

TRE SOLDIER IN YOUTH, TRE VETERAN IN AGE: TRE BODY AS CONSCIENCE¹

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*«as in works of the eternal nature, to the
tiniest caesura, all gestalt, and all for the
sake of the whole.»*

(Goethe, 1772)²

Since I will be talking about soldiers who, strangely enough, are often bearers messages they know not of, it will be necessary to enter into the appropriate disposition to hear them. Otherwise we shall hear as many voices as there are intentionalities, as is the case for one of the veterans with whom I work who was given the psychiatric label of “multiple personality.”

There is a familiar saying that “Old soldiers never die, they merely fade away”. That is to say, there is something of an apparition about them. Creatures of time and devotees of nostalgia, they often suffer as much from their own enigmatic survival as they impose their suffering on others. Better, those who love them try to absorb their suffering, but without avail.

Since we are accustomed to consider the body as the most obvious thing in the world, we are surprised to discover how little the soldier seems aware of bodily being. He or she has become an instrument to the point of having forgotten – or not having become aware – of being bodily. The tenure of soldier lies between the anonymities of corps and corpse. Language forsakes us.

If soldiers are often experienced as animals – and veterans often come to fear the animal in themselves – a passage from Aristotle’s *Parts of Animals* will help place our effort to understand the animality of soldier and veteran in a larger perspective.

«Of “things divine” we have already treated and have set down our views concerning them; so it now remains to speak of animals and their Nature. So far as in us lies, we will not leave out any one of them, be it never so mean; for though there are animals which have no attractiveness for the senses, yet for the eye of science, for the student who is naturally of a philosophic spirit and can discern the causes of things. Nature which fashioned them provides joys which cannot be measured. If we study mere likenesses of these things and take pleasure in doing so, because then we are contemplating the painter’s or the carver’s Art which fashioned them, and yet fail to delight much more in studying the works of Nature themselves, though we have the ability to discern the actual causes – that would be a strange absurdity indeed. Therefore we must not betake ourselves to the consideration of the meaner animals with a bad grace, as though we were children; since in all natural things there is somewhat of the marvellous. There is a story which tells how some visitors once wished to meet Heraclitus, and when they entered and saw him in the kitchen, warming himself at the stove, they hesitated; but Heraclitus said, «Come in; don’t be afraid; there are gods

¹ Dedicated to the memory of Erwin Straus, 1891-1975.

² Freud considered using these words at the head of his projected chapter on “the psychology of hysteria”. Letter to Fliess of April 4, 1896.

even here»³. In like manner, we ought not to hesitate nor to be abashed, but boldly to enter on our researches concerning animals of every sort and kind, knowing that in none of them is Nature or Beauty lacking».

In his phenomenology of inner time consciousness, Husserl understands time as a rhythm of protentional and retentive moments. This rhythm pervades, even constitutes every lived presence. It may even be thought of as the presence of all presences.

Now “moment”, unlike the German “*Augenblick*” – which ultimately derives from fulgence, and could form the topic of another meditation – ultimately relates to the figure of a balance and gravity. Erwin Straus has thematized the human resistance to gravity in his exposition of the upright attitude. “Moment” commemorates the movement of a balance beam as it trembles on the razor’s edge between moving up and moving down. «Time hangs in the balance». This is also the living glance (“*lebendiges Augenblick*”) of Husserl’s treatment of inner time consciousness, which also deepened into the sense of a primordial horizon (“*Urhorizont*”) of his late period. His earlier static phenomenology was followed by a genetic phenomenology, one in which passive genesis and transcendental intersubjectivity bear witness to the world of life.

The sense of participation in such a world has become all but lost for kind of veteran with whom I am familiar. In youth his life was given or used in the service of his country; now in age he has discovered its aftermath which is incomprehensible to him.

Erwin Straus was a medical officer during the First World War. In 1930 his book *Geschehnis und Erlebnis* (Happening and Experiencing) was published⁴. It deals with the war neurosis of ex-soldiers. In it he reflects on the disordered senses of time and identity experienced by the veterans he was called on to examine.

In that book there is but one sentence in italics. I will read it now, first in the original German, and then in English:

«Die Caesuren entstehen aus der Gliederung, nicht umgekehrt». That is to say, the caesuras literally stand up out of the membering, not the other way around. In smoother English, «The caesuras arise out of the articulation, not the reverse».

Let us reflect on the meanings of “caesuras” and “articulation”. A caesura is a cut or break in the rhythm of verse or melody, a pause contributing to the growth of sense. The caesuras serve the articulation. The implication of this for understanding the neurosis of war is that the Sisyphean life of the latter derives from a continuing failed attempt to recover the articulation from the caesuras, the cuts, in effect, the gaps – a task doomed to failure!

If we were to imagine the cut as made in a solid body, then the two faces of the cut would simply mirror one another endlessly, without any increment of meaning. It is the articulation as primary which is to be recovered. To the extent of its recovery, the focus on the caesuras recedes; now the traces of their presence contribute to the regenerated articulation.

The caesuras attest to the membership of the organic, and above all, of human life. Articulation may now be figured as that of the living moment, now upright in movement, self-manifestation. As in the Empedoclean vision of evolution, organs develop in the manner of rhyme, assonance, and alliteration. Such articulation, such membering and remembering, grounds the caesuras of individual existence. This articulation represents a sexuality of time, as it were, one of protentive and retentive moments of experiencing.

When Erwin Straus writes «not the other way around», he is directing attention to the expressive potential of the dehiscences characterizing human existence. Helmut Plessner, in his *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, observes that it is with the appearance of the cell wall that life makes itself known. Now membrane, membering, and remembering form a semantic continuity, as in the Husserlian analysis of inner time consciousness. The membrane may be understood as an icon of

³ Aristotle: “Parts of Animals”. Transl. by A. L. Peck. 12, 645a, 8-23. Cambridge, Harvard, 1968.

⁴ Straus E.: “Geschehnis und Erlebnis”. Zugleich eine historiologische Deutung des psychischen Trauma und der Renten-Neurose, 52. Springer, Berlin, 1930. Repr. 1978.

the Husserlian arche-horizon (*Urhorizont*). This literally defines, like the Greek *horizein*, the boundary of existence. «In der Begrenzung zeigt sich erst der Meister». («Through self-definition the master shows himself»). From this point of view “trauma” attests to the failure of such self-definition.

Erwin Straus has reminded us that pathology is to be understood from the norm, of world in the upright attitude⁵. Its deformity is to be understood as a modification of its formity, its articulation. The norm, of which military trauma represents a deformed realization, can be understood in terms of a model from early embryonic formation in animals. This includes the process of invagination, a process in which part of a sheet of cells is pushed inward so as to form a pocket opening on to original surface. Now there is an inside and an outside. There are also lips around an apparent gap. But the gap is secondary to the articulation which is accomplishing itself.

«The caesuras arise out of the articulation, and not the reverse». As they arise, the interfaces they generate enter into a world apparently constituted of them, obscuring the arche-horizon, hidden like the *phusis* of Heraclitus. But their differences may also be seen as expressive of the potential of the arche-horizon, inexhaustible by virtue of remaining hidden. Now the derivatives of the vital articulation stream into (Husserl’s “Einstroemen”) the world of definition, the horizontal, intersecting with the vertical.

The joints of the body, the *arthroi*, are derivatives of the vital articulation. The articulation itself appears as a stream steps, so to speak into itself, taking its time, which Husserl sought to clarify in his meditations on inner time consciousness.

The men with whom I am familiar in my work are individuals whose vital rhythms have become disturbed, so that they suffer various pathologies of time and identity experience. In their effort to compensate for these disorders, their lives have become increasingly complicated. From time to time images from their past are experienced as more vivid and real than anything around them, leaving them to wonder who they really are, whether two or more persons, or just the victim of a deranged memory. Carefully considered, such confusions are repetitions of earlier abrupt mood changes.

Erwin Straus, in his indirect memoir of war, has pictured just such a sudden mood-linked change of experienced reality in the life of the soldier. Interestingly, this comes shortly before his accent on the primacy of articulation.

«Anyone who has gone on trackless ways through fog and darkness on the mountain heights, or who in war has had to pass the night in unknown territory near the front, such a person also knows that all of the other uncomfortable bodily feelings and sensations – fatigue, cold, dampness, the weight of the rucksack, the pains which come from any kind of injury – can be experienced with much greater severity. But should the fog suddenly open up, all of the complaints disappear almost at once.»

At this point he interpolates two lines of poetry:

*«What could have been done in the autumn night?
The morning once more has made everything bright.»*

The lines are from Goethe’s “Hochzeitlied”⁶. However, Straus omits a middle line. The original reads like this:

⁵ Straus E.: “Norm and pathology of I-World relations”. In: “Phenomenological Psychology”, 255-276. Transl. by E. W. Eng. Basic Books, New York, 1966.

⁶ Hubertus Tellenbach located this for me.

«Was naere zu tun in der herbstlichen Nacht?
So hab ich doch manche noch schlimmer vollbracht,
Der Morgen hat alles wohl besser gemacht.»

The intermediate line Erwin Straus omits may be translated as «but I have spent many still worse ones (nights)». By omitting the middle line he avoids reverting to the past. Instead, he turns to a future promised by the experience of earlier survivals. He who had suffered self-doubt in the night is renewed in the prospect opened by morning. It is almost as if the capacity of the flesh for healing has become all the more perfectly realized through survived its wounds. Such a paradoxical intuition accounts for the survivor's nostalgia for the circumstances of his wound, a fascination which may often weaken, but which may always be revived.

The survivor has undergone an imperfectly realized experience of “shuddering awe”, which Goethe characterized as “mankind's best portion.” «Das Schaudern ist der Menschheit bestes Teil». “Schaudern” is cognate with the English “shuddering.” It has the connotation of “awe,” as in the presence of the sublime. It is the young soldier's ability to withhold any awe from his shuddering, from his quaking flesh, that enables him to survive combat. But it renders the veteran *hors de combat* when age compels him to begin to relearn the lesson of uprightness, now on his knees. This is the analogue of the earlier mentioned moment of invagination! This is what the ageing veteran begins to be able to realize through revisioning his memories of experiences as a young soldier. In realizing this he become of age. Through such awakening, his earlier dormant awe opens to him the world of life.

The sudden clearing of the fog which Erwin Straus likens to the morning light is experienced with a sense of wonder, the Greek *thauma*, as verb *thaumazein*, wonderment, which Plato and Aristotle thought of as the origin of philosophy. Prior to such a thaumatic moment there is a continually increasing danger that a sclerosis may prevent any alteration of the balance. Trauma however as here understood is not the opposite of *thauma* as here conceived, but rather as an arthritic hindrance to the free up and down balancing movements of the moment.

At the end of *Geschehnis und Erlebnis* Erwin Straus anticipates the theme of the upright attitude which he was to write about after still another war:

«The emergence of an aim or goal disperses the sense of heaviness, while conversely the breakdown of an aim presents itself to the one experiencing it as a sense of heaviness, of burdensomeness».

When the distressed veteran comes to the doctor in a state of turmoil and agitation, he often expresses the feeling of being at least two, and sometimes more, persons. He does not realize that he has now entered into a situation which has the potentiality for framing his life within an articulation through which his caesuras may take on new meanings. It is the archetypal articulation of doctor and patient which enables fresh caesuras, now expressive, rather than merely impressional. These in turn lead back to the disordered rhythms in the life of the anxious inquirer. One or more of his vital rhythms have been impaired: rhythms of the heart, of breathing and digestion, of sleeping and waking, of sexual interest. These are inseparable from the rhythmic sense of identity governing all of one's transactions in and of the world. Efforts to reduce the sense of disorder through alcohol, overwork, drugs, oversex or medication are but partly effective, and them only for a limited time. The pulse of the *Gliederung*, the vital self-articulation, represents the most intimate sense of identity. This includes commemoration of all the incidents, i.e. self-appropriations of one's particular body in and of the world. The experience of repetition is a sign of the ongoing articulation, articulation out of which the exchanges between patient and doctor take their rise.

Of the multiple caesuras in animal and human life, a major one is that of sexual difference. Then come the caesura between infancy or childhood, and adulthood, and that between the era of sexual reproduction and the era of post-reproduction. These transitions have their own rhythmic character,

changes which can become disturbed to the extent of earlier dysrhythmias. It is at this point that most of the veterans I see, now in middle age, twenty-five years after their youth in war, become acutely preoccupied with the way in which the disturbances of their primary rhythms have proven obstacles to their own the way realization of meaning and those around them.

The discovery of such disorder is eventually experienced as a mysterious illness, even if this realization is initially obscured by a series of delinquencies. Yet to just see it as sickness is but an imperfect understanding for what I see as an imperfect realization of the sense of wonder which presided at the birth of philosophy. To the doctor falls the task of midwifery for the thaumazein the veteran has failed to realize. It is only through such an illumination, however imperfect, that he may recover the missing moments which enable him restoration of the articulation to which all the caesuras lead back, in which they are all originally embedded. Husserl's intuition of the *Urhorizont* is a version of the opening of what young Darwin referred to as the "eye of wonder." It is the world as beheld in the interval of clarity of Sophocles's *Ajax* just before he falls on his sword. About to impale himself on an icon of his own uprightness, he celebrates the *orthos logos* of the articulation:

*«The long unmeasured pulse of time moves everything.
There is nothing hidden that it cannot bring into light,
Nothing once known that may not become unknown.
There is no power so sacred, none so strong
As to defy all rank and precedence.
The snowy feet of Winter walk away
Before ripe Summer; and patrolling Night
Breaks off her rounds to let the Dawn ride in
On silver horses lighting up the sky.
The winds abate and leave the groaning sea
To sleep awhile. Even omnipotent Sleep
Locks and unlocks his doors and cannot hold
His prisoners for ever. Must we not
Learn this self-discipline? I think we must.»⁷*

This meditation on the pulse of time invites a closer look at the word itself. «At its base stands the Latin *pellere*, to push, to chase, hence to chase away (...) as in Greek *pallo*, I shake, and *italpol*, as perhaps in Greek *polemizo*, I agitate violently, *polemos*, war» (Partridge). It is attractive to consider the possibility of understanding Heraclitus' pronouncement that «War is the Father of all things» in the light of the likeness of the urgent pulse of time to the agitation of war which brings so much to light. Now war itself may be understood as the violence of the articulation overturing established order in the service of fresh orderings of life. Of course, we are understanding war in a metaphysical sense here.

Appellation is a derivative of the stem of pulse, expressive of the moment of personal address in its thrust. I am compelled to do something about it. It names me by the way in which I answer to it. Thus it is not surprising that to are matched disorders of the name, to be seen in the confused identity of the disturbed veteran whose speech disorders cover the gamut from aphonia, stuttering, stammering to spluttering and cursing. These veterans are inarticulate

Such a veteran may hear someone calling his name, may not recognize his own name, or give names to different emotional states to which he is subject.

The issue of identity and difference lies at the heart of what Erwin Stauss has called "chronopathy." In my efforts to understand what is going on in my work with these veterans, I have found another's set of formulations useful:

⁷ Sophocles: "Electra and other plays". 40-41, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1953.

«All that is in the subject, is the object, and something more.
All that is in the object, is in the subject, and something more.
In a two fold manner we are lost or sheltered:
When we concede to the object its something more
We enhance our subject.»⁸

I will elaborate. “Subject” and “object” here are to be understood as poles of experiencing. The relationship of subject and object is one which postulates “something more” for subject on one side, for the object on the other. This recognizes an openness constitutive of their relationship. In our context this leaves place for vital articulation of the caesura. As subject pole, I can become lost in the object while feeling sheltered in my sense of being a subject. As object pole in my experience I can feel sheltered in the object while feeling lost as subject. There are two different ways of becoming lost, namely in the subject pole or in the object pole. There are two different ways of experiencing a sense of being sheltered, namely in the subject pole or in the object pole. When I concede to the object pole its “something more”, I experience an enhancement of my own “something more”, i.e. of my vital possibility. Finally, the synchronicity of the twofold “something more” results in the sense of an articulation, which can be variously named. Now it happens that we have been left a further development of the foregoing ideas by the same writer, whose identity I will mention later. This further formulation is given in a letter of reply to a correspondent:

- a) nature includes everything in the subject.
- y) and something more
- b) the subject includes everything in nature.
- z) and something more

b [i.e. the subject] can know a [i.e. Nature], but y [i.e. the something more of nature] can only be conjectured through z [the something more of the subject]. From this arises the balance, that of the world and of the course of life to which we have been assigned⁹.

To begin with, note that the pole of “object” has been replaced by that of “Nature,” underlying the vital character of the relationship. What is also new in this later formulation is the reference to totality, one suggested by the synchronicity of the “something more” of both the subject and object poles of the earlier formulation. The totality is one of a balance of the world as well as of the course of individual life. Considering that subject and Nature here are poles of experience, we may understand the body as being continually constituted in and through this rhythmic polarity. This is also what I understand by the body as conscience.

It is the weakening of the flesh in the middle years of life which serves to reveal the something more of the object or of Nature, and which facilitates what Freud referred to as “return of the repressed.” In my work with veterans this provides an opportunity for a reawakened sense of reality after an earlier loss. For the young soldier the something more of the object (or Nature) and the something more of the subject were occultated in the name of making him an efficient instrument of combat. The recovery of the full sense of this “correlational apriori” (Husserl in *Krisis*) is thus implicit in the idea of the body as conscience.

To his correspondent, our writer had even more to say:

«Your attitude, my friend, toward the four letters appears to me to be as follows: you agree to a and hope to understand it through b. But you deny y, by concealing it through a covert operation whereby it can be discovered in a subsequent investigation. Both of us realize the necessity for totality, but its bearer must present itself very differently to the two of us. May this earnest and immediate reply lead to fresh exchanges.»

Goethe, Weimar, Feb. 19, 1815

⁸ Goethe: “Maximen und Reflexionen”, 231. Insel, Frankfurt/M, 1976.

⁹ Goethe: “Letter to Christian Heinrich Schlosser” of Feb. 19, 1815.

Goethe writes that his correspondent agrees that nature includes everything in the subject, even while denying there is a “something more” of nature. His correspondent conceals this denial through a trick. I’ll try to explain. First, the “something more” of the subject is passed over. This makes it possible to attribute something of the empirical subject; the object has now become conflated with the object’s “something more.” At the same time it has become conflated with something of the subject. Later, when what was attributed is turned up, it may serve to enhance the empirical subject’s self-knowledge. Briefly, something known by the empirical subject was repressed and rejected (under the cover of its “something more!”), making possible its subsequent rediscovery, a return of the repressed¹⁰. Goethe tacitly implies that his correspondent fails to understand nature in the light of Spinoza’s *Deus sive Natura* as the bearer of such totality. Those who are acquainted with that Goethe-spirited paean to Nature which inspired the young Freud may recall the aged Goethe’s revisioning of its sense as that of “polarity and enhancement” (*Polarität und Steigerung*)¹¹. In the foregoing I have tried to show how Erwin Straus’s “caesura and articulation” may be similarly useful for understanding the body as conscience.

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¹⁰ Considering the affinities between Freud and Goethe, the resonances here are not surprising. But the differences should also be noted. Freud does not permit mention of totality, while Goethe raises the issue of naming such a totality.

¹¹ Goethe: “Werke”. Hamburger Ausgabe, 13, 572.