

E. D. Hirsch, Jr., 'The Politics of Theories of Interpretation'

All interpretations originate in politics, which is to say, in values. As in other human affairs, we choose one activity over another because we have values or habits which could be termed, in the broadest sense, 'political.' Scientific interpretations are no exception. Scientists prosecute many more interpretations in medicine than in astrophysics for reasons that are not themselves scientific. But even if our interpretations do originate in politics, must it follow that their final character is also politically predetermined? Not necessarily. Although we may ask an interpretive question for political reasons, its answer may not necessarily be dictated by those same reasons. If we ask whether leucile cures cancer, our question is political in origin and could have a politically predetermined answer. But we might be more interested in getting at the truth of the case. Some scientific interpreters might be much more interested in the truth about leucile than in having the answer come out on one side or the other. Their main political interest might be in getting the answer right, getting the interpretation right.

No doubt an interpretation can be politically predetermined. That would happen if the interpreter cared more about fostering a particular result than about being right. A proponent of political predetermination could object that the aim of being right is also a political aim which usually masks a conservative, status-quo ideology. That could be so, for who would deny that the aim of being right is itself an ideology and therefore political? On the other hand, isn't it also the case that the ideology of truth is structurally different from any other political ideology? Under other political ideologies, we desire and sometimes predetermine a particular result. Under the ideology of truth, our desire for a particular result is subordinated to our desire to be right. Our orientation is a posteriori, not a priori. We decide after the fact, not before the fact. And even if an interpreter is told that there are no disinterested, theory-free facts, the ideology of truth still *tries* to operate under the control of some 'other,' of some reality beyond predisposition and preference.

This choice between predetermined and revisable, postdetermined interpretations has an importance beyond textual exegesis. Interpretation is the central activity of cognition. Our perceived meanings or, metaphorically, our objects-in-the-world are always interpreted constructs, that is, they are always other than the 'language' of vibrations (light, sound, heat, and so on) through which we perceive them. We always perceive (construct) something other than the language through which we know that thing. This constructive process is interpretation. Since our

interpretations are always other than the language by which they are construed, a space of uncertainty exists between the vehicle (our language of cognition) and the meanings (or objects) interpreted from it. This gap, which cannot be overcome, is a space in which different interpretations can be played out. Hence there is always an element of uncertainty in every possible sphere of interpretation. This gap of uncertainty is the defining feature of interpretation — the gap between the vibrations and the object, between the vehicle and the meaning, between the sign and the signified.

One of the most influential ideas of our time, which is drawn from Kant, is that the form of our interpretive constructs is predetermined from within, rather than imposed from without. This is the doctrine of the synthetic a priori. Since Kant, the most significant development of the a priori has been its application to the changing realm of culture rather than just to the permanent structures of our minds.¹ This cultural Kantianism has had an immense influence on the popular mind as well as on recent theories of interpretation. Language, for instance, is said to predetermine the forms and limits of our ideas. Culture, in a still larger sense, is said to predetermine the forms and limits of all realities in our world. Ideology is said to predetermine the results of our inquiries, and politics (the extension of ideology) is said unconsciously to predetermine our interpretations.²

The staying power of the synthetic a priori comes partly from the impossibility of refuting it. Any empirical counterclaim advanced against the a priori can always be seen as occurring within its predetermined forms. Thus, even Kant's original claims about the a priori character of causality and Euclidian space, though long since called into doubt by physics, still leads a vigorous life in science and philosophy — on the grounds that such 'refutations' already take place within an a priori structure. But the impossibility of refuting the a priori also means the impossibility of confirming it. Therefore, the a posteriori is also alive and well in the sciences, if not in the humanities. Philosophically speaking, the *revisability* of interpretations is an idea just as impregnable as the predetermination of interpretations. The a priori claim than a revision 'always already' occurs within a predetermining scheme can be met by the counterclaim that the scheme itself is revisable. Revisability is as reasonable an ultimate as predetermination. Thus, neither the a priori nor the a posteriori could ever be definitively proved or falsified. Both are 'metaphysical' concepts. The political a priori is a metaphysical doctrine that, like all forms of cultural Kantianism, has no compelling logical application to practice. Psychologically, of course, it strongly influences practice, as do all metaphysical beliefs. But, logically, the doctrine of the synthetic a priori is neutral with regard to politics. Any and all interpretive choices are equally governed by its imperial force. If a political a priorist tried to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic interpretations, his theory would lose its epistemological generality and would then be seen to be what it really is: rhetorical exhortation. Exhortations imply choices; metaphysical a priori theories imply universal necessity. A priorism is, in Hegel's phrase, 'the night in which all cows are black.'

The only philosophical theory that could describe the politics of interpretation would be one that described interpretive choice as a theoretical ultimate. This, cultural Kantianism fails to do. Its political efficacy lies in its secondary rhetorical effect — in its suggesting that we do not *really* have ultimate interpretive choices, in its showing that we cannot *really* prosecute 'objective' interpretations, and so on.

My contrary thesis here is that interpretive choice can be described in ultimate theoretical terms and that interpreters can and should resist the rhetorical force of the *a priori* if they want to make those genuine political choices. I wish to expose the sheer rhetoricity of *a priori* theories and at the same time explore the most basic political choices governing interpretation.

Let me start with a simple example. Suppose that we are interpreting Blake's well-known poem 'The Lamb'. According to most *a priori* theories, we are not fully able to recover the original meaning of that poem. My efforts at historical reconstruction would necessarily be filtered through my own prior cultural or political categories. Since that secondary filtering cannot be overcome, the attempt to do so is an illusioned charade. To this, the ideologue of truth replies: 'Maybe; but in light of multiple vectors of evidence, and continual revision, we might sometimes achieve an accurate reconstruction, despite our cultural predispositions.' One of the interpretive questions that has been asked of 'The Lamb' is whether its original meaning was sentimental or ironic.³ Many readers take the poem to be straightforward, while Harold Bloom and others take it to be ironic. So far, that is an argument about how *Blake* meant the poem to be taken. It is, therefore, the typical, old-fashioned kind of question to which historical interpretation has always dedicated its energies. Can we, should we, try to resolve that historical question?

In providing this example, I do not intend to discuss the merits of ironic versus nonironic historical interpretations of 'The Lamb'. I use it to focus instead on another kind of choice. A mere disagreement between ironic and nonironic readings is a disagreement about the nature of an historical event, namely, Blake's original purpose. But there is another and more fundamental kind of disagreement which underlies the real politics of interpretation. It is a disagreement about the norm of interpretation itself. Whatever may be said for choosing an ironic versus nonironic reading of 'The Lamb', the choice would usually be governed by the attempt to reconstruct an historical event. But a very different kind of norm would be invoked if the interpreter decided to choose whatever meaning seemed preferable quite apart from its historicity. I shall argue that *this*, rather than disagreements about an historical event, is the ultimate political choice in interpretation.

To explain this basic choice, it will be convenient to steer a detour around all the irrelevant questions that have been raised concerning authorial intent. I confess to feeling personally responsible for some of the irrelevancies surrounding this issue, and I am at work on a book that tries to untangle those interesting problems. But that is another topic. In order to perceive the political essence of interpretive norms, we can circumvent the whole question of author psychology by adopting a semiotic account of interpretation.⁴ Instead of referring an interpretation back to an original author, we could just for the moment refer it back to an original code or convention system. Let us say that the historical interpretation is the one that applies an earlier code system to the text. For instance, one historical problem in interpreting 'The Lamb' would then be whether the original code system made the poem ironic or not. This semiotic account can be simplified still further if, instead of talking about particular conventions, we talk about the choice between different convention systems and we pretend that the choice is controlled by the selection of a particular 'cypher key.' Under this semiotic account, then, the political choices of interpretation have to do with the choice of a cypher key.

This model for dealing with the matter has another advantage besides simplicity. It not only avoids digressive issues connected with author psychology, it avoids confusions about the social and conventional character of linguistic meaning. Those who attack the author norm, or some other individualistic version of interpretation, rightly observe that no one could ever impose an arbitrary linguistic mode of interpretation. Nobody can act quite as Humpty-Dumpty did when he told Alice that he could make a word mean whatever he wanted it to mean. But the real political question does not concern the conventionality versus the individuality of interpretation; it concerns, rather, the locus of authority. *Who* chooses the cypher key?

It would be wrong to see this as anything but a political question. When Alice asked Humpty-Dumpty whether he really could apply any arbitrary meaning to a text, Humpty replied, 'The question is, which is to be master — that's all.' Although the choice of cypher keys is not unlimited, as Humpty-Dumpty claimed, that fact does not have the theoretical importance which some theorists have attached to it. Much more important is the fact that several conventional codes can be applied to any text. That being so, Humpty-Dumpty's question, *Who* shall be master? *Who* shall choose the cypher key? is the ultimate political question in interpretation.

In the *a priori* view, the real chooser of norms is, of course, willy-nilly the reader. So, the short answer to the question, *Who* chooses the cypher key? is the reader chooses. But this short answer hides an important detail, namely, that the reader can decide to let somebody other than the reader choose the cypher key. Under that kind of arrangement, the reader, like the ideologue of truth, would take an *a posteriori* approach. The reader would accept whatever cypher key seemed, on the evidence, to be one that governed a past event. That kind of interpretation is inherently and necessarily historical, since it always refers back to a decision made in the past. Therefore, the structure of the historical norm, which is always open to revision, is different from the structure of a norm based on *ad hoc* reader preferences, which are open only to change by whim.

This distinction between a reader's present, *ad hoc* choice of a cypher key and the reader's decision to accept somebody's past choice of a cypher key is applicable to every act of interpretation whether of speech or of writing. Let us call the reader's choice of his or her own preferred cypher key a 'self-governing' or 'autocratic' norm. In contrast, let us call the reader's decision to defer to past choice of a cypher key an 'other-governing' or 'allocratic' norm.

This distinction is more general and useful than 'author-norm' and 'reader-norm,' since 'author' usually refers to an original author and to one single historical event, and that is not the only important kind of historical interpretation in the humanities. Take this example of nonauthorial yet historical interpretation. Suppose I say that my goal is to interpret 'The Lamb' not as Blake understood it but as Bloom did. It is true that I would then conceive of Bloom as a kind of secondary author, and so I would still be conducting an interpretation under a kind of authorial norm. Structurally speaking, to conduct an accurate historical interpretation of Bloom's 'Lamb', I would follow the same sort of allocratic procedure as I would in conducting an historical interpretation of Blake's.⁵ Both would be historical *a posteriori* investigations, and evidence relevant to either historical event would help provisionally in choosing the cypher key to be applied. The historical,

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allocratic norm would govern both, thus giving that term a greater generality than authorial norm.

This autocratic/allocratic distinction holds also for those interpretive communities celebrated by Stanley Fish. In the example just mentioned, I might choose to belong either to the Blakean community or the Bloomian community, but in both cases I would have to look back to an historical act of choice by which the community adopted some cypher key which defines it as an interpretive community. On the other hand, if I decided to disregard *anybody's* choice of a cypher key and chose the one that I preferred, or that seemed right to me, or that was always already given to me, I then would be following the autocratic norm. It's true that such a norm is not merely an individualistic one, since the cypher key I have chosen consists of social conventions. Moreover it's true that other people might independently choose as I do, thus making me a member of a transindividual interpretive community. But the only way anyone could deliberately join me in that community would be to practise an historical, allocratic interpretation in order to find out what the cypher key of my community was. To do that they would have to engage in straightforward allocratic, historical interpretation.

From the standpoint of logical coherence and even legitimacy, I do not think there is anything to choose between an autocratic or allocratic norm of interpretation. I must not object that the autocratic norm is linguistically implausible, since any choice of any cypher key would actualize some existing conventional, legitimate system. But this very plurality of legitimate code systems requires an interpreter to choose one cypher key rather than another, without having any *logical* reason for choosing one over another. So, the decision between the autocratic and the allocratic norm is at bottom an ethical and political choice, and only that. Against Fish's insistence that interpretation is always already autocratic (whether we know it or not) must be set P. D. Juhl's insistence that interpretation is always already allocratic (whether we know it or not).⁶ Both of these monolithic descriptions are rhetorical exhortations masked as theory (whether they know it or not). For the claim that we have no choice between the autocratic and allocratic norms is in practice an exhortation to make one choice rather than another; the political choice itself is very real. Ironically, the a priori theory that interpretations are always already politically predetermined is an evasion of the very real political choice between the autocratic and allocratic norms.

Let me briefly summarize the analysis to this point. First, the politics of interpretation resides in the choice between the autocratic and allocratic norm. Under the autocratic norm, authority resides in the reader, while under the allocratic norm, the reader delegates authority to the reconstructed historical act of another person or community. Second, autocratic interpretation is not in principle revisable except by accidental change of preference, whereas allocratic interpretation is revisable ex post facto on the basis of changing theories and evidence about a determinative historical event. Hence the autocratic norm is a priori and incorrigible; the allocratic norm is a posteriori and revisable. The authority to choose one of these norms lies with the reader, and this choice, being free, is ethical or political in nature; it is entirely unconstrained by epistemological considerations. I will now amplify this last point.

Broadly speaking, those who claim that all interpretations are prestructured by cultural schemas may be called 'idealists': Nihil in interpretatione nisi prius in

schema. In the deepest sense, in this view, interpretation is always already autocratic, that is, always constituted by the reader's predetermining schemas, whether cultural, political, or what have you. The contrasting view, that interpretation can be either autocratic or allocratic, assumes that the truth about an historical event (say, another person's choice of a cypher key) is something that might be objectively known despite the influence of cultural schemas. Those who hold this latter view may be called 'realists.' (In recent polemics, they are called 'naive realists' with 'naive' being a nonseparable prefix.) This contrast between realism and idealism seems to be the epistemological bottom line between the autocratic-a priori and the allocratic-a posteriori principles in interpretation. As Richard Rorty has pointed out, the rise of a prioristic, post-modern literary theory is a resurgence of nineteenth-century cognitive idealism — in a new guise.⁷

In calling the views of Foucault, Fish, Derrida, and De Man 'idealistic,' I do not suppose that I score a telling point. Quite the contrary. Idealism is one of the durable positions in epistemology. Furthermore, when I assume the philosophical respectability of cognitive realism, I do not suppose that philosophical problems are circumvented merely by appealing to the universal realism of common sense. The realist position, like the idealist, is beset by embarrassments (though they happen to embarrass me less than the idealist ones). My observation that post-modern theorists are idealists has a practical, not a philosophical, motivation. I want to claim that *neither* epistemological idealism nor epistemological realism has any direct practical bearing on the politics of interpretation. Ultimately, nothing argued at the grandiose level of epistemology, such as the turn from 'logocentrism' (Derrida), 'the historical a priori' (Foucault), 'the political unconscious' (Jameson) — none of these high-level generalizations can decide the issue between autocratic and allocratic norms of interpretation.

This truth is acknowledged by both idealist and realist arguments in their more thoughtful forms. A sophisticated idealist would never deny that we can act like realists — that is, act *as though* our beliefs were indefinitely revisable and *as though* they sometimes corresponded to reality. The idealist simply proposes that these beliefs are either wrong or unjustifiable. A sophisticated realist, on the other side, would not deny that our beliefs might, at some unknown, ultimate, not-yet-defined level be unrevisable, nor that we couldn't sometimes *act* like idealists if we wanted to. People do act like realists even if the idealist position should (in some undemonstrable way) be right; they can go on acting like idealists, at least in the sphere of intellectual affairs, even if the realist position should (in some undemonstrable way) be right. This influence on action constitutes what I would call the 'rhetoricity' of interpretive theories. In short, even a sophisticated idealist would grant that we can *act* as though we have a choice between autocratic and allocratic interpretation, and action is the medium of politics and ethical choice.

Thus, to be a realist or idealist in an ultimate epistemological sense is rather like being a theist or an atheist. Such metaphysical belief is a psychological sanction for action rather than a position that can be proved or demolished. Neither position is certainly decidable. As Pascal once observed with regard to religious belief: 'We are incapable of knowing either what He is or whether He exists. This being so, who will be so rash as to decide?'⁸ Yet, in practical terms, as Pascal also observed, we are put into the position of having to choose, that is, having to act. Pascal proposed, therefore, the further question: How shall we act in the absence of any

decisive grounding for theism or atheism? He argued that in the end such a decision had to be a gamble: 'Let us weigh the gain and loss in calling heads — that God exists. Let us estimate the two chances. If you win, you win everything. If you lose, you lose nothing. Do not hesitate then, gamble on His existence.'

The analogy between Pascal's famous wager and the situation of the interpreter is this: no philosopher, including whichever current sage one chances to reverse — Foucault, Heidegger, Rorty, Derrida — has put forward a decisive argument for preferring an idealist over a realist view. As with theism versus atheism, no decisive ground could be put forward. This fact has led Rorty, for example, to adopt what he calls a 'pragmatist' (in my view, an idealist) position. But the same facts and arguments which lead Rorty to repudiate traditional epistemology can, following Pascal's argument, lead to a different imperative, namely: choose that position among the two undecidable ones which sanctions the most desired or desirable practice. The modern version of Pascal's wager would be: Let us weigh the practical gain and loss in calling heads — that is, that objective historical truth exists. Let us estimate the two chances. If you win, you win something. If you lose, you lose nothing. Do not hesitate then, gamble on the existence of objective truth.

How does that wager play itself out in the sphere of interpretive practice? I have suggested that the realist (a posteriori) viewpoint sanctions the possibility that we might sometimes know the objective truth about the following historical question: What was the code of conventions that somebody chose at some historical moment to apply to this text? To the extent that this historical question might be answered correctly, historical, allocratic interpretation might be carried out correctly. Allocratic interpretation, moreover, is the only sort that can in principle be revised, and thus make practical use of scholarship, evidence, logical argument, and could even look to the possibility of empirical progress. Allocratic interpretation, then, offers the possibility of being wrong. Autocratic interpretation, by contrast, is always right or, more exactly, could be neither right nor wrong; it offers itself no external standard with respect to which it could be one or the other. That doesn't nullify autocratic interpretation, which in a particular circumstance could serve the more valuable purpose.⁹ But such a value judgment would be a practical, not a theoretical, decision. It would be a genuine political decision.

What have I tried to achieve with this Pascalian argument? First, a negative goal — I want to remove the delusion that philosophers, theorists, and cultural sages could ever definitively show that objective truth is impossible or that accurate historical interpretation is a delusion. They have not shown this, and they cannot do so. This means that the field of interpretation is, in its large theoretical structure (and despite some genuine technical advances), more or less where it was 100 years ago. That is where big theoretical issues are likely to remain, along with the big epistemological questions to which they are allied — forever in the realm of the never-surely-decidable. I have argued that the practical consequence of this theoretical aporia is not to subordinate the politics of interpretation to big theory but rather to subordinate big theory to politics. In the end, the debate between autocratic and allocratic interpretation is a political, not an epistemological, issue. And the political issue is: What sort of culture do we want to foster?

When I was first starting on a career in scholarship, I was thrilled to read Max Weber's lecture to young scholars called 'Wissenschaft als Beruf,' 'Science as a

Vocation.' No one will venture to contend that Weber neglected or underestimated the cultural, personal, social, and political influences that impinge upon the seeking of objective truth. He was the master of that subject. Yet no one has spoken of the goal of objective truth — *Wissenschaft* — with more impressive and infectious fervour than Weber did in that 1919 lecture. His message to young scholars was: In the academy beware of politics as an adjunct to science and, equally, beware of science as an adjunct to politics. Fourteen years later, in 1933, Ernst Kriek, the first Nazi rector of the University of Frankfurt, pronounced in his inaugural address a different view: 'Nowadays the task of the universities is not to cultivate objective science, but soldier-like, militant science' — a succinct statement of the politics of interpretation.¹⁰

The word 'science' (*Wissenschaft*) of course meant to Weber more than the word 'science' can convey in English, since *Wissenschaft* embraces the humane as well as the natural sciences. Indeed the interpretation of texts was one of the memorable examples Weber used in his lecture to illustrate what he meant by science:

Whoever lacks the capacity . . . to come up to the idea that the fate of his soul depends upon whether or not he makes the correct conjecture at this passage of this manuscript may as well stay away from science. He will never have what one may call the 'personal experience' of science. If you lack this strange intoxication, ridiculed by every outsider, if you lack this passion . . . you have no calling for science and should do something else. For nothing is worthy of man as man unless he can pursue it with passionate devotion.¹¹

In the 1980s, we who find ourselves in the profession of textual interpretation cannot respond wholeheartedly to Weber's example. Too many children of science have already pored over too few canonical texts with just the intensity that Weber so inspiringly described. The allocratic exegesis of our major canonical texts has pretty much reached a dead end because our texts are few and our interpreters, over the years, have been many. The allocratic exegesis of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton on narrow literary principles cannot provide us with an endless frontier, and it is the closing down of that New Critical frontier rather than 'advances' in epistemology which now draws our profession toward autocratic interpretation (for which the frontier no doubt seems endless, even if intellectually uninteresting). But it is doubtful that autocratic interpretation will long continue to satisfy either its practitioners or its readers.

Unfortunately, the forty-year-old doctrine that textual exegesis (interpretation in the New Critical sense) is our only legitimate critical activity still holds sway in the academy. It is the hidden assumption that joins allocrats and autocrats together; it is the common bond of Derridians and Robertsonians. But without this assumption that only interpretation of the 'literary work' is legitimate, would we still feel an institutional pressure to continue to produce new readings whether autocratic or allocratic? Does not this restriction of our activity to interpretation in a narrow sense betray a certain habit-bound lack of imagination? What is needed for the future is a genuinely new frontier for allocratic, historical interpretation — interpretation with an object, but with a new kind of object.

This can be found only in history. And it will have to be found beyond the narrow boundaries of the aesthetic and the text-in-itself. Interpretation, as the general term for cognition, is hardly limited to the boundaries of texts or to the arbitrary confines of fiction and poetry. Historical interpretation is the humanistic

pursuit par excellence and embraces not just texts but contexts. On this score, the contextual urgings of Foucault (minus his *a priori* obfuscations) are all in the right direction.

Whether professors of literature shall find new objects of historical inquiry is a political, not a theoretical, question, even though in a large perspective it is perhaps an insignificant political question. Sometimes, however, academic humanists do enter the sphere of significant politics in addition to their considerable influence in the classroom. Once in a while some professor in the humanities is named to an important panel or called on to testify before a legislative committee. When that happens, the humanist is never asked to put forward an autocratic interpretation of texts or of the world. The humanist is called on to tell, as far as possible, the objective historical truth about some facet of reality that he or she has closely studied. Nobody outside the academy is interested in autocratic interpretations, even when they follow the conventions of some established interpretive community. Interpretation is intellectually interesting inside the academy mainly when it is trying to determine some objective historical truth. It is politically significant outside the academy *only* when it is trying to determine some objective historical truth. Whether or not an interpretation is telling the historical truth is a question that nobody can answer. Nonetheless, the interpreter's decision to try to tell this truth is a genuine political decision, too important to be yielded by default to the rhetoric of interpretive theories.

Notes:

1. The term 'a priori' is of course familiar to readers in philosophy. Taken loosely and in a broad sense it sometimes means the totality of prior givens which enable us to interpret experience: such prior cognitive frameworks as space, time, object, person, and so on. These givens 'ground' our experience; we never confront experience with an innocent eye — on that point all parties agree, including empirical psychologists of various schools. The more specific doctrine that I call the 'a priori' here is a Kantian form of idealism which holds that we cannot change our formative givens in a fundamental way. Thus, I use the term *a priori* to specify the doctrine of the *unrevisability* of our cognitive givens. This unrevisability doctrine, central to Kant, is held, *mutatis mutandis*, by the cultural Kantians of our time. The *a posteriorist*, by contrast, while not contesting the idea of cognitive frameworks, does contest the idea of their unrevisability. There is no limit in principle to the revisability and corrigibility of our interpreted constructs. The *a posteriorist* regards our prior givens as provisional rather than as ultimate. For extended discussion, see Arthur Pap, *The A Priori* (New York, 1946), and the recent translation of Hans Reichenbach's path-breaking book of 1919, *The Theory of Relativity and A Priori Knowledge*, ed. and trans. Maria Reichenbach (Berkeley, 1965).
2. See, e.g., Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1981), p. 17: 'This book will argue the priority of the literary interpretation of literary texts. It conceives of the political perspective not as some supplementary method, not as an optional auxiliary to other interpretive methods current today . . . but rather as the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation.'
3. The *a prioriist* would quickly observe that these questions themselves fall within a predetermined scheme. Yes, they do. The more fundamental issue is whether these pre-given questions (or frameworks) are themselves revisable. If so, they are predetermining only in a 'Pickwickian' sense, that is, not absolutely predetermining at all.
4. By no means do I consider semiotics to be an adequate account by itself, nor have I abandoned the principle of authorial intent. I have simply set aside that issue for the moment in order to focus on the nature of basic political choices in interpretation.
5. I have noted before that a priorist, autocratic critics invite us to pursue an allocratic interpretation

of their own writings — thus recognizing implicitly the reality of the autocratic/allocratic choice — by their actions if not by their theories.

6. Stanley Fish: 'No longer is the critic the humble [allocratic] servant of texts whose glories exist independently of anything he might do; it is what he [autocratically] does, within the constraints embedded in the literary institution, that brings texts into being and makes them available for analysis and appreciation' (*Is There a Text in This Class?* [Cambridge, Mass., 1980], p. 368). P. D. Juhl: 'There is a logical connection between statements about the meaning of a literary work and [allocratic] statements about the author's intention' (*Interpretation* [Princeton, N. J., 1980], p. 12). work is a statement about the author's intention' (*Interpretation* [Princeton, N. J., 1980], p. 12). See Richard Rorty, 'Nineteenth-Century Idealism and Twentieth-Century Textualism,' *The Monist* 64 (1981): 155-74.
8. Pascal, *The 'Pensées'*, trans. J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth, 1961), no. 451.
9. For instance, we might prefer to interpret Benjamin Franklin's proverb 'A rolling stone gathers no moss' *autocratically* as an admonishment to keep out of a rut, rather than allocratically as his admonishment to stay put. In this case my own preference is for the autocratic interpretation, and I would be willing to argue that in certain contexts it is the more valuable one. But in making that political choice, I haven't the slightest need of epistemological theories.
10. Gerald Graff has quoted Mussolini in a similar vein in *Literature Against Itself* (Chicago, 1979), p. 188, and the two examples together show pretty well that the politics of interpretation, though now espoused by the intellectual Left, is not the exclusive property of any political group. Nor is it only a characteristic of the Right to take on the cloak of realism and 'spurious objectivity.' A political leftist can be an ideologue of truth and a realist-objectivist — such was Lenin. See the account of Lenin's realism and objectivism in Roger Trigg, *Reality at Risk: A Defense of Realism in Philosophy and the Sciences* (New York, 1980), pp. 27-39. See also the spirited defence of realism by a thinker whom nobody would call conservative, Paul Feyerabend, especially in his 'Realism and Instrumentalism,' *Realism, Rationalism, and Scientific Method: Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 176-202. Another example would be the cohabitation of realism with Maoism in Hilary Putnam a few years back (see Putnam, *Philosophical Papers*, 2 vols. [London, 1975]). All of this further documents a primary thesis of this essay: that politics and epistemology are independent variables and that the attempt to sanction either of them by the other is basically a rhetorical (political) manoeuvre.
11. Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation,' *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (New York, 1946), p. 131.