most careful and sophisticated readers are frequently left mystified; or alternatively he might appear as one who creates a new

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[37] Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics of the Infinite" (Interview with Richard Kearney), in *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage*, ed. Richard Kearney (Manchester University Press, 1984), 62-63.

role for philosophy, destabilizing its fictions of mastery, making a space receptive to the as yet unheard language of the Other. I am attracted by the latter reading but cannot quite bring myself to dismiss the former."[38] I agree with both accounts. The practice of hermeneutic charity when interpreting Levinas' discourse helps one to side with the later account. My intent is to do just that, although not always.

We exist in a world of otherness (alterity), of all that is but that is not ourselves. Otherness is a fact of life. Levinas is primarily interested in how this otherness shows itself in the "face of the other" and how it instructs who we are as ethical and moral beings. What Levinas means by "the face" is typically associated with the face of a human being. But the face can mean more than that. Levinas admits as much when defining the face: "A face has meaning not by virtue of the relationship in which it is found, but out of itself; that is what expression is. A face is the presentation of an entity as an entity, its personal presentation . . . the existence of a substance, a thing in itself."[39] For example, the "Big Bang" referred to at the beginning of my narrative has a face. So, too, Dillard's "total eclipse." And here is one more example not yet mentioned. The "human genome," whose "showing-forth" was discovered by the scientist Dr. Francis Collins and his research team. The project was launched in 1990 and completed in 2003. Collins was an atheist when the project began and was so awed by the discovery that while remaining a scientist he became a disciple of God. The discourse of the human genome, he declared, is the "language of God."[40]

Collins heard the call. The "face speaks." Its call of conscience instigates what Levinas describes as a "moving out of oneself" toward the otherness of the other.[41] The face speaks a call for transcendence, for the self to move *beyond* its current egotistic ways of being situated in the world and acknowledge the otherness of the other. Collins found this showing-forth of otherness in the face of the human genome, which he interpreted as a "trace" of God's presence in our lives. The otherness of the face shows-forth in the happening of a total eclipse and in the happening of the Big Bang. Both are cosmological events. The cosmos is expanding at least at the speed of light: 186 thousand miles per second. Does the expanding cosmos have an end point? Is it ever complete, perfect? Who knows? Human beings have a name that answers these questions: God, the ultimate presence of "Otherness" and the happening of "transcendence." Levinas' philosophy is dedicated to teaching his readers and listeners,

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[38] Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 143.
[39] Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 20.
[40] Francis Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (The Free Press, 2007).
[41] Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism,* trans. Sean Hand (John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 9-10.

his students, this "fact of life." He puts it this way: "God is not simply the 'first other,' the 'other par excellence,' or the 'absolutely other,' but other than the other, prior to the ethical bond with another and different from every neighbor, transcendent to the point of absence."[42]

Levinas describes the "showing-forth" of Otherness as a fundamental act of "expression," a "saying" of the presence of Otherness embodied in the face. According to Levinas, the "face speaks" this "presencing," this showing-forth of Otherness which now can be symbolized in what Levinas terms the "said" of everyday discourse. Levinas puts it this way: "Face and discourse are tied. The face speaks. It speaks, it is in this that it renders possible and begins all discourse."[43]

The face speaks, and the self is made aware of an "exposure," a showing-forth of otherness coming from the presence of the other. Levinas refers to this evocative event as "the epiphany of the face" from which emerges a "call of conscience." This call defines an act of "teaching" that "interrupts" and calls into question the self's egotistic tendencies and know-it-all attitudes that preoccupy the self with its own well-being rather than with the well-being of the other. With its call of conscience, the otherness of the face teaches otherwise.

An easier way to understand what Levinas is saying here is to recall the story of Moses and God's use of the burning bush to enhance Moses' understanding of the nature of God's existence. As designed by God, the bush is a rhetorical device, a simile, that helps explain how God exists. The bush is evocative; it sheds a "Limitless Light" (*Ein Sof*) on its surroundings. Its flame never dies out but goes on forever. The bush's existence is infinite, endless, like God's everlasting presence, a constant happening of transcendence.

God's use of a simile to disclose (show-forth) God's most original showing-forth of how God exists confirms my earlier stated claim that God is a rhetorician. Levinas does not admit as much, but when referring to God's showing-forth of Itself he declares that this specific disclosing of truth operates as a "rhetoric without eloquence."[44] I find this declaration confusing. What is rhetorical but not eloquent as God shows-forth Its truth? Here is a summary of how Levinas answers this question: The face speaks. It sounds a call of conscience that interrupts the self's egotistic tendencies. The interruption moves the self toward the other and its need to be needed, its need to be acknowledged for what it has to say and teach with its showing-

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[42] Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 165-166.
[43] Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. Richard Cohen (Duquesne University Press, 1985), 97.
[44] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 72; Emmanuel Levinas, *Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford University Press, 1994), 138-139.

forth of the truth disclosed in the face of what is other than the self (e.g. the Big bang, a total eclipse, the human genome). This disclosure is especially significant if it is evocative enough to be awe-inspiring as the face of something shows itself in the right way at the right time so as to move the self toward the other and its need for acknowledgment. What is more evocative than the way the face speaks of the showing-forth of what is called "God"? This evocative power of the face is, for Levinas, the original happening of rhetoric in the life of a human being. Rhetoric is the movement of the self toward the other as it responds to the interruptive call of conscience that is happening as the face speaks.

Levinas emphasizes that this movement of the self toward the other, its being-with-and-for-the-other, is "asymmetrical." Reciprocity is not called for in the original relationship between the self and the other. The self serves the other. The other does not serve the self. Levinas stresses that the movement at work here originates the ethical and moral responsibility of the self to demonstrate its goodness to serve the other by acknowledging the showing-forth of truth that the face speaks with its interruptive call of conscience. Its Scripture comes alive: "Where art thou?" "Here I am."[45] The call of conscience and what it requires brings to mind another relevant and fitting segment of Scripture: "Walk before me and be thou perfect."[46] Responding to the call's demand to fulfill its obligation to serve the other, the self assumes the task of perfecting itself, cultivating its goodness so that it can better acknowledge the other's need to be needed. Levinas maintains that this ethical and moral endeavor is the defining feature of human dignity. The indelible communal character of human existence is made possible by an altruistic and thus ethical and moral impulse that lies at the heart of human beings. Levinas' philosophy demonstrates a civic republican mentality.

Notice, however, that I made no mention of eloquence in offering this summary. Levinas would have it no other way. As far as he is concerned, there is nothing eloquent happening in this epideictic event. It simply can be characterized as "rhetoric without eloquence." For Levinas, eloquence diminishes the saying of the primordial discourse of the face. Like many of his philosophical ancestors dating back to ancient Greece, Levinas associates the rhetorical workings of eloquence with "ruse, emprise, and exploitation."[47] But does not the burning bush constitute an act of

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[45] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 105-06.
[46] Gen. 17:1
[47] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Duquesne University Press, 1992), 70-72; Emmanuel Levinas, *Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford University Press, 1994), 135-143.

eloquence? Does not its evocative awe-inspiring nature, its showing-forth of a more original showing-forth, its symbolic (rhetorical) disclosive happening in the right way at the right time, facilitate Moses' ethical and moral movement toward the otherness of the other? Does not the contradiction, the conflict exhibited in the "Limitless light," re-present the contradiction and conflict in God's Name (*Ein Sof*): "I am who I am," "I shall be who I shall be"? Recall Burke's comment regarding the function of the name quoted in the introduction of this essay: "The mere desire to name something by its 'proper' name, or to speak a language in its distinctive ways, is instructively 'perfectionist.' What is more 'perfectionist' in essence than the impulse, when one is in dire need of something, to so state this need that one in effect 'defines' the situation."

With these questions and Burke's comment in mind, perhaps Levinas would be open minded regarding the value of eloquence. The burning bush is not an instance of ruse, emprise, and exploitation. Moreover, I believe that Levinas would be supportive of the argumentation and debate that continues to take place today regarding the proper way of interpreting the truth of God's Name. Argumentation and debate are dialogical (rhetorical) activities that require reciprocity between the interlocutors, the self and the other. As he develops his ethical philosophy Levinas maintains that such a philosophy favors its association with "dialogue." This association modifies the self's relationship with the other. Levinas phrases it this way; ""Thanks to God', I am another for the others."[48] Involved in the dialogical and reciprocal activity of argumentation, the self deserves from the other what the other deserves from the self: a "movement" toward each other. This movement is facilitated as the interlocutors employ the rhetorical and evocative art of eloquence so as to make their arguments more awe-inspiring and persuasive. The interlocutors exist not merely as a self or an other, but rather as a self/other. Levinas does not employ this construction, although I believe it is appropriate for describing what Levinas terms "the third": those individuals in the public sphere who have something to advocate in situations where the truth of matters of interest is being contested and thus where arguments are bound to happen between self/others who demand reciprocity from their interlocutors. For Levinas, such situations allow for the promotion of "justice," which makes possible the creation of civil society and laws that, at least for the time being, grant ethical guidelines for the righteousness of interpersonal behavior.

[48] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 158.

Philosophers admit that they welcomed dialogues with Levinas.[49] For the purposes of the present narrative, the most illustrative dialogue is one Levinas (the teacher) had with his students. Levinas recalls "I remember meeting once with a group of Latin American students of Marxist liberation terribly concerned by the suffering and unhappiness of their people in Argentina." During the dialogical exchange, the students asked him "rather impatiently if [he] had ever actually witnessed the utopian rapport with the other which [his] ethical philosophy speaks of." He replied: "Yes, indeed, here in this room."[50]

With what I have discussed so far about Levinas's philosophy, I think it is fair to say that the students heard a call of conscience coming from others. They are acknowledging this call and what it demands: Accept the responsibility of respecting and serving others. You are obligated to do so. Where art thou? Here I am! The students are moved by the painful plight of others. The students are taking a stand against those who fail to abide by another Commandment emanating from the other's call of conscience: You shall not commit murder. The students are living for the other. It's a way of demonstrating and perfecting their goodness. In short, the students are showing Levinas how the utopian rapport with the other can be put into practice. Levinas could not help being taken with all that went on in this dialogical situation. "Yes, indeed, here in this room."

Levinas, however, has nothing to say about how the actual conversation informed the dialogue: How did the students use language in evocative and interruptive ways to describe their reactions to the call of conscience? Did they argue and tell stories to make their points? Was their speech masterful, hyperbolic, inarticulate? If masterful, did it employ figures of thought and figures of speech to heighten others' consciousness and appreciation of the situation at hand and to sound the student's own call of conscience? To answer these questions is to increase an understanding of how rhetoric is not without eloquence.

Of course, the validity of this claim is supported by the rhetorical competence of a self/other who takes seriously the definition of rhetorical eloquence emphasized by Fenelon as noted above. It deserves repeating: The evocative and potentially awe-inspiring function of eloquence "is made up of the methods which reflection and experience have evolved to make a discourse such as to establish the truth and to arouse a love for it in the hearts of [human beings]. Things which strike and arouse the heart . . . eloquence is just that." Perhaps Levinas would have provided a more

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[49] Richard Kearney, ed., *Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage* (Manchester University Press,1984), 47-70.
[50] Ibid., 68.

direct and detailed appreciation of rhetorical eloquence by incorporating this understanding of the art in developing his ethical philosophy.

The Reciprocity of the Teacher-Student Relationship

Although influenced by this philosophy, the philosopher Calvin Schrag abides by Fenelon's definition of rhetorical eloquence as he develops a historical and philosophical assessment of the dialogical practices of argumentation, conversation, and the evocative nature of eloquence. In developing his assessment. Schrag argues for a particular understanding of the teacher-student relationship. I offer a critique of his argument. My narrative concludes once this critique is presented.

As developed in several of his books, Schrag holds a basic and well accepted understanding of the practice of rhetoric:

> The distinctive stamp of rhetorical intentionality is that it reaches out toward, aims at, is directed to the other as hearer, reader, and audience. This intentionality illustrates not the theoretical reflection of cognitive detachment but rather the practical engagement of concrete involvement. In the rhetorical situation the other is not set at a distance. He is 'engaged,' brought into the space of praxial concerns. The rhetor seeks to evoke from the hearer a response to a particular situation. He calls for deliberative action and reasoned judgment. Rhetoric as the directedness of discourse to the other, soliciting a response, is destined to slide into ethics.[51]

In other words, the rhetor is involved in the process of using the right words in the right way at the right time for others being addressed, what Schrag terms a "fitting response": members of the audience feel they are being acknowledged in a respectful way, are more receptive to what the rhetor is saying, feel comfortable voicing a response to the rhetor's attempt to be persuasive, and realize that they can contribute to the rhetorical situation at hand and thereby form a reciprocal and communal relationship with the rhetor. The rhetor is a teacher, and those addressed are the

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[51] Calvin O. Schrag, *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press,1986), 198. Also see Calvin O. Schrag, *Philosophical Papers: Betwixt and Between* (State University of New York Press, 1994), 225-244; Calvin O. Schrag, *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity* (Indiana University Press, 2003), 179-196; Calvin O. Schrag, *Doing Philosophy with Others: Conversations, Reminiscences, and Reflections* (Purdue University Press, 2010), 71-76.

students. Owing to the reciprocity at work, the students are also the teacher and the rhetor is also the student. It is a self/other ethical relationship with another self/other, a dialogical way of being-with-and-for a self/other. This way of being is essential to what was referred to earlier as maintaining the "good health" of community advocated by the philosophy of civic republicanism.

The livelihood of the dialogue referred to here is dependent on the rhetorical competence of the interlocutors. One way of achieving this task is for the interlocutors to engage in the rhetorical and rational activity of conversation. The philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer comments on the ethical nature of the conversation that should unfold as the interlocutors communicate and dialogue with each other:

> We say that we 'conduct' a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one we wanted to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it. The way one word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the lead. No one knows in advance what will 'come out' of a conversation.[52]

For Schrag, conversation is a form of "communicative rhetoric" that invites the evocative workings of eloquence so that the interlocutors remain attentive and open-minded to whatever is being advocated by their counterparts and thereby keep their dialogue ongoing. Schrag writes: Communicative rhetoric does not afford

> a privileged authorization and voice of sovereignty to the rhetor. The developing reciprocity of question and answer, challenge and response, is strictly a communal affair. Communicative rhetoric replaces the subject-centered rhetoric, in which the rhetor as knowing and speaking subject is invested with a panoptic vision and a controlling knowledge—a controlling knowledge that is always on the edge of coercive force and manipulation.[53]

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[52] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and* Method, 2nd revised edition, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshal (Crossroad, 1989), 383.

[53] Calvin O. Schrag, *The Resources of Rationality: A Response to the Postmodern Challenge* (Indiana University Press, 1992), 130-131.

Communicative rhetoric fosters a "teaching" environment that values the reciprocity that encourages individuals to contribute their assessments of the matters at hand such that what they have to say might advance the good health of their communal existence.

Schrag associates the ongoing development of this democratic process with what he defines as the genuine nature of the teacher-student relationship. According to Schrag, "A student acknowledges the gifts given by his teacher not by returning something in kind to his teacher, but rather by giving to others. The very dynamics of the gift is to be centrifugally and ceaselessly given again and again."[54] This definition of the teacher-student relationship is a consequence of how Schrag understands the "true" meaning of the gift and its relationship to the phenomenon of transcendence.

For Schrag, "A gift, to be genuinely a gift, is given without any expectation of return. There can be no expectation of a 'countergift,' for such would place the giving within a contractual rather than a gift-giving relation.[55] Elsewhere he maintains "To acknowledge the gift as gift . . . is to attest to an alterity that transcends" everyday existence. "The gift is a testimony to radical transcendence . . . presented without any expectation of return—without any anticipation of a repayment in kind or by something of equal value . . . The gift event requires that the recipient be freed from an obligation to reciprocate."[56] Reciprocity is not part of the process. But Schrag also claims that "the challenge of perpetuating the event of giving" takes form as the teacher-student "reciprocates by creating more and more giving in responding to the [additional] challenges of our civic responsibilities."[57]

This last statement is a bit confusing, for as noted above Schrag maintains that reciprocity is not a feature of the teacher-student relationship. Resolving this confusion requires one to understand that the reciprocity associated with the relationship involves the students giving the teacher's gift to an audience "again and again" whereby the student acknowledges the value of the teacher's teachings and thus rewards the immediacy of the teacher's efforts. The student's task is to be receptive to the gift of the teacher's teachings and then spread these teachings to others who can keep the conversation going by doing the same. Now the student becomes the teacher, and the given audience becomes the students. The teacher-student relationship calls on those involved in the relationship to be rhetorically competent so as to enhance the success of the communication transactions at hand. The reciprocity of the teacher-student relationship makes possible the asymmetry and transcendence of the relationship, its

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[54] Calvin O. Schrag, *Reflections on the Religious, the Ethical, and the Political* (Lexington Books, 2012), 112.
[55] Calvin O. Schrag, *The Self after Postmodernity* (Yale University Press, 1997), 139-140.
[56] Schrag, *God as Otherwise Than Being: Toward a Semantics of the Gift*, 110.
[57] Ibid., 128.

taking place in the immediacy of the relationship and before and thereafter this immediacy. The reciprocity involved in the giving of the gift is an ongoing event; it happens in the past, present, and future of the teacher-student relationship

Schrag does not address the confusion that results in what he has to say about reciprocity and how it calls into question his definition of the teacher-student relationship. Given what I have just suggested about the reciprocity of the relationship, I would revise his definition: "A student acknowledges the gift given by his teacher by *returning* something in kind to his teacher as the student, by way of reciprocity, shares this gift with others. The very dynamics of the giving of the gift are centrifugally and ceaselessly given again and again. But this ongoing process presupposes the continuous workings of reciprocity which make possible the asymmetry and transcendence of the teacher-student relationship. What more Schrag has to say about these related phenomena returns us back to the beginning of my narrative, back to God.

The beginning of the asymmetrical nature of transcendence is at least as old as the happening of the Big Bang 13.7 billion years ago, a cosmological event which is the basis of all that exists; hence, the space and time of human existence and its objective uncertainty, the openness of the future. Religious individuals abiding by the dogma of religious institutions give the event a Name: "God." Is God the "I am who I am," or is God the "I shall be who I shall be"? The conflict and argument continue today. In either case, the answer is God. Science objects. As the scientist and physicist Paul Davies argues "Our ignorance of the origin of life leaves plenty of scope for divine explanation but that is a purely negative attitude, invoking 'the God-of-the-gaps' only to risk retreat at a later date in the face of scientific advances." Hence, "to invoke God as a blanket explanation of the unexplained is to invite eventual falsification and make God the friend of ignorance. If God is to be found, it must surely be through what we discover about the world, not what we fail to discover."[58] Nevertheless, religious individuals abiding by the dogma of their religious institutions still call it "God."

We do not know for sure what God is and how and why It exists, if it does. We do know that transcendence is a fact of life. It is the giftedness of this fact that Schrag praises. As he emphasizes, one does not have to identify with the dogmatic institutions of "religion" to be "religious."[59] Schrag thus emphasizes that "The question about God boils down to a question about transcendence as radical alterity."[60]

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[58] Paul Davies, *God and the New Physics* (Simon & Schuster, 1983), 70, 209.
[59] Schrag, *God as Otherwise than Being: Toward a Semantics of the Gift*, 143.
[60] Schrag, *Reflections on the Religious, the Ethical, and the Political*, 69.

Was the supposedly Limitless Light a showing-forth of the transcendence of a Creator with an ambiguous Name? The question is but one of many raised throughout my narrative. I leave it up to the reader to answer the question. Instead, I close with a case that illustrates my argument regarding the essential nature of the teacher-student relationship. The case is personal. It is one of many examples I have used in various ways throughout my professional career.

I am teaching a graduate seminar in communication ethics enrolled by nine students. During the first meeting of the seminar, I share the wisdom of the philosopher Georges Gusdorf whose words are instructive for what I hope develops as the seminar progresses:

> The decision to express marks the threshold between the passivity of eating one's heart out and creative activity. To speak, to write, to express is to act, to survive crisis, to begin living again, even when one thinks it is only to relive one's sorrow. Expression is a kind of exorcism because it crystallizes the resolve not to let oneself go . . . By doing this, moreover, by helping the other to use his own voice, one will stimulate him to discover his innermost need. Such is the task of the teacher, if, going beyond the monologue of instruction, he knows how to carry the pedagogical task into authentic dialogue where personality is developed. The great educator is he who spreads around himself the meaning of the honor of language as a concern for integrity in the relations with others and oneself.[61]

Comments and questions from the students indicated their appreciation of this wisdom, which they demonstrated in each of the following meetings of the seminar. In one of these meetings the assignment was to assess Kierkegaard's theory of "indirect communication," which is a rhetorical maneuver intended to interrupt an interlocutor's egotistic based understanding of the matter at hand. Kierkegaard offers the following analogy to help others appreciate the purpose of his theory.

> When a man has his mouth so full of food that he is prevented from eating, and is likely to starve in consequence, does giving him food consist in stuffing still more of it in his mouth, or does it consist in taking some of it away, so that he can begin to eat? And so also when a man has much knowledge, and his knowledge has little or no significance for him, does a rational communication consist in giving him more knowledge, even supposing that

[61] Georges Gusdorf, *Speaking (La Parole),* trans. Paul T. Brockelman (Northwestern University Press, 1965), 73, 125.

> he is loud in his insistence that this is what he needs, or does it not rather consist in taking some of it away?[62]

Kierkegaard also provides an example of indirect communication intended to challenge an interlocutor's supposed knowledge of the nature of "the self."

> Man is a spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation which relates itself to its own self, or it is that in the relation [which accounts for it] that the relation relates itself to its own self; the self is not the relation but [consists in the fact] that the relation relates itself to its own self . . . Such a relation which relates itself to its own self (that is to say, a self) must either have constituted itself or have been constituted by another.[63]

I offer introductory remarks regarding Kierkegaard's theory, wanting the students to keep in mind that, for Kierkegaard, the temporal existence of the self is foundational for understanding how to appreciate God's existence. The remarks sound a call of conscience intended to have the students appreciate the importance of knowing-with others, of being-with-and-for-others, and of employing communicative rhetoric that facilitates dialogue. The reactions to the above discourses were mixed. Some found the example an extreme instance of indirect communication. They wondered why readers would appreciate what Kierkegaard was trying to accomplish if they did not have a decent understanding of his philosophy. Others were more tolerant, suggesting that, albeit extreme, it warranted acknowledgment of being an illustration of indirect communication. One student added his own form of indirect communication by sharing his familiarity of the earlier quotation from Aldous Huxley cited in the beginning of the narrative: "What if [our] world is another planet's hell." The quotation was thought-provoking, disconcerting, and awe-inspiring. Another student suggested that the quotation was an evocative and eloquent way of having people consider why they sometimes describe their existence as being "a hell on earth." A science classmate replied by noting that the possibility cannot be disproved. She argued that only massive achievements in cosmology and what they reveal about the nature of planets can secure a "rational" answer to the question . . . "and by then we'll be dead." She admitted that

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[62] Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton University Press, 1941), 69, 265.
[63] Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton University Press, 1954), 14.

nevertheless the possibility presents itself. The dialogue and conversation continued as additional arguments were voiced regarding the feasibility of the possibility.

I contributed comments and questions regarding how possibility plays an essential role in Kierkegaard's philosophy. Owing to the ever-present objective uncertainty of the future, possibility is an essential feature of the temporality of human existence, of the ongoing phenomenon of transcendence, of the ongoing happening of space and time. Possibility functions as an interruption that calls into question the self's egotistical, habitual, and typical ways of understanding the truth of the matter at hand. Possibility can lead to an awareness of there being something more to the truth of the matter. The showing-forth of something more calls the self to transcend its current ways of being in the world and spread the words of both a teacher and the teacher's students. The showing-forth disclosed by the something more can incite the emotional experiences favored by Kierkegaard—anxiety and awe—because they open the self to Otherness and thus to an enlightened appreciation of God's existence. For Kierkegaard, this instance of openness is the ultimate goal of indirect communication. It's a gift from God.

Ongoing responses to comments, questions, and challenges arose as the students considered the ways and means of indirect communication and related material. The responses spoke to the importance of the teacher-student relationship. The dialogue increased as continuing arguments, conversation, and attempted efforts articulating the evocative workings of eloquence transpired. Based on past teaching experiences, I remained convinced, to borrow an earlier noted insight from Heschel, that both the students and I "need to be needed" so as to be content with our performance in the classroom and even in settings that are somewhat larger than the classroom. Teachers need to be rhetorically competent in communicating with and for students so to involve them in discussions of course material. Their involvement speaks to their need to be needed. It is a gift to the students who now can reciprocate by performing in a way needed by their teachers so to be acknowledged for doing what it takes to provide students with a quality education. It is an ongoing back-and-forth process, otherwise known as the enactment of reciprocity between self/others. The process prepares the students and their teacher to spread to other self/others outside the classroom the teachings that they developed during their reciprocal endeavors. This reciprocity leads teachers and students in the direction of asymmetry, transcendence, radical alterity. Reciprocity is called for repeatedly if the process is to remain ongoing. The reciprocity of the teacher-student relationship is an ethical communication practice involving a number of related phenomena: the interruptive function of the call of conscience, experiencing the values of anxiety and awe, striving

for perfection, the responsibility of acknowledging others, and exhibiting competence in the rhetorical practices of naming, ambiguity, dialogue, argumentation, conversation, storytelling, and the implementation of the evocative eloquence of epideictic discourse. A sense of accomplishment was present as the seminar concluded. And now so does my narrative.

I designed the narrative to identify a relationship involving God, rhetoric, and the reciprocity of the teacher-student relationship. All the complementary topics mentioned in the introduction have been accommodated. Too much hermeneutic charity? Not enough hermeneutic charity? Without a doubt the narrative remains unfinished. There is more that needs to be said than what is offered here. Being unfinished, however, is not a bad way to be. A special and unforgettable teacher taught me the value of being this way.