TWO WAYS OF READING A PHILOSOPHY — AND THEIR PITFALLS

Eugene T. Gendlin  
University of Chicago

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First, a very simple and sure answer to the question, how to read a philosopher: the answer is many times.

It is never possible just to sit down and read a philosophy through and understand it, because the reader can understand only as the terms mean to the reader. But a philosophy doesn't use terms as they mean to the reader. Instead it undercuts and repositions the basic words in a new context. A philosophy undercuts and repositions terms such as: thought, experience, concept, relation, judgment, language, nature, system, function, and so on—in short, the very words in which the philosopher would be expected to tell us what he is saying. Therefore it is impossible at first to understand how the philosophy cuts differently than the ordinary way we vaguely use these words. It is impossible to just read where he says how he newly means them—in what terms will he tell us this? In these very terms.

But a philosophy isn't just a different way of cutting and a different context of concepts and words, it is also a deeper way. If it were just different it might not be worth the work involved for us. Because it is a deeper way, because a philosophy gets underneath the level we usually think these thoughts, because a philosophy shows these terms as emerging clearly, therefore it is worth reading the philosophy the many times it takes, to understand how it operates differently and deeper than we could know at first.

I want briefly to mention four ways of mis-reading a philosopher. These ways reduce easily to not reading the philosopher at all, although they can involve a little reading.

The simplest way is the reputation system. This method involves no reading; one simply cites what the philosopher is reputed to have said. This is usually the opposite of what he really said. Aristotle is supposed to have believed in invisible entit İzized principles in things, when actually his method is to lay out a functional network. Hume is supposed to have destroyed reason and inquiry, when actually he built careful philosophical machinery to account for them. This method can sometimes involve a little reading, usually of the opening section of a philosophy book. Too much reading destroys it, as one reads the opposite of what one knows of the philosopher and becomes confused.
It is something of a problem why writers about philosophers so often tell us that they said the opposite of what they did say—I will try to explain how that comes about in the following.

A second, more sophisticated method is the take-off system. With this method one reads some lines the philosopher actually wrote, and then one goes off from them to associations, and associations to associations—never to return. In this way one can build up a very rich, complex interpretation for which the philosopher's lines were the occasion.

In this connection something important must be said about interpreting a philosophy, or really anything. An interpretation rests not on its own plausibility, but on checking back against the work being interpreted—only if the interpretation of a given spot also illuminates other places, can it stand. To be correct, an interpretation has to check itself out beyond question, has to reconcile and suddenly clarify many places previously puzzling.

The take-off system does not return, but remains content with the inherent interest and richness of the interpretation. When it looks at other spots, it takes off anew from them.

There is a second aspect of interpretation peculiar to philosophies. Not only will a correct interpretation clarify many places and resolve other puzzles, but it will turn out, once you have arrived at the correct interpretation, that the philosopher quite literally and explicitly said it. Now that you have at last formulated the right interpretation you can suddenly see that, in these sentences right here, that is exactly what the philosopher said. Until you worked your way to having this understanding, these sentences went past you unclearly. Therefore you didn't see them as saying this until after you thought your way to it.

It is my theory that the reason there are so few good published interpretations of philosophers, is that those who arrive at correct interpretations then see that the philosopher already said exactly that. Of course the interpreters shouldn't think that therefore people have no need of the interpretation. But it seems that way to correct interpreters. What they want to say about the philosopher is already printed right here before them.

On the other hand, those who arrive at misinterpretations experience no such discouragement. Therefore misinterpretations become written works, while correct interpretations are rarely written.

Implicit here is a principle of reading difficult texts: it is a principle of perception: what at the start is difficult and unclear, later becomes
plain sentences saying what's what. This perception effect is somewhat along
the lines of the Zen master who sent the student home to observe a spider net
until it becomes as big as a house. The student returns three years later,
the task done. He sees it now.

When we first use one of St. Thomas' commentaries on a work of Aristotle
that is new to us, the commentary is a pleasure. "Oh... that's what
Aristotle's talking about here!" is our constant grateful reaction. Ten
readings later the matter stands differently. How frustrating Thomas is—he
merely repeats what Aristotle says. He explains none of the spots that aren't
clear, he merely repeats them. But St. Thomas was rare in knowing that his
commentaries would help a long stretch of the way.

In discussing the take-off method, we have found two principles of
interpretation: (1) the criterion of an interpretation is the return to the
text, and the clarification of many other places in it; and (2) the perception
principle: what at first is difficult and unclear later becomes plain state-
ments of what's what.

A third way of mis-reading a philosopher, again a way that requires little
reading, is the subsuming system. One reads the philosopher through one's own
perspective or through the perspective of some well worked out philosophy other
than the philosopher's. In this way Aristotle presents Plato; in this way one
can make a philosopher a mere stage in one's own system; in this way one can
analyse and dismiss a philosophy because its way of defining terms does not
meet one's own criteria; in this way any philosophy can be swiftly skinned and
tacked up on someone else's coordinates.

A fourth way to misread a philosopher is what I call the upshot way.
This method wants only to set out the conclusions. It misses what philosophy
is, that philosophy undercuts extant concepts and assumptions and deals with
how one can freshly ground one's assumptions and approaches. If this is missed,
a philosophy can be reduced to a bunch of conclusions—which can then be con-
sidered carefully separated from their grounds. This method really misses two
things: first, that conclusions have grounds, and secondly, that for a philosophy
it is the kind of grounds, the way of establishing grounds, the deeper basic
starting points, that matter. Philosophic conclusions are really indices or
vehicles for this grounds-work. To separate the conclusions out, leaves them
silly. Thus Kant said that time and space are in us, Hume said we think by
custom, Plato said teaching is impossible, Aristotle said we think geometry
after we are dead. More seemingly sophisticated, but really the same method, is the division of philosophers into "-isms". Kant and Plato were Idealists; they said everything is really ideas. Thales said everything is really water. Marx said everything is really matter. This method ends with the question why these thinkers should be remembered.

After this introduction of foolishness, I want to present two serious ways of actually reading a philosopher. I hope that by contrast to the foregoing the seriousness of these two ways will be revealed.

The first way, which I term the scholarly method, is carefully to read the philosopher, to study the work, and to lay out the philosopher's work in an accurate analysis of the steps and parts of the work. This is done up to the point to which one understands the philosopher.

One then equates the philosopher's capacity with one's own current capacity, and one declares the philosopher to be wrong beyond that point where one ceased to make sense out of him. Thus one distinguishes carefully and says: "Kant got as far as this and this...", but..., "Kant failed to solve such and such a problem...and failed to clarify this and that difficulty."

The method is a kind of identification with the philosopher. It follows him step by step and imposes no alien principles. This method assumes that where the philosophers mix me up, that's where they're mixed up.

The method involves a principle about which I must say more later: it is the principle of the inherent superiority of the reader over the philosopher. This superiority is probably based on the fact that the reader lives later and has the benefit of human progress. Naturally, so the method holds, at some point I will know better. Therefore, where I cannot make sense, that is where I must criticize. That is my responsibility.

Now this method, as I say, is scholarly because it does involve reading the work, studying it, and laying the work out carefully.

This method has degrees. The more reading and studying occurs before the point where the reader presents the interpretation, the better and more serious the use of the method. One can apply the method after the first reading, or after the eighth and ninth. I suppose it is a matter of hermeneutic judgment just at what point to close the book. There is also a point of diminishing returns: so long as a further reading answers just those difficulties for which one would have blamed the philosopher at the last reading, one is glad not to have gone to press with one's critique yet. But when further readings
don't help, and one is confronted with one's own limits of thinking further, then one has met the philosopher's limits.

Done poorly, this method omits the hard study and lays out only the results of the first reading. There are even ways of doing it which reduce to methods of not-reading, as when one has had enough of the philosopher early in the first reading. Whether one writes one's results or not depends upon one's status and responsibilities. Thus many students, and well placed older people, are fortunately not compelled to publish their interpretations. But many are. Many people simply "turn off" early in their first reading, feeling that if the philosopher says a thing like that, he isn't worth reading to the end, for already, that doesn't make sense. One can write about that.

But every method must be judged at its best. At its best, the scholarly method presents a careful working out and laying out of the philosopher's work. Valuable work is thus presented, and can help us very much if we too are reading the text. Interpretations cannot of course take the place of reading the text, since they cannot help us understand a philosophy if the philosophy isn't there before us. How can the interpretation illuminate many places in the text, without the text? The helpful interpretations are not the dense actual steps the philosopher takes, each sentence carefully built upon the last. We need not only the interpretation's help with the last sentence, we need that sentence before us when we read the next one. We want to understand the philosophy, not the interpretation.

To read interpretations instead of philosophies is somewhat like reading a book on paintings with little fuzzy black and white illustrations. This magnificent painting, the book says, makes its impact by the contrast of raw colors and has visible brush strokes which shade the contours without lines, and so forth. We have to remember all this, because we cannot see it ourselves. Similarly, we want the interpretation to help us see and understand the philosophy before us, just as such a book on paintings is a very valuable aid, to let us see directly in the paintings that which, left to ourselves, we might not have seen.

The scholarly method, it must be noted, is an honest method. It distinguishes clearly between its sense-making, text-checked results, sets these apart from its non-results, and clearly states where it is as yet confused.

The second serious method of reading a philosopher which I will discuss is the Chicago method. This method is the exact reverse of the scholarly method, but at its best it also involves reading.
The method is the opposite of the scholarly, the exact reverse: It assumes the inherent and permanent inferiority of the reader in relation to the philosopher. It assumes that the philosopher is always right, that there are exactly no limitations one can ever encounter in the philosophy, that each major philosophy works out perfectly with no remaining difficulties, and that it is sophisticated to know this.

To criticize a philosophy is to make the unnecessary admission that one has difficulty understanding it, which is obviously letting go of an advantage one could take, if one simply maintained that everything written here is perfectly clear.

Like the scholarly method, this one has degrees of reading and study. At its worst, it is a method for making further reading unnecessary, because one already knows that it all works out, and one knows along what general lines it will all work out. Each philosopher has a kind of genetic code, which is the same in every cell of the philosopher, and so the same explanation can be cited for any and all difficulties encountered. Once one knows the code, one need only state it, and those who don't thereby understand the philosophy are revealing their own ignorance, not ours. This solves all questions.

The serious and powerful move of the Chicago method is to assume that the philosopher was not stupid, and also spent a lot of time on the work. The Chicago method therefore assumes that there are answers to the difficulties we find. Most especially, when what the philosopher says really seems plain stupid, most especially then we can assume safely that we haven't yet gotten a hold of the point.

The same principle applies in other ways: If the philosopher claims to have solved a certain problem, and we understand the problem well but cannot see how it is solved, we can assume that since this relatively bright person claims to have solved it, therefore there must be some reasons and details to make up at least the contention that in some respects something like solving the problem is being presented. Until we see exactly how and why this could be thought, we will not be inclined to think about whether it is a real solution or not.

Again, whole sections of a philosophy may seem quite unnecessary, and we can do quite well with just, say the first, section. Again the principle is that we want first to see why this relatively bright person thought and said that the other sections were necessary. By applying the perception principle already stated earlier, we can assume that both the need for the sections, and
the places where the philosopher said what the need was, are likely to have escaped us, and are likely to continue to escape us for some time. Not until we find out why these sections are here, will we consider ourselves in a position to think about whether these were good reasons or not.

Thus the method's assumption of the permanent inferiority of the reader as compared to the philosopher, this assumption can be understood at various levels. What the philosopher spent twenty years putting together, we can safely consider superior to our first reading. What took many steps of new and deeper thought to build is safely assumed to be better than our first set of puzzles. Or even our second set. Whether or not our inferiority is indeed permanent, as the method assumes, I will discuss later. For the moment it is clear that the import of the inferiority assumption is to continue reading and studying. It is a kind of assurance that answers are there, and it is therefore necessary to keep reading until they appear.

Gendlin, a Chicagoan, is discussing this second of two serious methods.

Now, what is the deciding factor which determines whether the method is thus used to keep further study open, or whether it is misused to foreclose study, as I described earlier? I believe what makes the difference is whether one applies the Chicago assumptions to oneself, or whether one applies them to other people. Like moral precepts, they are legitimate when applied to oneself, but questionable when applied to others.

If applied to oneself, the Chicago method insures that one will not close the book. In one's heart of hearts one knows, after all, just how much one does and does not understand. The loyally kept assumption that it's all perfectly clear and works out, keeps one working. This is the valid version of the Chicago method, and it has great rewards. If one continues working and refuses to accept the tough tenth-reading troubles, if one keeps plugging just when it seems that all this cannot be and that there is no way, if one just stays in the field and refuses retreat, fighting it out a few trees at a time, deep in the woods, and if need be for years, one comes eventually into a broad plain. There too problems are seen, in fact many more difficulties than those in-the-woods which were mainly confusions. Now the power and usefulness of the philosophy appears, and glimpses of how it all fits together. This fitting together appears and disappears, and great pitched battles are fought all over the entire plain, and in the daylight, involving many places in the philosophy at once, and giving one increasing mobility from place to place. The fight is joyous, because
one can see what it is about. When this series of battles on the plain is fought out, all becomes quiet and powerfully useful, and very enjoyable too. One can then operate on that plain.

Beyond this stage there are still problems—but those who get there are not inclined to complain about the Chicago assumptions which got them that far.

When one applies the Chicago method to other people, however, it has the opposite results. Moral precepts apply to others easily and simply—it is obvious what they ought to do—whereas when we apply precepts to ourselves there is an internal controlling sense of the difficulties, qualifying circumstances and complexity of our situation. Similarly, when another person who also practices the Chicago method asks a question concerning a difficulty with a philosopher, we usually see quite simply that there is really no such difficulty. Instead of the line of thought being, "There must be an answer to this question, let us seek it in the text," the line of thought most often is that the questioner must not have really read the text, that the questioner is stupid and the question is a stupid question. After all, all difficulties are really stupid, aren't they, since we know the philosophy works out? One has enough trouble with one's own more sophisticated questions—who wants to take on more difficulties than one already has, difficulties one has fortunately managed not to run into? Since all difficulties can only be confusions, on the assumption of the method, one is loath to let oneself in for becoming confused unnecessarily. One knows, according to the Chicago method, that the philosophy works out and that there is therefore no justification really for this or any question. The philosopher, as we have said, is inherently superior to the reader, but the reader is inherently superior to the questioner—by the reflected light of the knowledge that the philosopher is superior. This leaves the questioner at the bottom.

Of course, if the questioner happens to have hit exactly on the reader's most recent frontier question, that shows sensitive study. Even then the reader must overcome the pain of admitting an—of course only temporary—similar lack of development, in not seeing how the difficulty works out. The reader is tempted, instead, to give one of the four or five answers (which the reader has instead of one, at this time), and skip the other answers and also skip the trouble with this and the other answers. No one in a Chicago method of study is ever without an—answer, one knows the general lines along which the code of the philosopher works. One can always apply that, say what is thus known all along to be the answer, and remain silent about the respects in which one's
attempts fail to cope with what is there. Thus it takes a strong will for honesty, to confess to the difficulties—since, after all, one knows better, one knows there aren't any such difficulties. Nevertheless, the reader may well admit the same puzzle as the questioner.

Again, if the questioner happens to have run exactly into a question the reader himself had earlier, and has now answered, then it depends. The reader may begrudge the years it took to see the answer, and may leave the questioner to the same fate by giving nothing more than a superior smile or a repetition of the philosopher's genetic code. Or the reader may feel it as a reward for his own labors, to be able to give a clear answer.

The main problem arises when the questioner poses a different difficulty than the reader has encountered. And usually a different person will see different problems. Then the Chicago method is most likely to foreclose questioning and further study. The code is reiterated, the confusion is protected against and considered to be some early stage of reading one need certainly not go back to oneself. The questioner is made to feel a lack of sophistication in not being able to say a deeply felt "aha" in response to the genetic code. The premium is thus put on early cessation of asking and a heavy price is exacted from those who keep asking. A deep privacy and lack of communication develops as a result, as each Chicago methodist applies the method to himself to study further, and applies it to others to silence them.

The Chicago method produces no commentaries, no critiques, no helpful accompaniments to reading, no interpretations. Thank God St. Thomas did not subscribe to the Chicago method! Now why does the method fail in this vital public responsibility? Why does each person preserve privately to the grave the hard-acquired power to read one or more major philosophers? Why do these people not help us by writing what they have learned, as the scholars do?

There are a number of reasons. The rarity of good published interpretations is such that it has been assumed in Chicago that no commentary can be good. A Chicagoan would be loath to admit that he became a member of that despised crew who turn out these things euphemistically called "secondary readings." This is obviously a confusion, on almost any philosopher a commentary that would check with—and illuminate—the text, would carry the field and become an immediate classic. Not all interpretations are bad, only most of them.

Another reason, as Garver has pointed out, is the deeply held Chicago conviction that no aid should ever be given for anything a person can possibly
achieve alone. To give out a commentary would shorten the good years of struggle to which each new reader is entitled. Telling what a philosophy means will let people know without needing to struggle and think. It will not be a genuine knowing, that is the fear. It is true that some people, if they are given a step they did not think on their own, find themselves stopped from all further thinking of that step or beyond it. As I will say more clearly later, one's own thinking ought never to stop, whether others write or say things or give steps of thought, or not. I accept no steps from others without thinking them through, and all around them; why then should their steps stop me? The further I can get with everyone's aid, the sooner I can think even further on my own. Why should I so long be stalled so far from the frontier? This attitude requires a resilience of one's own thinking. The given step isn't all there is to be thought, as though if you show it to me I am preempted. On the contrary, I can move to further steps.

Chicagoans, seeing that struggle and thinking are both necessary, fail to distinguish between them. Those who would use a good commentary to illuminate the text would still find enough struggle left to safeguard them. Also, they would find enough to think about even after they achieved a higher level of thought than most of us survive to reach under present conditions.

But the deepest reasons depriving us of the hard-won products of the Chicago method have to do with a basic contradiction in its underlying values. On the one hand, as I have said, Chicagoans are under pressure at all times to adhere to the view that the given philosophy is perfectly clear, and that it is a matter for private shame if one has trouble with it. Commentaries are superfluous. On the other hand, the method also assumes the permanent inferiority of the reader as compared with the philosopher, so that it is also considered an error to say such a thing as: "I understand Aristotle completely," and no one is ever heard saying something like that. It would thus both be not a very valuable thing to write an interpretation—since everybody knows the philosophy is already quite clear—and a violation of the inferiority principle, since one would be publicly claiming that one is ready to be equal, and perhaps even presuming to state something more clearly than the philosopher did.

Finally, there is the problem of the philosopher's code. After all, are not the few sentences of the code sufficient for any knowing person? One does not want to consider oneself as writing for fools.

I submit that this is the greatest pitfall of the Chicago method. The other pitfall, the foreclosing of the questions of others—is bad. But to
undervalue and, by custom almost prohibit, the writing of helpful interpre-
tations, this is the method's seed of its own destruction, much as the
scholarly method has the reverse pitfall; one would think that the sheer
stupidity of what is published too soon by the scholars would destroy that
method. But the scholarly method has the advantage, for nothing in the method
forces one to publish one's results too soon, whereas the Chicago method has
it as its principle that one gives out one's exact reading of the text—never.

A very unsatisfactory situation arises when two individuals following
these different serious methods actually meet in person. The opposite natures
of the two methods have a kind of chemical reaction resulting in heavy
smoke. Each side feels upheld. The careful systematic layout of the philos-
opher, as presented by the scholar, seems simplistic to the Chicagoan because
it is not the genetic code. The limitations and remaining problems to which
the scholar honestly points are received by the Chicagoan as mere confessions
of failure in public, about which the Chicagoan feels a kind of vicarious em-
barrassment for the scholar. The scholar doesn't know that everything in the
philosophy works out fine. The Chicagoan tries to decide whether to take
the scholar to the cleaners by telling the genetic code and solving all the
problems, or whether some law of hospitality prohibits it. The Chicagoan's
comments are therefore half-hearted.

On the other hand, the scholar sees quite correctly that the textual
problems are being simply avoided. The careful analysis isn't followed in its
steps. The resulting problems the scholar posed are clearly too much for
the other. The genetic code produces none of the silence and compliance since
the scholar is not a member of the Chicago system and demands the detailed
solution to the detailed problems to which the scholarly analysis pointed.

The scholar thus maintains superiority over the philosopher since the
specific questions remain unanswered. In addition the scholar gains a new
superiority over the Chicagoan since the carefully posed questions remain
unanswered. On the other side, the Chicagoan maintains the principle of infer-
iority to the philosopher and in addition perceives the scholar's greater
inferiority since the scholar has admitted not understanding the philosophy,
and doesn't even know that the philosophy works out fine.

Such a confrontation is an unreal one. Both scholarly method and Chicago
method are found here foreclosing further study, the scholar stands on the
analysis—it cost enough work and unless someone can answer the questions,
there are no new leads into the text. The text has had its trial, now the case is before the jury and here is the prosecutor's summary; answer it, or admit. But the Chicagoan also, by that method, will not seek to meet the scholar's points in the text. The Chicagoan needs no new confusions, wants no new leads up blind alleys when it is known that there is some sure road through here, somewhere.

In such a discussion neither side opens the text, even though it may be physically present in the room.

But as we saw, the criterion of an interpretation of a text is the power to illuminate and clarify many places in the text itself, and to let emerge clearly what the philosopher plainly said—and can after a while be seen to have plainly said.

Therefore, taken as serious methods, these two must be evaluated by the light they shed on the text. No other criterion can be used, and on that criterion both methods can do powerfully well, or badly, depending on how well they are used.

Therefore we can defend both methods as methods, and consider the disadvantages as pitfalls. All the pitfalls can be avoided, if one refers to the text in all disputes and questions—refusing to use the methods to foreclose fresh questions. The scholarly method would give up its assumption that the reader's current confusion is the philosopher's ultimate failure.

Both methods would give up their fond wish to pretend, at least in public, not to need to study further, to have the philosopher bagged (positively or negatively). Instead, both would be methods for studying further. The strength of the scholarly method is to lay out the text exactly. The strength of the Chicago method is the assurance that only something exceedingly good, clear, powerful can be what the philosopher had, and is therefore our assurance of reward if we continue.

Now, what about the question whether the philosophy does work out in some one way?

A philosophy has one correct interpretation. This is because it was put together by a person in the way a watch is put together. As you look at the machinery of a watch you may see a given wheel turning back and forth. The question "What is this?" has an answer. It isn't a matter for different equally valid interpretations by different people.
Of course the answer might be phrased in different languages and by various analogies, but if these take account of the other parts to which the wheel is connected, what makes it turn, and what the turning does to other parts, and how that makes the watch move regularly, then these various versions will be very close to each other.

A philosophy is unlike a poem, because the relations of parts, and the point of parts and of the whole, are sayable and thinkable, whereas art employs non-discursive relations. But even a poem is not interpreted by anything and everything one associates to it. Say we have two poems and we ask a number of people to write an interpretation of each. Each person will write interpretations quite differently from the other people. But still, we could shuffle them and anyone should be able to sort them into two piles, one for each poem. If that cannot be done, if we cannot tell which of the two poems a given interpretation refers to, then it isn't a valid interpretation. The poem must bear it out, furthermore. If it is a good interpretation we should be able to see and feel many things directly in the poem we did not notice before. But a poem may be inexhaustible in this way; a philosophy is not.

If one wanted to consider the philosophy as a bit of historical or psychological behavior, then again one can interpret it inexhaustively and variously. But this deals with aspects other than the actual workings of the philosophy.

Also, if one wants to write why Aristotle is important, how his work can be useful to us today, such a topic needs to be rewritten in each age. But both a valid and an incorrect understanding of Aristotle could be interestingly shown to be just what Western thought needs today. Such questions differ from an interpretation of the actual workings of the philosophy.

I suggest that one approach reading the philosophy by following the philosopher's steps. If instead one views it through some interpretive scheme such as "all philosophies involve such and such factors," then of course one will get different results depending on one's interpretive scheme. The philosophy is itself a scheme, and imposing another scheme on it gives various results depending on the second scheme. This can be very valuable but goes far beyond interpreting the actual workings of the philosophy itself. Therefore one can get various results in this way; again, the best way to use such schemes is to shed light on the text! If the question is whether Kant has a (dialectical) or a reflexive principle in the Unity of Apperception, I ask: what does this
let me notice in the text, which I then understand better? Thus, although these two interpretive assertions are supposedly contradictory, what they show me in the text is not contradictory. The Unity of Apperception has all types of synthesis as forms of itself, in a comprehensive dialectical manner. It is also the identity and reflexivity of the single thinker identical with the unity of his object. Which of these two you like to emphasize if you want to classify the philosopher is a matter of the definitions of your scheme, but both aspects are valuable to have seen in the text.

It is also true that one needs some sense for what the "enterprise" of philosophy is, as Smigelski points out. People who have no experience with philosophy at all should not lock themselves in with just one text and insist that sooner or later they will make sense out of it. My answer here is that people do need to read four or five philosophy books, or parts thereof, without expecting that these first ones will become clear. Knowing something of the sorts of theoretical problems encountered in some sciences or other fields is also necessary, if one is to see why philosophy is so valuable. Thus it is true that one must bring something to the text—it does not do everything alone.

With the above seven paragraphs I want to have delimited and defended my assertion that there is such a thing as the text which talks back and can control interpretations, until its main workings can be seen to work out, and until puzzling spots become plain. To that point the text limits and corrects, and there is only one right interpretation. Beyond that what one can do further becomes limitless.

There remains the question: When does the reader get to the stage of thinking differently from the philosopher? The scholar feels free to do that at any time from the point of unclarity forward. The Chicagoan seems to hold that no living person can properly arrive at the level of the philosophers, and nothing less would be worthwhile. Someone now is sure to try to compromise between these views, saying that first one should spend the many years it takes to read the philosophers, but then, from one's fiftieth year on, one should kick over the principle of inferiority. I disagree.

I propose that we adopt both extremes. On the one hand, let us retain the Chicago principle and simply never mess our own views into the midst of these pure and intricately fitted philosophies, but only let them emerge for themselves. This is a kind of permanence of the inferiority principle, in regard to that philosopher's philosophy. On the other hand, let us begin
instantly, however young or old, to work out our own thinking, and give ourselves immediate superiority, in principle. Both one's own thinking and the reading of philosophers require some years, and should be carried on simultaneously—but you must always know which is which. If you mix up what is that philosopher and what is you, both lines become blocked. You will fail to understand the philosophy and get to the power it offers. You will also fail to develop your thinking, constantly putting some philosopher's way on your as yet inarticulate beginnings.

But if kept separate, the reading of great philosophers and one's own thinking aid each other. Rather than completing one's own beginning thoughts with some philosopher's already extant ways, one becomes able to work one's own thoughts out—and then sees that not everything one has done was entirely independent of the philosophers. In this way one finds that one has actually oneself thought something through, and quite in one's own way, and yet it is unlikely that one would have known to make certain moves, had one not studied analogous moves in the philosophies. Still, the move is one's own, and different from the philosopher's.

I find, for instance, that the functional interactions I so often use in my own formulations owe Aristotle a lot, but they can't be attributed to him for they are not permanent, like his. I find that the steps of my method employ directly felt experience to correct formulations which must be related to my studies of Plato, but I cannot attribute them to Plato because his method transcends particular questions of the kind I find I have to work on. My discovery of an identity between the patterns in experience and those we use in thinking was hardly likely, had I not studied Kant, yet I discovered it first and only then saw that what I had there was, in one respect, analogous to Kant's way.

To discover these relations between myself and these thinkers makes me joyous; it in no way detracts from me. Again, here, the Chicago method would imply that I had only stolen from these thinkers, and naturally had messed up and improperly combined what, in the purity of these different philosophies no doubt cannot go together—else the philosophers themselves would have seen that and said so. Also, the Chicago method leads one to attribute one's own thinking to some philosopher. One can consider any thought as a mere elaboration or variant of what a previous writer already said, or at least hinted at. Thank God Spinoza wasn't an adherent of the Chicago method—first, he would never have
published his book on Descartes, and then he would have viewed his own work as a mere variant and distortion of Descartes and wouldn't have let that out either.

The method I propose—shall we call it Chicago Scholasticism? (or has that been used?)—would recognize textual analysis as a highly valuable and much needed arena for contributions by those for whom a philosophy really has worked out, and would also accord our own thinking the same respect and years of careful working which we must accord the philosophers, but would keep the two separate, granting the philosopher his superiority with regard to his philosophy, and me mine with regard to mine. Then the fact that both exist within my one organism will make them both powerful, not by addition or confounding, but by that mysterious principle by which whatever we know aids us in our next bit of living even though that next bit is anything but the same as the last. We do not "apply" what we have learned—rather we create; but the more we have learned, the more there is with which to create further.