DEEP RHYTHM AND THE RIDDLE OF ETERNAL LIFE

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A QUESTION
OF HEART’S DESIRE

If I must die someday, what can I do to satisfy my desire to live?
—my question in my first book, 
*The City of the Gods*

In a strange story by David Lindsay, *A Voyage to Arc-
turus*, there is a rhythm that can be heard again and again, a drumbeat that is first heard over the sound of surf on the North Sea. It is the rhythm, I suppose, of a deeper life that can live on through death. “Only try to hear it more and more distinctly,”¹ Maskull, the main character of the story, is told. I heard that the Velvet Underground, a rock group in the sixties, was planning a rock opera based on the story when the group disbanded. I can imagine the beat and the strobe lights of the rock opera. The deep rhythm of eternal life, I suppose, can be heard not with the ears but only with the mind. “Only try to hear it more and more distinctly…”

There is a dualism of good and evil, Krag and Crystalman in the story, that repels me, as I look for a sense of eternal life. My question is “If I must die someday, what can I do to satisfy my desire to live?” a life-affirming ques-
tion, as it seems to me, and I look for a depth of life, a deep rhythm of life that can encompass death and survive it, rather than death as the horrible Crystalman grin in Lindsay’s story. It is true, I didn’t think of the question till I had considered many answers to death in writing my first book, *The City of the Gods*. I thought of the question at the end and put it into the conclusion and into the preface, the last parts I wrote. So it can give the impression that I knew what I was doing. Now, though, I do begin with it and I imagine it will be transformed as I write on, maybe into an answer that is the deep rhythm of eternal life.

Rhythm is the element that is common to words and music. My question is in words, but there are answers in music, in song and dance. It is a question of desire, of heart’s desire, and if the answer is in the rhythm of our lives, the basic metaphor is that of the heartbeat. One answer is to live in the present, as Wittgenstein puts it, “eternal life belongs to those who live in the present,” for if I live in the present, I am living without regret of the past or fear of the future, even fear of death. Another answer is to live in a consciousness of my life as a whole, in freedom from the past and openness to the future, open even to death, so my life is “being toward death,” as Heidegger says, and “freedom toward death.”

These answers of twentieth-century philosophers, even that of Wittgenstein, who speaks here of eternity but identifies it with the present moment, are answers within the horizon of time, “the possible horizon,” as Heidegger says, “for any understanding whatsoever of being.” But if time, as Plato says, is “a changing image of eternity,” then we can go beyond the horizon of time to eternity, as in Henry Vaughan’s poem,
I saw Eternity the other night,
Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright.  

It is here in the great circle of eternity that we may find the answer to the heart’s desire. Or if we look for it in time, the answer is in time as “a changing image of eternity.”

**A Quest of Eternal Life**

My own quest of eternal life took me all the way from Gilgamesh to Heidegger, covering the whole span of recorded history. It was a quest like that of Gilgamesh, but the figures I met on the quest were historical figures instead of the figures of legend. The meetings, nevertheless, were very similar. Gilgamesh met figures who told him to turn back and embrace a human happiness, that eternal life was reserved for the immortal gods. I met figures who tried to find immortality in noble deeds that would be forever remembered or in running the gamut of experience and living life to the full or in making life their own and becoming free toward death. It was only in “the words of eternal life” in the Gospel that I found the hope of eternal life I was looking for. All other answers seemed to fail. “Lord, to whom shall we go?” Peter says to Jesus in the Gospel of John. “You have the words of eternal life.”

Where to go from here? Now I seek for an understanding of eternal life. “Faith seeking understanding” (*fides quaerens intellectum*), as Saint Anselm calls it following Saint Augustine, leads you on a quest again, faith in eternal life seeking understanding of eternal life. This quest is a
“repetition,” as Kierkegaard uses the term, of the quest of Gilgamesh on a deeper level. Gilgamesh journeyed toward the sunrise, according to the ancient epic. “This is the point where the two ends of the circular world meet,” as Kleist says in his marvelous essay “On the Marionette Theatre.” We must journey again toward that point in order to find an understanding of eternal life. What we are likely to find is the great circle of life and light and love that is set forth in the Gospel of John or in the words of the old Bedouin to Lawrence of Arabia, “The love is from God and of God and towards God.”

What path are we to follow to come to this point of understanding eternal life? I imagine it will be what Kleist calls the path taken by the soul of the dancer. When he says this, Kleist is thinking of the marionette theatre, how the puppeteer dances when the puppets dance. I think of the words “David danced before the Lord with all his might,” thinking of eternal life as loving with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. If eternal life does prove to be the great circle of life and light and love, the love that is “from God and of God and towards God,” then it does make sense to follow “the path taken by the soul of the dancer,” as in a circle dance in which the dancers join hands and move in a circle, for instance where women form a circle and move clockwise and men form a circle around them and move counterclockwise (and the man and woman opposite one another when the music stops become partners in the next dance).

It is true, Kleist envisions the puppets moving in a straight line. The controlling string, as he imagines it, is fastened to their center of gravity, so when they are moved in a straight line their limbs describe circles. No doubt, dance is a metaphor here, a “conceptual metaphor” I would
say, borrowing the term from cognitive science. The puppeteer dances when the puppets dance. So it is, when others dance to my music, I dance when they dance. Where then does “the path taken by the soul of the dancer” lead us? Does it lead us into the great circle of life and light and love?

“Grace appears most purely,” Kleist concludes “in the human form which either has no consciousness or an infinite consciousness.” As he understands it, “This is the point where the two ends of the circular world meet.” And he asks “Does that mean we must eat again of the tree of knowledge in order to return to the state of innocence?” And he concludes “Of course, but that’s the final chapter in the history of the world.” According to this, our quest leads us back to our unconscious beginnings, only we come back consciously and to a greater consciousness. The circular path we follow is that of a circle dance, but we don’t necessarily make it back to the very beginning. Instead, when the music stops, the man and woman opposite each other become partners in the next dance. Still, if the music does not stop for us, I believe, we keep coming back to the very beginning and we find ourselves in the great circle of life and light and love.

All this is metaphor, but what does it mean? As I understand it, the deep loneliness of the human condition, the loneliness we feel in the face of death, becomes the love, and thus is illumined, becomes the light, and thus proves to be the deep life. “So the darkness becomes the light,” as T. S. Eliot says, “and the stillness the dancing.” The deep loneliness is already there in our experience, but coming back to the beginning enables us to recognize it as life and light and love. Or vice-versa, recognizing it is coming back to the beginning. As it is, we experience it as
being alone and longing to be unalone, and the longing to be unalone is our heart’s longing, our heart’s desire.

There is a joy in the love, just as there is a sadness in the loneliness. According to Spinoza, love of God is simply joy at the thought of God,13 for me joy at the thought of being on a journey with God, joy that God is my companion on the way. For me it is the joy of God-with-us (Emmanuel). So when the loneliness of the human condition becomes the love of God, as I experience it, the sadness passes into the joy, and it does so again and again each time I remember God, each time I remember joy. There is the sadness of mortal men and women, the sadness “if I must die someday,” and it is transformed into the joy of “what I can do to satisfy my desire to live,” and what I can do, I am thinking, is walk with God.

“Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.”14 I always think of this passage in Genesis when I think of walking with God. It has the hint, and more than a hint, of eternal life in those words “and he was not, for God took him.” Seeing my life as a journey with God in time, I am hoping it can be said also of me, “He walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.” The sadness of our mortality keeps coming back to me, and I have again and again to invoke the joy of God-with-us, often reciting George Herbert’s mystical song,

Come my joy, my love, my heart,  
Such a joy as none can move,  
Such a love as none can part,  
Such a heart as joys in love.15

Going from loneliness to love of God, ever and again on my quest of eternal life, I am going from the Many to the One,
from many desires to one heart’s desire, as in the biblical imperative, “Seek peace, and ensue it.” For my loneliness, by itself, can move in many directions, seeking intimacy with many different individuals. If the deep longing in our loneliness is really a longing for God, the longing does not already know this but has to learn it through the experience of life and the illumination that comes of faith in eternal life. Thus Tolstoy in his late years wrote “God is my desire” in his diary, but he could not easily explain that to Max Gorky, who saw those words in the diary. I want to say that too, “God is my desire,” for I can feel the peace in that standpoint, but I can also feel the tug of the many desires pulling me in all directions.

If I follow “the path taken by the soul of the dancer,” I go from the Many to the One and join the dance around the One that Plotinus describes, “And we are always around it (the One) but do not always look at it,” he says, “it is like a choral dance . . . but when we do look to him (God), then we are at our goal and at rest and do not sing out of tune as we dance our god-inspired dance around him.” As I understand it, this dance is simply a metaphor for dwelling in our center of stillness. This, I believe, is what Plotinus means by being “alone with the Alone,” not being cut off from everyone and everything else but rather joining everyone and everything in the dance around the One.

“We all have within us a center of stillness surrounded by silence,” Dag Hammarskjöld says. This is the opening sentence of the brochure he wrote for the Meditation Room at the U.N. We can experience this center of stillness in ourselves when we are outdoors in the beauty of nature, among the giant redwood trees or by the shore of the sea, and we can experience it simply when we are
sitting quietly in a room. “And we are always around it but do not always look at it,” this center of stillness, as Plotinus says, “but when we do look to him (God), then we are at our goal and at rest and do not sing out of tune as we dance our god-inspired dance around him.” As I understand it, the center of stillness we all have within us is what I am calling “the heart,” the place where all the dimensions of life meet, and the presence of God to us is the surrounding silence.

There is a clash of images here, Plotinus has God or the One in our center of stillness and I have the divine presence in the surrounding silence. God is there in both images. I suppose it is like God in the heart, Atman, and God in the universe, Brahman in Hinduism, and Atman and Brahman are one, according to the Upanishads. God in our center of stillness is God in the heart, and God in the surrounding silence is God in the universe, and it is one and the same God. The dance image is affected: we dance around God in the center, but God dances with us in the surrounding silence.

Walking with God on “the path taken by the soul of the dancer,” I am walking in the great circle of life and light and love. No doubt this is a metaphor. Is it more than a metaphor? “I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father,” Jesus tells his disciples in the Gospel of John, and they reply “Ah, now you are speaking plainly, not in any figure!”21 Walking with God on “the path taken by the soul of the dancer,” I am on a path that comes from God and returns to God, that of the great circle of life and light and love. If I say this, am I speaking plainly, not in any figure? The circular path is “from God and of God and towards God.” Because it is “from God” I came from God and have
come into the world; because it is “of God” I am walking on the path with God; and because it is “towards God” I am leaving the world and going to God. What Christ is saying, as Meister Eckhart always says, I can say too.

Does this take away the uniqueness of Christ? No, for it is “through him, with him, in him,”2² as is said in the Eucharistic prayer, that I have all I am. If I am “from God,” it is because he has come “from the Father” and has “come into the world,” and if I live “towards God” rather than simply towards death, it is because of him “leaving the world and going to the Father,” and if I am “of God” and walk with God, it is because he is “God-with-us” (Emmanuel). It is the love that is “from God and of God and towards God,” and so it is by being caught up in the love that my life acquires his “whence” and “whither.”

“Existence is God” (Esse est Deus), Meister Eckhart says, and there is one existence (unum esse) in Christ the Word made flesh, he says following Saint Thomas Aquinas, and so also in us, he concludes, like Wittgenstein saying “It is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it exists.”2³ So if the wonder of existence is “the mystical,” then all the things that Eckhart says make sense, that existence is God, that this is the existence of Christ, and that through and with and in Christ it is also our existence. It is the wonder of existence, I think, that Heidegger has in mind when he says “we are too late for the gods and too early for Being.”2⁴

I suppose we are “too early” because we take existence for granted. The gods go with the wonder of how things are in the world, God with the wonder that it exists. We are too late for the gods with our scientific account of how things are in the world. We are too early for Being in that we are
not thinking back (andenken) to Being but are caught up instead in representational thinking (vorstellendes denken), or so Heidegger would say. If we no longer took existence for granted, on the other hand, then thinking would become thanking, as he says “Thinking is thanking” (denken ist danken),25 quoting the mystics of the seventeenth century. A thinking that is thanking is also what Wittgenstein calls “the mystical,” “not how things are in the world . . . but that it exists.”

Does this make God the least common denominator of things to say, as Meister Eckhart does, Esse est Deus? No, that would be taking existence as belonging simply to “how things are in the world.” Instead existence is “the mystical,” the wonder “that it exists.” Saint Thomas Aquinas calls God ipsum esse, but he argues in his Summa Contra Gentiles that God is not the esse formale omnium.26 As I understand it, the wonder of existence is one thing, the least common denominator of things is another. I suppose everything here depends on a thinking that is thanking. If I see the existence of things as the least common denominator, I take it for granted. If I perceive the wonder of existence, then my thinking becomes thanking.

I think Meister Eckhart saying Esse est Deus means what Saint Thomas Aquinas means saying God is ipsum esse subsistens, “subsistent existence itself,” only Eckhart understands God to be giving his own existence to all things, creating them, and giving it to us too as revealed in Christ, especially when Christ says “I am.” In those “I am” sayings, sometimes translated “It is I” and “I am he,” Christ is speaking of the Shekinah, as my friend David Daube used to say,27 the divine presence in the world. The presence of God, I believe, is what Meister Eckhart means too
when he says *Esse est Deus*, God is present to all things, giving them existence.

Understanding then the wonder of existence with Meister Eckhart as the divine presence in the world, and saying all that is said of Christ can be said of us through and with and in Christ, we are in effect saying existence is “from God and of God and towards God,” echoing the words of the old Bedouin to Lawrence of Arabia, “The love is from God and of God and towards God.” So the great circle of existence is the great circle of life and light and love and thus the great circle of eternal life. It all depends on thinking that is thanking, perceiving existence not as the least common denominator of things but as the wonder of existence, the mystical, not how things are in the world but that it exists.

Have we proved too much, though, talking of existence and the divine presence in the world, not just that we can participate in eternal life but that the world is eternal? “Is some riddle solved by my surviving for ever?” Wittgenstein asks. “Is not this eternal life as much of a riddle as our present life?”28 Let us consider now this riddle of our present life and eternal life.

*The Riddle of Eternal Life*

“When the answer cannot be put into words, neither can the question be put into words,” Wittgenstein says. “The riddle does not exist. If a question can be framed at all, it is also possible to answer it.”29 What he means by riddle (*Rätsel* in German) is an unanswerable question. If we take it to mean instead simply an unanswered question, then there are three riddles here, I think, the riddle
corresponding to the three great metaphors in the Gospel of John, life and light and love.

There is a cluster of questions here about divine action. I think of God as illuminating the mind and kindling the heart. So I am inclined to think of God as creating in the same way, “Let there be light,” knowing and loving things into being. “God is spirit,”\textsuperscript{30} as is said in the Gospel of John, and so God acts spiritually. The riddle of eternal life then is the question whether our own life of knowledge and love, the life of the spirit, is capable of enduring death and surviving it. Even that sentence “Existence is God” or “God is subsistent existence itself,” I take to mean “God is spirit,” as if to say to be and to know and to love are one and the same thing when you are speaking of God. It is like saying “I think therefore I am,” I know and I love therefore I am. Can our life of knowing and loving then, our life of the spirit, survive our death and live on forever?

Dark light is a second riddle here, closely related to that of eternal life. What I mean by “dark light” is God illuminating our minds and yet remaining unseen, like physical light passing unseen through space until it strikes an object and then becomes visible, or what becomes visible is the object illumined. So it is with divine light illumining our minds without us seeing God. Arthur Zajonc, a physicist studying the quantum theory of light and comparing the experience of spiritual light, calls this “catching the light.”\textsuperscript{31} Perhaps this is why eternal life is also a riddle. We can experience the life of the spirit, the hope, the peace, the friends,
the intelligence that belong to the life of the spirit. To know, though, that the life of the spirit is eternal and survives death would be like seeing the light itself and not just the objects that are illumined by the light.

Love shown and withdrawn is a third riddle here, connected with the sense of mystery. “That which shows itself and at the same time withdraws is the essential trait of what we call the mystery,” Heidgger says, speaking of the mystery in technology (“The meaning pervading technology hides itself”). It is true, though, of the mystery that shows and withdraws in eternal life and in dark light and in the love that is from and of and towards God. “The inner voice of love,” Henri Nouwen calls it, describing his own “journey through anguish to freedom.” There is this tantalizing experience of love shown and withdrawn in human friendship that discloses the mystery of life and light and love. The riddle is the mystery.

It is the great circle of life and light and love that is the answer to all three of these riddles. Hope and peace and friends and intelligence, all the life of the spirit, locate me on this great circle that circles from God to God and is of God who is spirit. If I am on the great circle, walking with God, I have the hope of eternal life, the intelligence of dark light, the friends of love shown and withdrawn, all the riddles of life and light and love, but the answer to the riddles is in the peace, as Dante says, “his will is our peace” (la sua volontate e nostra pace). If “we all have within us a center of stillness surrounded by silence,” we all have within us the center of the great circle of life and light and love, and there is our peace. If the center is a moving center like the moving eye of a storm, we are moving on a journey in time and the surrounding silence is the surrounding presence of
God with us on the journey. All this again is metaphor, but the hope and the peace and the friends and the intelligence are real.

Speaking of the here and hereafter, Rilke says “The true pattern of life extends through both domains, the blood with the greatest circuit runs through both: there is neither a This-side nor a That-side but a single great unity in which the beings who transcend us, the angels, have their habitation.” His metaphor here is that of the circulation of the blood, flowing through the arteries from the heart and returning through the veins to the heart. God is the heart of the world, and the circulation of life and light and love is from God to God. Death, according to this metaphor, is not a going out of existence but a going to the heart of the world, a return through the veins to the heart. So if God is the heart of the world, death is a going home to God.

“Death is the side of life that is turned away from, and unillumined by us,” Rilke says in the same letter: “we must try to achieve the greatest possible consciousness of our being which is at home in both these immeasurable realms and is nourished inexhaustibly by both.” I wrote a song called “Dark Light”:

Why is it dark at night?
—a thousand stars
are like a thousand suns!
Why is it dark before me,
if your light
shines on my path?
I can know more
than I can tell
of light and darkness,
for if your eyes open,
there is light,
if your eyes close,
then there is dark,
but light inside my heart.\(^{36}\)

It is especially death, “the side of life that is turned away from and unillumined by us,” that is dark to us, “there is dark, but light inside my heart.” The kindling of the heart leads to the illumining of the mind, and what is “unillumined by us” becomes illumined.

It is the kindling of the heart that is the answer also to the third riddle, that of love shown and withdrawn. “He did not tell Gandalf, but as he was speaking a great desire to follow Bilbo flamed up in his heart—to follow Bilbo, and even perhaps to find him again,” Tolkien says of Frodo at the beginning of his adventure. “It was so strong that it overcame his fear: he could almost have run out there and then down the road without his hat, as Bilbo had done on a similar morning long ago.”\(^ {37}\) There is a kindling of the heart at the thought of a journey with God in time that can overcome fear and overcome sadness too, the sadness of a friend’s love withdrawn. For the love of God is simply joy at the thought of God, as Spinoza says, joy at the thought of being on a journey with God, I would say, and it can be so strong that it overcomes fear and sadness with what Meister Eckhart calls “wandering joy,”\(^ {38}\) the joy of being on a journey with God.

There is a connection between the inner peace and the inner light of the life of the spirit. I can see this in the musical settings of Mozart in the last year of his life (“Eternal rest give them, Lord, and let perpetual light shine on them”) (Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine et lux perpetua luceat eis). The connection appears in the Ave Verum, writ-
ten in the last summer of his life, in the Requiem and in The Magic Flute, his last major works. “Eternal rest” (Requiem aeternam) is the inner peace, and “perpetual light” (lux perpetua) is the inner light. As the Quakers understand it, the inner light gives spiritual enlightenment, moral guidance, and religious assurance to those who seek it in faith. If we take the inner light this way, then “perpetual light” shines already in this life, and “eternal rest” exists already in this life as inner peace. The Freemasonry of The Magic Flute, looking to this life, and the Catholicism of the Ave Verum and the Requiem, looking to the life beyond, come together in this sense of an inner life that can survive death.

Spiritual enlightenment, I suppose, as it comes from the inner light, is the answer to Saint Augustine’s prayer in his Soliloquies, “May I know me! May I know thee!” (noverim me, noverim te). I suppose too it is already enlightenment just to pray that prayer. For often there is an answer just in the turn of a question. That is how it is here, for we are a mystery to ourselves, unable to leap over our own shadow, and so praying “May I know me! May I know thee!” we acknowledge the mystery and the connection between knowing ourselves and knowing God. It is “the cloud of unknowing in the which a soul is oned with God.” Praying to know me and to know thee, I am “oned with God” in “the cloud of unknowing,” and this is spiritual enlightenment, a knowing of my unknowing, and brings me closer to God than any supposed knowing of God.

Moral guidance, I think, as it comes from the inner light, is the answer to Newman’s prayer,

Lead, Kindly Light,
   Amid the encircling gloom,
   Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark,
And I am far from home—
Lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet;
I do not ask to see the distant scene—
One step enough for me.\(^41\)

Here again there is an answer already in the prayer itself, the wisdom of not asking “to see the distant scene,” the remote future, but only the next step, “One step enough for me,” the realization that “The future—any future—was simply one step at a time out of the heart.”\(^42\)

Religious assurance, I believe, as it comes from the inner light, is the answer to Donne’s prayer,

I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
Swear by thyself, that at my death thy Son
Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;
And, having done that, thou hast done,
I fear no more.\(^43\)

The answer is there in the prayer, the Sun shining and the Son shining, the Son of God, that is, as in the pun there, and there is also the pun, Thou hast done and Thou hast Donne. I just read a review of a book called *The Dream of Eternal Life*, written from the viewpoint of molecular biology.\(^44\) Religious assurance, though, is more than a dream of eternal life. It is the assurance of the Sun shining and the Son shining.

Spiritual enlightenment, moral guidance, and religious assurance, therefore, as they come from the inner light are the answer to prayer, and I am led to think of turning the
truth of a life into prayer, as Goethe speaks in his autobiography \textit{(Poetry and Truth in My Life)} of turning the truth of a life into poetry. We all have a continual conversation with ourselves, a conversation about our hopes and fears. Prayer, as I understand it, means letting that conversation with ourselves become a conversation with God, and this means turning our hopes and fears over to God, entrusting them to God. What this leads to is an inner peace where we fall silent at last in the presence of God, and that inner peace, I take it, is the ultimate answer to prayer. That inner peace is also spiritual enlightenment, moral guidance (“his will is our peace”), and religious assurance.

What is the truth of a life? It is the past, the present, and the future of the life, but it is also, I suppose, one’s relation to the past and present and future, for instance fear of the future, especially of death, and regret of the past. To turn the truth of a life into prayer is to do what Dag Hammarskjöld does when he prays at the turning point of his life, “For all that has been—Thanks! To all that shall be—Yes!”\textsuperscript{45} What he does is go from regret of the past to “Thanks!” and from fear of the future to “Yes!” It amounts to taking the advice Tolkien has Gandalf give to the king, “To cast aside regret and fear. To do the deed at hand.”\textsuperscript{46} Here thinking back to the past becomes thanking, and thinking forward to the future is assent that becomes consent.

If I turn the truth of my life into poetry, I come to a symbolic immortality like Goethe’s Faust, but if I turn the truth of my life into prayer, I come to eternal life, an \textit{I and thou} relation with the Eternal Thou. I think of the concluding words of Mozart’s \textit{Ave Verum},

\begin{verbatim}
Esto nobis praegustatum
in mortis examine.
\end{verbatim}

Be to us a foretaste in the hour of death.\textsuperscript{47}
like the concluding words of the *Ave Maria*, “Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.” Faith in eternal life is faith in the survival of the *I and thou* relation with the Eternal Thou, that the *I and thou* with God is eternal. It is in the words of the Gospel of John, “I in them and thou in me.”

“The Eternal Feminine draws us on” (*Das Ewigweibliche zieht uns hinan*), the concluding words of Goethe’s *Faust*, are an expression of heart’s desire, of longing for eternal life. The realization of that longing, though, the realization of heart’s desire, is in an *I and thou* with God, as in Saint Augustine’s words at the beginning of his *Confessions*, “you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”

We are made for an *I and thou* with God, and our heart is restless until it rests in an eternal *I and thou*. Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* themselves are a sustained prayer, and so are themselves the very realization of the heart’s desire that he is envisioning. The human heart rests in God in the inner peace “we all have within us,” “a center of stillness surrounded by silence.”

“An endless conversation,” that is what Diogenes called Plato’s philosophy, and that is how a quest of eternal life begins, in an endless conversation with others, but it becomes an endless conversation with ourselves, and it ends as endless conversation with God. I suppose it is the endlessness of the conversation that points to eternal life. It is true, though, the conversation even with God can come to an end in silence. I think of Pascal saying “The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens me” (*Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m’effraie*). I think sometimes that I am talking death to death in my endeavor to study all the answers I can find to the question “If I must die someday, what can I do to satisfy my desire to
live?” Silence then is an answer, like “the eternal silence of these infinite spaces,” though it “frightens me.”

Words and music come out of silence and return into silence, and so also the great circle of life and light and love,

Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright.

“Where the story-teller is loyal, eternally and unswervingly loyal to the story, there, in the end, silence will speak,” Isak Dinesen says. “Where the story has been betrayed, silence is but emptiness.”

If I am loyal to the story of the great circle of life and light and love, like the Gospel of John, there, in the end, silence will speak, even the eternal silence of these infinite spaces. Words and music come out of silence, even the eternal silence of these infinite spaces, “the words of eternal life,” the Word, the one who has “the words of eternal life,”—and the music?—perhaps the Word in the beginning is also the music, “In the beginning is the song.” When I am composing music, I have to have silence, I can’t be listening to music. Also I have to be at peace.

“It was the word beyond speech.” That is the concluding sentence of Hermann Broch’s novel The Death of Virgil. That, I believe, is what it means to say “in the end, silence will speak.” It is as if to say “In the end was the Word,” like the Gospel of John saying “In the beginning was the Word.” This is the fulfilment, it seems to me, of the quest of eternal life, the answer to the riddle of eternal life. Broch’s novel tells the traditional story of Virgil on his deathbed wanting to burn his unfinished Aeneid. It is like the story of Saint Thomas Aquinas at the end of his life refusing to
finish his *Summa Theologiae*, saying all that he had written seemed to him “like straw.” That would make eminent sense if we suppose an encounter at the end with “the word beyond speech,” and especially if we suppose that word beyond speech in the end is the same as the Word that is in the beginning.

If I am faithful then to the story of my own life, to my journey with God in time, then I may hope the silence will speak to me in the end, even the eternal silence of these infinite spaces, and it will speak or, rather, somehow communicate “the word beyond speech,” and that Word in the end will be the same as the Word in the beginning. It is “the word of life,” as Saint John says in the prologue of his epistle corresponding to the prologue of his gospel, the Word of eternal life, just as Christ in the gospel speaks “the words of eternal life.” Silence speaks, I believe, when it is felt as presence, the surrounding silence of “We all have within us a center of stillness surrounded by silence.” It is the surrounding silence of the presence of God.