RICHARD McKEON

A Study

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Reminiscences of the Years 1932–49

Apart from the years when he served part of the time as administrator and councillor, the professional life of Richard McKeon rested upon two aspects of his work.[1] There was McKeon the author, magnificently erudite, incredibly versatile, honed to a surpassing sharpness for his dialectical assaults and defenses, and remorseless in the drive of his logic. Then there was McKeon the teacher, also magnificently erudite, incredibly versatile, honed to a surpassing sharpness in his dialectical assaults and defenses, and remorseless in the drive of his logic. As a writer, part of his task was to expound the opinions of others, which he did almost invariably with what might be termed a sympathy or sympathetic literalness, while another part was devoted to explaining his own complex views. In the classroom, much time was devoted to the delivery of his meticulously prepared lectures, the rest being given to discussion, nearly always directed to some doctrine or text, but with the same emphasis upon the method of interpretation. He stated flatly his theories at intervals; then he would defend them if attacked, though as a rule in connection with the expounding of other philosophers, so that it took patience to disentangle his original from his scholarly thinking. He did not, however, use the figures of history as buttresses for his own views.

I first heard of Richard McKeon[2] from an older friend who commented on the man's brilliance but gave me little indication of the directions in his philosophy. It was summer 1932, and I was about to enter Columbia College as a freshman; because McKeon taught no courses open to beginners, my enrollment in his classes would have to be postponed. I did manage to attend a noonday chapel talk that autumn and remember chiefly that he ended with a quotation from St. Bonaventura: "Plato spoke the language of wisdom, Aristotle the language of science, and St. Augustine, illumined by the Holy Spirit, spoke the language of

against myself, because there were two paragraphs that I could not account for—he had either written them himself or copied from some other source that I did not know. And then he told me that he had never even *heard* of Joseph Ratner, so I said to him that in that case one of your fraternity brothers has played you a dirty trick.

McKeon was also teaching graduate courses in (physical) Science and Metaphysics, and History of Histories of Philosophy. More will be said about the first of these in chapter 5. In the second he distinguished—so I was told—between grammarian-historians, who seek to preserve historical knowledge, rhetorician-historians, who seek to marshall it to influence beliefs and behavior, and logician-historians, who test the truth of the ideas they encounter and expound. I was not permitted in these rather small graduate classes but managed to become acquainted with some of their contents through my agents in the field. It was a novelty for me to see headings for the medieval trivium turned to new account when they were applied analogically in ways stemming from and resembling the original meanings but by no means literally the same. This systematic reapplication turned out to be a regular device in McKeon's discourse, and one could interpret a term with significations that moved increasingly far from the original denotation. If one had a series of two or three or more terms, one could move in the same successive ways to the remoter meanings and thereby set up an array of them. One of the obvious differences between our two instructors in General History of Philosophy lay here; Edman merely put important words on the blackboard as they occurred to him, in no particular order, and with lines having no significance except to separate the words, whereas McKeon's blackboard was covered in his precise handwriting in diagrammatic style, and the lines always had some essential meaning: subsumption, correspondence, equivalence, or, again, these analogies, usually rendered in oblongs and squares. He was extremely visual-minded in his philosophizing, and his published work shows this, for the writings are almost invariably the working out in prose of these figures. He expected the reader to reconstruct the quasi-mathematical images in the mind of the author.

At the time of his teaching Philosophy 162 McKeon had been an assistant professor at Columbia for four and a half years, despite the very favorable impressions he had made with his book on Spinoza and his anthology of medieval philosophers, not to mention several journal papers. In the autumn of 1934, however, he skipped a rank when he

was appointed for a year as visiting professor of history (not philosophy) at the University of Chicago. Those of us at Columbia had to change over to various other teachers, probably the best and most rigorous of whom was Ernest Nagel on modern logic.

Once in a while there drifted back to us chilling rumors that McKeon would not be returning to Columbia, though on vacation in New York at Christmas he allayed those fears, only to reverse the situation at Easter by saying that the rumors were now true. He was to be a full professor on the Midway and a dean as well. The first was as professor of Greek, but later he became professor of philosophy in addition. Chicago's Department of Philosophy was, to my mind, much more independent-minded and straightforward than the inbred staff at Columbia. (I am not sure what effect this apparent fact had upon McKeon's decision to leave New York, though certainly the opportunity to bypass an associate professorship and also become a dean must have been some inducement.) Hippocrates G. Apostle was one of the students who took a bus to Chicago the next fall, making that city and its most glittering ornament his home for many years. I followed in the autumn of 1936 (to be at the University for three academic years during that stint), and Alan Gewirth, a Columbia student who was spending a couple of years at Cornell, came to the Midway a year or so later. There were many others.

It happened that at Chicago McKeon's courses, most of them on the graduate level, were conducted very differently from Philosophy 161–162. Now the students, perhaps fifteen or twenty at most, sat in a quasi-circle round a large table; each person was required to read in turn a sentence of text and then to answer questions. Invariably nursing a pipe, McKeon sat or stood at the end of that ponderous blond wooden table in a homely white-walled, high-ceilinged room, lining up at table's edge the partly burned matches with which he had tended his smoking utensil. His questions were dreaded, and there was no escape, short of a desperate plea. If the questions seemed easy, that was deceiving for newcomers, who were not overtrusting for long. McKeon had a way of continuing his interrogations until the student, commencing bravely and with some small success, had finally to flounder and admit that he (or she—there were a few women in the classes, though never very many at that time) simply did not know. Try as we might, we virtually never came out unscathed. In the six years, all told, that I attended his classes at Chicago, I heard him praise a total of two recitations. Any one of us

would have been glad to be included in that number, one of them a lady who was at the time on leave as dean at a prominent eastern women's college, the other a man later becoming director of classical studies in philosophy at one of the nation's great universities.

The questions had to do at first with translating each sentence of the texts, in courses devoted successively to the *Republic,* Aristotle's *On the Soul,* later his *Politics,* then Plato's *Timaeus,* and after that Aristotle's *Physics.* (I had been a year too late for classes in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Organon.*) When translation problems had been settled (students of Greek in the class were dealt with slightly differently from those in philosophy), or it was agreed that a final decision on constructions was impossible because of corrupted text, the questioning would turn to definitions of the terms or to other devices, such as analogies, examples, and so forth, used by Plato or Aristotle to help fix their meanings or to offer reasons why they should be loose for the time being. The questioning might advert to the relation of the sentence under consideration to its predecessors, immediate or remote, its probable influence upon those to come, and whatever else seemed relevant. The structure of the argument was of supreme importance: what was the chief heading, what were the subordinate headings, how were the least parts related to the others, great and small? The most dreaded question, Why four (terms, modifiers, propositions, proofs, counterarguments, as the case might be), and why *these* four—or some other number that happened to fit the circumstances—was a query faced over and over. It was a strenuous discipline, but every other way of teaching philosophy seems in retrospect perfunctory by comparison.[5] Citing texts not immediately adjacent to the one under scrutiny was of course permitted, but the student had better have a good reason for so doing. One victim, having been backed into a corner, was silently scanning the entire contents of his memory for something helpful and finally brought forth a couple of lines from a text he considered obscure enough to awe the instructor. "Yes, I know the author said that," replied McKeon, "but then what does he say over on the top of the next page?" T. E. Lawrence said of the great General Allenby, in relation to his underlings, ". . . comprehension of our littleness came slow to him." I used to think this true of McKeon vis-à-vis most of his students; he seemed to think us capable of his own prodigies of application to so many subjects. When he handed out an extremely stiff take-home examination on the *Timaeus*

and said that it could at most require three hours' work, this was greeted with nervous laughter, mingled with a few sturdy groans.

McKeon seemed to follow Hobbes's famous prescription to be sociable with them that will be sociable and formidable with them that will be formidable. The formidable moods, however, usually manifested themselves in coolness, not to say a kind of remote severity, and this was generally called forth in class by extreme inattentiveness or disagreeable combativeness, or else by repeated unexcused absences.[6] Outside of class, however, his manner was usually one of restrained friendliness, punctuated occasionally by puckish whimsicality or hearty laughter, head thrown back. McKeon enjoyed hearing a joke from time to time, but I do not recall his telling any that were not anecdotes of incidents in the academic world or in his many travels. His attitude from beginning to end in class hours was that comradeship was all very well, but there was much work to be done. Something similar was manifested in a remark he made in the nineteen-thirties about rural vacations. "Going to the country is all very well for a few minutes"—these were his exact words—"but there are no libraries."

There was a small difference between his way of conducting class and what I saw of his demeanor as host at his home. He taught *On the Soul* as an evening seminar, two-and-a-half hours at a stretch, and later we were usually invited to the McKeon's apartment, where Muriel, his first wife, was a witty, friendly hostess, who did much to soften the rigors of the earlier part of the evening (with which she was thoroughly familiar, having been enrolled in the course). She was a serious, able student, and later became managing editor of an excellent journal. Conversation at the apartment was generally rather lofty but fun, and much of it supplemented the classroom ordeals. There, McKeon had almost always adopted a favorable attitude toward the text at hand, assuming that if it made little sense it was our fault for misunderstanding its author. At his residence, on the other hand, one could ask what he *really* thought of the *Laws* or the *Treatise of Human Nature* or some book in modern logic and would generally receive a down-to-earth response, though not necessarily a detailed one.

The lively conversations were always intellectual in content. Persons who came to the classes all or nearly all the time, and who also repaired to the booklined apartment, were Paul Goodman, always arguing but quite goodnaturedly and often with tongue in cheek; William Barrett,

less flamboyant but every bit as keen, with strong literary as well as philosophic interests; Apostle, a devoted and learned Aristotelian, originally trained as a mathematician; Robert S. Brumbaugh, who went on to become an outstanding Platonist; Gewirth, formerly concerned with dialectical materialism and pragmatism, but now deep in late medieval studies and later in much more contemporary topics. Many times international politics would obtrude, for Hitler was enjoying his rapid rearming of Germany and the subduing of neighboring countries, and was much in our minds and feelings. McKeon had been in the Navy during the later months of World War I and had had a taste of its discipline and frustrations, though not of battle; it gave him a perspective that most of us, who had grown up at a time of fervid peace marches, did not then possess.

Although the conversations were free, occasionally spirited, and often cordial, if McKeon ever learned anything about the substance of the discussion from us or modified his opinions, this was a secret kept sealed. He had already done the work, learned the texts almost to the point of memorizing them, had the experiences, opened up the distinctions, and we were in fact opsimaths. McKeon might not convince us, in fact he failed in this many times; but the assumption was that one day we might at last catch up.

It was his great gift for seeing the relevance of one kind of concept to another that enabled him to conduct a discussion so handily in the classroom, at professional meetings, or at informal gatherings. He could help either party to a debate, and often did, though without adopting a wait-and-see attitude. Frequently he would say, after a colleague's suggestion or objection to a speaker, "I think what Mr. X is trying to say is. . . ." On occasion this kind of assistance would be showered with gratitude, but not always.

Some students remained McKeon's steadfast friends throughout later decades; others broke away for one reason or another—I never cared much why. There can well have been right on both sides, but though I had one or two differences with him I found McKeon almost unfailingly kind and helpful, despite his occasional austerity of manner. He had relatively little to say, at least to me, about his own life and feelings, except for his professional experiences, and this may have been taken by others as an unwillingness to share confidences. When he retired from the deanship of the Division of Humanities after a dozen years, I overheard one of the faculty praising him for his fairness and

willingness to listen, and this seemed to be the general attitude. His resignation came, he once told me, because the position had become so overloaded with meetings and directives and triplicates from above that he felt he could spend his time much more wisely.

One must remember that in 1935 when McKeon took on the work at Chicago he was scarcely more than a third of a century in age, but he seemed already to have pondered and clarified an enormous body of intellectual material and come to terms with many practical issues of life as well. A point in this connection: At Columbia he had worn a thin mustache, possibly because it would dispel the impression of youthfulness and at the same time by its sportiness avert the suspicion that its wearer was a mere bookworm. (A couple of years later, he dispensed with this decoration and remained clean-shaven until the last years of his life.) I think that above all he was unwilling to give others impressions that would encourage them to categorize him in some way; he wanted to be and to seem a man for all potentialities.

In the late 1930s, the Department of Philosophy at the University of Chicago was in one of its great periods. Several members, T. V. Smith, Charles Hartshorne, Charner M. Perry, Charles W. Morris, A. Cornelius Benjamin, and McKeon himself, were to be elected to high positions in the American Philosophical Association, which may not be the only essential touchstone of excellence, but these men were singled out for good reason anyway. Marjorie Grene had among other tasks the care of mechanics of the strenuous beginning course in philosophic history, Movements of Thought. Rudolf Carnap and two of his assistants, Olaf Helmer and Carl G. Hempel, had been signed on. Visiting professors for part of the school year were Morris R. Cohen, slightly acerbic and very penetrating, and Bertrand Russell, who brought his dashing wife Patricia, gave popular lectures, and also entertained in evenings at home for the graduate students.

McKeon's apartment was awash with books. I saw only those shelved floor to ceiling in the living room, though rumor had it that they were everywhere. One did not scrutinize, but my impression was that he owned very few lightheaded books in all the thousands of volumes, many of them leather-bound, that he had retrieved from estate libraries. (In the 1920s and 1930s there were very few edited, translated, or reprinted versions of the Latin classics, and of the Greek the Oxford and Loeb Library editions were the chief ones available in this country. To own a work by Grosseteste or Autrecourt or Nicholas of Oresme meant

bidding at a special auction or downright good luck at some Parisian bookseller's.) McKeon confronted volume after volume of the most perplexing books to unravel their inmost structures and secrets. There was a tale that he read two hundred and fifty pages an hour, but when I once asked him he said his "normal rate" was "slow," he elaborated on this no further. Outlining texts occupied him frequently; he deplored the time he had to spend outlining the entire corpus of Francis Bacon. His class notes, typed on white paper folded once, were meticulously prepared, so it seemed; he guarded them zealously.

During the years before World War II McKeon was especially circumspect. As dean, he wanted to avoid siding with what was coming to be called "The Chicago School" of literary criticism, already associated in the public mind with Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. Mortimer J. Adler had preceded McKeon to Chicago by a year or two, and quickly making it clear to everyone that Thomas held keys to the chief and enduring philosophic truths, had helped President Robert Maynard Hutchins acquire this view. Without having changed any of his own opinions regarding the intellectual acuteness and orderliness of the best medieval minds, McKeon nevertheless wished to dissociate himself from any movement to propagandize for them. He taught the courses on Aristotle, but it was a Greek Aristotle, he insisted, not one seen through the eyes of Latin divines. He had formulated a very independent, detailed interpretation of the Stagyrite and could have published profusely on him, but in general he contented himself with merely including briefer expositions in papers on a variety of topics. The exception to this was his publishing of a collection of Aristotle's texts, drawn from the multivolumed Oxford translations, to which he contributed a long introduction whittled down to some twenty printed pages. Otherwise, he seemed to shy away from his former topics. In the academic year 1937–38 he, Perry, and Hartshorne offered a course in Hobbes, Locke, and Kant, McKeon taking the first; he told me later that he had decided to teach Hobbes because this would combat the impression of involvement with the radically God-centered approach that teaching Spinoza would generate. The course on Hobbes was, like all the rest of his offerings, difficult, but discussions of *Leviathan* moved faster than with the Greeks and alternated with lectures on practically everything else written by the crusty, multifaceted Englishman.

In the early summer of 1939, having a thin purse, I left Chicago to teach for two years in New York State, and then had four years of mili-

tary service, and returned to Chicago in the spring quarter of 1946. On furloughs, I had seen McKeon a couple of times, and he had done much to cheer me, and a good many others, by sending friendly letters and, on request, his published papers. My barracks mates in Yukon Territory were puzzled at my absorbed interest in "The Philosophic Bases of Art and Criticism."

Its author was on leave in the spring of 1946 but returned to the university that autumn, and those who had been in service set about trying to make up for the years lost from study. That there were changes at Chicago needs no explanation here. The department provided plenty of other teachers who gave excellent instruction, but to me McKeon was still the brightest star. Among the newcomers who had the Ph.D. from Chicago and had taken numerous courses from McKeon were Manley H. Thompson and Warner A. Wick, also Alan Gewirth (with a doctorate from Columbia). Kurt Riezler, formerly chancellor of a distinguished German university, was there, and Eliseo Vivas as well. Many of McKeon's circle of students had left, but a new group was coming on: Charles W. Wegener, Robert D. Cumming, Robert Sternfeld, William Sacksteder, William Earle, and several more.

McKeon's interests seemed to be shifting from the doctrines of individuals to the dialectic of systems, comparing one with another. The agonizing classroom exegesis of earlier years faded away, but the difficulties in grasping the recondite lectures were as severe; nov he aimed at interpreting larger blocks of traditional doctrines in light of his own currently much more prominent theories. Questions were still asked in class and solutions argued, but it was no longer Plato at the center of discussion, or Aristotle, or anyone else. The elaborately-arranged rubrics into which the philosophers could be fitted held our attention. McKeon gave the old Science and Metaphysics course at least once again and in addition a successful offering that compared the logics of Mill, Bradley, Bosanquet, and W. E. Johnson and contained some remarkable insights into the nature of alternate formulations in philosophic logic. This was followed the next year by an even more impressive course on the ultimate theory of meaning, truth, and inference, in which McKeon expounded very painstakingly the square matrices he had hitherto kept hidden from our view.

This was the last, or nearly the last, regular class that I attended, for soon afterward I left Chicago for good to commence a new life with expanded academic obligations. Because this was a turning point, I

bring these reminiscences to a halt, for after June 1949 I saw McKeon rather infrequently, mostly at philosophical association meetings. After that year much of my information about his life and work as teacher came secondhand. I can sketch a little more of his life from conversations with him over rare meals or coffee, or from public records. His chief honor at the university was his appointment as Charles F. Grey Distinguished Service Professor in the late 1960s, a chair he continued to hold for long following his retirement from regular teaching, though he kept up his almost incessant travels much after that. Some years after Muriel McKeon's death he remarried. As I said, Muriel was an editor; Zahava K. McKeon is a teacher of humanities and author. I have owed much to both of these exceptional women.

This chapter should conclude with one or two remarks on McKeon's versatility, which continually astounded the rest of us.

During his single adolescent year in the Navy, he had been given courses in marine and other engines and had indeed contemplated becoming an engineer; he later took a number of courses in fairly advanced mathematics in preparation for that profession. In addition he had studied languages and vast amounts of history and literature. Many years afterward, at Chicago, he taught a course in the school of law. The three different professorships that he held at one time or another could no doubt have been supplemented by some others. Always eager to discover and weigh, and if need be suggest possible refutations for what was currently being said in the philosophic profession, he attended large numbers of conferences, so many, in fact, that to us it almost seemed a weakness; at any rate it interrupted his scheduled classes. There was a story to the effect that on one occasion he was surrounded by an informal gathering of Near Eastern scholars wanting to hear all about James and Dewey, to which he responded that the almost-forgotten medieval Arab and Jewish traditions were of extraordinary strength and variety, and he sketched some points in Alfarabi and Avicenna, and of course Moses Maimonides. Upon his suggesting that they form an institute for the study of these worthies, the scholars replied that they would be glad to seek funds for this, provided that McKeon himself would consent to be its head. I once asked him if the tale were true, and he denied it but gave a corrected version so close to the other that I have always had a hunch that the original was not some concoction.

During World War II he was placed in charge of all the military instruction programs at the University of Chicago campus, as he felt it

incumbent upon himself to do as much as he could to forward the war effort. I once heard him deliver an excellent lecture on modern short stories, after which, over some beer, he talked to friends about Stravinsky.[7] He had studied various works on physiology, and he also gave, so I was told, quite marvelous analyses of *Hamlet*. Through it all he made the unswerving effort to come to grips with inner meaning and truth, to illuminate with philosophy all things in nature and the arts, and make those things in turn broaden and invigorate the philosophic discipline.

Long ago, when I was a junior at Columbia and had taken just that one course from McKeon in the history of philosophy, I told a friend that I thought my professor was, for his breadth of mastery, clearness, penetration, and originality, a mind virtually on the level of Immanuel Kant. In the fifty-odd years since then, I have seen no good reason to change that opinion.

2

Conspectus

Writings and Publications

The expository chapters of this book on Richard McKeon's philosophy should commence with some superficial information regarding his publications and public stance. He was the author, co-author, translator, and/or editor of about a dozen books, depending upon the way they are counted.[1] These books, however, are not for the most part independent, unified statements of his major contributions, with one exception. *Freedom and History: The Semantics of Philosophical Controversies and Ideological Conflicts*[2] is the closest to a full-scale presentation of original materials not previously published between boards and intended to be complete in itself as a book. Still, it is short, and is constructed much like one of McKeon's extended essays.[3] Apart from his doctoral dissertation on Spinoza, published by a commercial house,[4] his works do not include any full-length studies focused on one occidental philosopher. Two volumes of selections from medieval philosophers were edited and translated by him when still a young man.[5] Two books of selections from Aristotle are provided with introductions hinting at the editor's highly detailed interpretation of the Stagyrite.[6] McKeon coedited a critical edition of the *Sic et Non* of Peter Abailard,[7] while he and N. A. Nikam also brought out a translation, with introduction and notes, of the famous *Edicts* of the Indian monarch Asoka.[8] *Thought, Action, and Passion*[9] selects three essays previously published and adds a fourth of considerable length and surpassing importance not printed before.

A listing of this sort reveals a surprising reversal of an author's usual emphasis upon large books: for McKeon many of these volumes could be termed scholarly incidentals. It is to the essays that the reader should turn for a sounder notion of the breadth and depth of McKeon's thought. They deal with an extraordinarily wide spectrum of topics, and

like a spectrum the contents exhibit many carefully graded colors. The topics are connected in various ways so that almost any one of them could serve as the groundwork of a book containing several such treatments, with all manner of proofs, applications, refutations, and examples drawn from scholarship or observation. Lacking these amplifications, however, and lacking explicit announcements of their ties to each other, the essays, when read one by one, give a very different kind of sweep from that say, of Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* or Dewey's *Experience and Nature*. Despite this, it is mistaken to take the well over one hundred and fifty published articles and chapters as intended for sketches of books, just as it would be wrong to think of the *Gorgias* or *De rerum natura* as treatises in larval form. The essays are at once complete in themselves and yet form long chains, though not in any Cartesian sense. The painters who have executed the Stations of the Cross, or, on a more familiar level, Hogarth with his *Rake's Progress,* have painted individual works complete in themselves yet part of a yet more complete whole. McKeon's essays commence not with simple, indisputable ideas but rather with compounded forms in their own way indisputable, embracing all possibilities of approaches to a specific, circumscribed topic. Whether they should be called essays as units is another question, to which allusion will be made later.[10] Could one say that McKeon wrote essays but was not an essayist?

The strongest reason that McKeon has had fewer adherents thus far than he might have had, considering his marked effect on public gatherings, is that he never caught widespread attention with a masterly book that expounded and defended his views such as the two just named by Dewey and Bradley or *Process and Reality* or *Being and Nothingness*. Had he published such a book, general readers might have been attracted to it and then turned to his shorter writings. To subscribe to a journal on the chance that it would contain an essay by a particular author is uneconomical, and the uncommitted would hardly be expected to become habitual devotees. As it is, one examines the bibliographies and notes of book after recent book by others dealing with topics on which McKeon had much to say, only to find him represented by no more than one or two references, or none at all. This is true even for *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* published when McKeon was nearing his seventieth birthday.

Even if a multivolume edition of all McKeon's published works is issued (as is now planned), this may not remove misunderstandings al-

together, for the essay form virtually forced him to repeat certain fundamentals (I shall state them as theses in chapter 8) and the repetitions will doubtless seem odd and be taken lightly by a new reader, who would tend to skip to the accounts of what others had said on each topic. In a great many of his writings, such as the longer articles on Aristotle[11] and his address entitled "Symposia,"[12] McKeon offered the results of careful, word-by-word analyses that were made explicitly only in his classroom exegeses. Elsewhere there was little effort to give more than a condensed version of doctrines and arguments pertinent to the classificatory and other points being made. He said little regarding the substructures that he invented and used throughout, but they are vital to any interpretation of his writings nevertheless.

A classification of these writings might be something like this: the basic distinction in all of his works, be they long, short, simplified, or advanced, is between what I call the preservative and interpretive on the one hand and the originative on the other. The books and essays under the first heading can be divided into treatments of single figures and plural. Of the single the chief example is the book on Spinoza, to which the little volume on Asoka can be added. Each thinker in the two-volume work on medieval philosophers is treated as a single figure as well. Other examples are the brief study of Maimonides,[13] an essay on Thomas Aquinas,[14] a much later piece on Duns Scotus,[15] an extended account of Cicero,[16] a short but sensitive address in honor of Thomas Mann,[17] and of course the essays on Aristotle.

As for the writings on more than one figure, there are three chief kinds: first, those wherein the basic distinction is between two traditions, such as we find in "Literary Criticism and the Concept of Imitation in Antiquity"[18] and a few others; second, the three-term contrasts, as in a piece on the Renaissance and methods in some predominantly religious writers[19] and finally the four-term contrasts, in which McKeon in later phases of his career analyzed a large number of problems, social, linguistic, artistic, and others.[20] Certain of these studies heavily stress historical aspects of their subjects.[21] but even so they are philosophically organized so that the salient points and contrasts between them are shown with great conceptual clarity; however, they are not always easy reading.

The materials in these are held under such tight control that it is a short step to the obviously originative works, where the chief doctrines veer away from classifications of traditional answers and into fields in

which new ideas regarding current subject matters are explained, exemplified, and supported. Here the primary division is between monothematic and collational writings (I apologize for the neologism). Several of the collational essays bring together two, three, or four rival approaches to a problem, a discipline, or even to the whole of philosophy, allowing or not allowing minor variants to creep in but making great effort to find harmonizing principles between them. Of these collational essays there are two sorts, those dealing with a subject analytically and without emphasis on chronology or cultural milieu and those that are primarily historical. The monothematic essays, too, are of two kinds, either testing one other thinker or devoted solely to McKeon's own, uncompared views. Further subdivisions abound, but the lines between them become exceedingly hazy. The kinds of structures, however, can be more easily discerned. Some are what I call omnibus arrays, while others are special arrays. Of the second type, in which two or more kinds of thinkers are arranged in parallel but with limited lists of concepts ranged under headings dictated by possible divisions in the nature of things, the most elegant and clearcut representative is "The Philosophic Bases of Art and Criticism";[22] another is "Dialectic and Political Thought and Action."[23] Of those ordered under three main headings, I find no examples of an omnibus array, but of the special there are many: "Philosophy and Method,"[24] the little book *Freedom and History,* and a good many more, including the very difficult "Being, Existence, and That Which Is."[25] Of the four-term collational essays, a remarkable special array is the until recently unpublished "Philosophic Semantics and Philosophic Inquiry," about which there is much more to be said.

To give a better notion of the emphasis that McKeon may have placed upon different subject matters on which he wrote, I offer a rough quantitative measure, though publication does not always reflect a writer's intrinsic concern for his topics. Invitations to join a panel or symposium, suggestions from publishers, requests from editors of Festschriften—these and other encouragements, hazards, and vicissitudes with which authors are familiar everywhere help to determine the publications and even the written output of an author.

A tenth or so of the more than a dozen dozens of separate pieces are concerned almost entirely with Greek philosophy or literary theory, but except for a small number they deal with thinkers other than Aristotle or include him only in passing. A very few articles have Roman philosophy as subject matter, and another tenth take up medieval writers. A

fifteenth, approximately, are about modern and contemporary thinkers, but such a statistic can be extremely misleading, since fully a fifth of all the essays deal with what may be called general philosophy, chiefly metaphysics, and most of these make extended reference to trends. Education and the arts account for about an eighth of the studies, and world peace takes up a like fraction. Two or three articles are on matters of law. There are many—a great many—that take up social problems overlapping with international differences. The rest are on heterogeneous subjects, and there is even a trio that are at least vaguely autobiographical;[26] a single collaborative essay deals with theory of numbers. By far, then, the largest portion of the essays treat of culture and social policy. To put matters otherwise, well over a third expound the author's point of view without reference to historical interests that have so frequently been attached to McKeon's name, while a similar number are chiefly expositions of the history of philosophy and of a truly prodigious collection of the practitioners of its special arts—grammarians, doctors of the Church, doctors of the body or mind, rhetoricians, political and legal thinkers, historians, men of a diversity of sciences, novelists. A small group of publications in which the classification and proper use of philosophic systems is the exclusive topic is equally rich in examples drawn from the history of the discipline, so that the essays remain partway between historical and analytical discussions.

All this poses a large problem for anyone surveying these works. The many strands make exposition of a single clean-cut organization nearly impossible. Simply to take the chronological order of publication would falsify issues, mainly because it often belies sequences in which leading ideas and even whole writings originated. Dates are important in his case, however, but I shall aim first at a dialectical order of connections between ideas as they seem to lead one to another. In general, McKeon gave greater attention to social problems after World War II; before it he displayed greater interest in epistemology, metaphysics, and the foundations of literary analysis.

Aristotelianism, Neo-Aristotelianism, and the "Chicago School"

Like all intellectuals with something to say, McKeon has frequently been misunderstood, sometimes grossly so. Laying to rest all instances, many of them flavored with disparagement, would, if it were comprehensive enough, require undue space, but a little can be said here.[27] Because he has often been termed a historian pure and simple, I repeat

that relatively few of his papers are solely historical in character, even though most use historical materials, some of them recondite, and McKeon probably had as good a grasp of the general career of philosophy from Thales to the latest meetings of the various philosophical associations as anyone in the whole history of thought, Hegel and Ueberweg not excepted. He rarely paused in print to refute allegations against him, and let the general tenor of his published work speak for himself. In a sense, of course, it would be little disparagement to say that a philosopher is a historian, for the preserving, ordering, interpreting, and evaluating of knowledge constitute four important initial steps in the improvement of the philosophic position of thinkers, despite the fact that some of the best-known philosophers of our time are relatively untutored in the background of their chosen discipline.

A more specific criticism, sometimes leveled by the persons who made McKeon out a historian, has been that he was an orthodox Aristotelian or, a trifle more generously, a neo-Aristotelian. Because the only real Aristotelian was born in Stagyra, probably in 384 B.C., the first version comes to nothing. Barriers of time and language and culture would make it impossible to be anything but a follower, even if one were to espouse Aristotle's philosophy to the fullest possible extent, which McKeon did not. He made full and elaborate use of certain Aristotelian contributions, but literal adherence to the doctrines or even methods of the Colossus of Macedon was tempered by his use of a gathering of thinkers of quite different tendencies: Plato, Spinoza, and John Dewey (one of his own teachers) among them, along with Cicero. It must still be acknowledged that the man on whom he wrote most often was Aristotle, and unlike his book on Spinoza his essays on Aristotle were on several levels of elaborateness.[28]

I need first to lay to rest, if possible, the imputation that McKeon was a follower of "the bad Aristotle." Without question, if Aristotelianism means what many superficial histories have implied, then McKeon was no devotee at all: it posited a fictional personage of rigid doctrinaire type who "invented" the syllogism (so ridiculed by John Locke);[29] the Aristotle who defined man as a rational animal throughout, though we all *know* the facts are otherwise (a self-contradiction, by the way); the Aristotle who thought metaphysics rules the sciences and can solve all their problems; the Aristotle badly mistaken about the speed of falling bodies, possibly because Greece lacked any leaning towers; the Aristotle who had the audacity to lay down a flock of rules for tragic drama; and

finally, the Aristotle who held science back for two thousand whole years.

McKeon carried on exacting studies that had the effect of reducing the bad Aristotle, alleged to be full of discrepancies, lacunae, and false confidence, to a chimera, a *Hirngespinst*. In addition, much of his scholarship expended upon the Dark and Middle Ages, regardless of whether he intended it for the purpose or not, verified the rather slight hold that Aristotle had, and could have had, considering the almost total absence of his texts from the ecclesiastical libraries of the western world until the twelfth century. Even the Peripatetic School founded by Aristotle adopted methods and principles that would have been rejected almost out of hand by the founder. That being so, the "reign" of Aristotle, if a reign at all, lasted for no more than about a hundred years and applied to relatively few men, Robert Grosseteste, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Siger of Brabant, and William of Ockham among them. Grosseteste and Albert, however, exhibited many Platonic tendencies, as did Thomas, a sizable selection of whose propositions were condemned; Siger was soon discredited; and Ockham excommunicated. By the middle of the fourteenth century several anti-Aristotelian movements, including some of skeptical bent, and a kind of pre-Galilean mathematical physics had become influential. This superficially outlines McKeon's picture of the history that he buttressed with all manner of textual proofs.[30]

So much for Aristotle as a blight. As for making him out a duffer who sought to reduce all thinking to one type, McKeon sometimes referred to the *Prior Analytics* (there should be a club for those who have read that dreary book through, start to finish!) to show that there are far more kinds of syllogism treated there than are retailed in modern texts, that some approximate ordinary speech, and where they do not the *Rhetoric* supplements them with its arguments akin to syllogism. The *Topics* affords much more latitude in the kinds of probable arguments than there is in the strict *Posterior Analytics,* with its requirements for scientific demonstration. The loose agglomeration of the other myths concerning Aristotle, such as the crazy-quilt theory of the corpus, were similarly punctured by McKeon in various essays and his classes.

This was the bad Aristotle. What about a good one, if such a thing could be? The exposing of the bad cannot prove the existence of a good, nor does the denial that one clings to the bad demonstrate one's allegiance to the other. The issue might be important, but McKeon never,

so far as I can determine, used history to dictate his own principles. It made suggestions, certainly, but that was all. There was little advantage to fantasizing oneself back into an earlier epoch, in a remote country, writing in a strange language on wax tablets. McKeon was acutely conscious, as Dewey was, that changes in philosophy are pliant to changes in the culture of the times, and he looked to Aristotle's principles only to discover the kind of evidence for unshakable truths; but McKeon's own working principles were conceived in isolation from those of old. The Philosopher, as Aristotle was so often called in the thirteenth century, would have been dismayed by and would have vigorously assailed the starting points of McKeon's systematic thinking.

McKeon has many times been named a member or leader of a "Chicago School" of literary criticism. This has not always been intended pejoratively, though such labelings are often accompanied by a thin, toplofty smile. If there was indeed such a school, he was certainly a member and no doubt a leader; but the question is still open. The basis for the myth or the root of the fact, whichever you prefer, was a kind of seminar that met fairly regularly during part of the 1930s and early 1940s, in various apartments of its members, all of them teachers or advanced doctoral candidates at the University of Chicago. The membership, always very small, were chiefly on the staff of the Department of English, McKeon and one or two others being exceptions. Part of the work, true enough, was a close reading of Aristotle's *Poetics,* undertaken because earlier translations and interpretations by American and European scholars appeared to falsify the text and weaken the exceptional rigor of its analysis. But this was only one of the classics surveyed. Many years later, McKeon himself wrote an article[31] to prove that there was no Chicago School at all, that it was an informal gathering, nothing more, and he supplemented his thumbnail account with a detailed treatment of several other classical writers on rhetoric and poetic, a hitherto unpublished paper originally prepared for reading before the group. The motives for originally writing and then publishing the account nearly a half century afterward were evidently much the same: to dispel any notion of a monolithic doctrine held by all or even some of the "members." The impression each time was of the superiority of a pluralistic approach, regardless of whether each classical writer had a theory as broad, sound, and detailed as each of the others. The article by McKeon was followed by a friendly rejoinder regarding the situation by Wayne C. Booth of the Department of English, who set out to show

that in his terms, at least, there *was* a Chicago School.[32] In Booth's terms, a school was a group of persons consistently seeking to understand one another, and he found six marks whereby this group could be identified, all having to do with processes of reason and intuition in general.

The most direct evidence lies in the chief publication enshrining individual writings of the persons attending most of the early meetings, *Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern,* edited by Ronald S. Crane.[33] The thread binding the essays together is far more a manner of tackling problems rather than a commitment to a doctrine or set of doctrines. There is a persistent drive toward discovering what poets, novelists, and other writers are about in their actual work, and a rejection of their *obiter dicta,* of psychoanalytical explanations, of a *Zeitgeist,* or of anything exterior to the work of art in hand.

To McKeon, the question of a "school's" existence was bound up with the striking revisions taking place throughout the college at the University of Chicago under the presidency (later called chancellorship) of Robert Maynard Hutchins. In the ferment of much communication and cross-fertilization between parts of the college, many thought it imperative to come to terms with processes of interpretation that would hold texts of all kinds up to clear-eyed scrutiny. The informal seminar in question was a kind of distillate of tendencies involved in reforming the college and the university as a whole.

There is, however, another side. To an onlooker, such a group would seem an entity, even had *Critics and Criticism* never been published. That responsible persons merely affirmed existence of a Chicago School would have given it some kind of real being, not so much because smoke is evidence of fire as because such an attribution, however false if interpreted literally, leads the outside world to expect and thus find a concerted effort to influence thinking.

It amounted to this: If McKeon was indeed a full-fledged neo-Aristotelian, he could not have spoken characteristically in or for a pluralistically oriented group, whatever it was. If he spoke pluralistically, orthodox Aristotelians would have had none of him.

Position and Superposition

A cardinal feature of McKeon's thinking is that the mysteries of being, cosmos, human nature, and meaning are all essentially soluble. Aristotle said that to be is also to be intelligible, and at another extreme St. Thomas reportedly said that he had never read a page that he did not understand. In McKeon's writings I find no suspicion that ultimately the universe will withhold its secrets from the well-prepared inquiring mind. Nor did I ever hear or hear of a confession from McKeon that he could make little or nothing of a chapter in any authentic book of philosophy, even those by Hegel and Heidegger. This was not because he boasted of having universal understanding, but in practice he did feel that if one human being could write intelligibly to himself, another who dedicated sufficient energy could fathom what had been said. This assumption animated McKeon not only in his reading of others but also in his writing: if he could set forth his conceptions in precise, well-ordered prose, then any reader coming to them when prepared could be counted on to understand.

The complexities of individual essays and their many kinds make it extremely easy for critics to err in attributing or denying to McKeon any particular doctrine. He covered himself rather frequently with layer upon layer of recombined terms, modified statements, and extenuating arguments to build a technique and finally a science of observation, interpretation, and integration.[34] The reader must approach the writings with care, else he will come, against all intent, to conclusions that McKeon would have considered shortsighted or at best scattered. It is best to address the essays by endeavoring to reconstruct patterns, as he did with the classics, and at the same time try to preserve the intellectual independence that the author was looking for in his students. If Nietzsche was right that the pupil who makes no new discoveries is a poor pupil indeed, then to be a genuine McKeonian requires, entirely apart from this need to stand on one's own feet, a readiness to reinterpret the very same texts that McKeon had analyzed and eventually reformulate the theory of philosophic history and its intertwinings with cultural history. I cannot imagine how anyone could outdo McKeon in his ever-so-extensive researches and ever-so-intricate schemata and thereby fulfill Nietzsche's demand completely, but the attempt should be made within the limits of one's own powers. McKeon as teacher and author encouraged this, though he was not unready to note errors that a person undertaking it might make.

Pluralism is the only label I can think of that was not distasteful to McKeon, so its peculiarities should be scrutinized. It is one thing to believe in pluralism, quite another to demonstrate it. Those who consider it "a good thing" simply because they possess cheerfully tolerant

natures or because they have tried unsuccessfully to resolve philosophic disputes usually do not aim at anything like the philosophic certainty that more than one system can and must be true to the same or nearly the same degree. There are, then, a "soft" and a "hard" pluralism, a naive and an adept. McKeon had much tolerance, but it was never easy-going. He invented what I call the machinery of pluralism, carefully erected to accomplish the twin tasks of discovering precisely what each philosopher meant in his assertions—and his silences—and then of finding ways to show kinds and degrees of equivalence between rival formulations. The machinery's use required that all the concepts, leading and subsidiary, in a philosopher's writing be carefully interpreted and along with them his method: a method to be followed if it was already set forth by him, or detected if it was not.[35] To bring this philosopher's utterances into line with those of other persons, it was necessary for McKeon to contribute certain concepts and certain methods of his own, in what amounted to a union of philology with philosophy.[36]

McKeon developed his theory of discourse quite steadily throughout his career, though not always in a predictable line, writing and rewriting from his student days up into an age when others as old could no longer consider themselves creative at all. Throughout, one might help to characterize his thinking by contrasting it to what he evidently believed could be properly modified among his typical contemporaries. I find it hard to cite exact references to published statements by McKeon indicating his explicit objections to the following; but his lectures and informal discussions furnished the contexts for voicing these indications:

Russell—that most philosophers, prior to the recent development of symbolic logic, had little way of detecting or remedying either the general confusions or their own special misreasonings. For McKeon, on the other hand, virtually all the responsible philosophers have set up their safeguards for thinking and doing and speaking, even if without such a symbolic outlay as is intended to replace customary language in the philosophical sciences.

Carnap—that the distinction between linguistically true and empirically true is final and exhaustive, and nothing intelligible can be said about existence as a universal. For McKeon, there are plenty of a priori propositions that are not mere verbal tautologies and plenty of "empirical" propositions requiring foundations of elaborate logical construction.

Wittgenstein—that there can be no uniquely philosophic doctrines, and accordingly philosophy is reduced to the activity of analyzing the grammar of what is said by scientists or by ordinary people. It was a cardinal point for McKeon that metaphysics can guide science and investigate problems that the special sciences cannot. Looking at grammar, furthermore, is but one kind of legitimate philosophic activity.

Ryle—that philosophic problems chiefly take the form of dilemmas that we resolve by exhibiting the supposed contradictions as resulting from conceptual confusions ("traffic jams") and mistaken categorizing of whatever is under discussion. For McKeon, misformed dilemmas are certainly one source of philosophic confusion, and they can be resolved by distinctions; but problems also arise out of discrepancies in our sensory reports,[37] conflicts between the order of nature and the order of understanding, and dubious moral choices. The oppositions found in the philosophic formulating of problems is not as a rule what Ryle thinks, because not only are the concepts given different meanings (ordinary ambiguity) but they are also arrived at and related by different methods.

Regardless of his agreement with other doctrines promulgated by these philosophers, opinions such as the foregoing are representative of the ideas McKeon set about to replace. The replacement was achieved not by refuting or otherwise shoving the older views out of the way but by finding means for locating a unique place for them in something—not a philosophic system in the usual sense—much broader and less controvertible. Much of his accomplishment arose through borrowing old concepts that he used markedly differently from the traditional ways. It is, for instance, very ambiguous to say that he used technical terms. Certainly it was in no more than a few cases, in which they were intended to be technical, fixed by definition and carried thus throughout a system, regardless of particular context. Instead, each of the terms gained a new and different meaning from the companions with which it was introduced, and again with the new contexts in which these limited sets were put through their paces. Again, and here too with few exceptions, nearly all were expressions that had already enjoyed long, distinguished, and therefore highly controversial careers in the history of philosophy, or at least in considerable stretches of it:

a. name-definition-thing (probably derived from Plato's *Sophist*)
b. knowledge-belief (from Plato's *Timaeus*)

c. material-efficient-formal-final causes (derived from Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*)
d. demonstration-dialectic-sophistic (derived from Aristotle's *Organon*) (another version was demonstration-dialectic-rhetoric)
e. things-ideas-words, *or* objects-thoughts-symbols (probably derived from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*)
f. logic-physics-ethics (derived from Aristotle's *Topics,* from the Stoics, and from medieval authors)
g. grammar-rhetoric-logic (derived from the early medieval trivium)
h. knower-known-knowledge-knowable (derived from various sources, perhaps chiefly from Kant's first *Critique*)
i. method-concept (derivation uncertain)
j. theoretic-practical-productive (derived from Aristotle's *Metaphysics, Physics,* and *Nicomachean Ethics*)
k. holoscopic-meroscopic (probably original)
l. subject matter-method-principles (derived from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and other treatises)
m. expression-communication (probably from John Dewey)
n. art work-artist-audience (from Plato's *Ion*)
o. proper places-commonplaces (from Aristotle's *Topics*)
p. invention-arrangement-diction-memory-delivery (from Cicero)
q. apodictic-epidictic (from Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* and *Rhetoric*)
r. reason-sensation (from Plato's *Republic* and *Timaeus*)
s. method-principles-interpretation-selection (I know of no direct precedent for this very important quartet in McKeon's later work)
t. dialectical-logistic-problematic-operational (original)
u. whether it is-what sort it is-what it is-why it is (derived from Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*)
v. political-forensic-epidictic rhetoric (from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*)
w. elements-causes-principles (from Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*)

These sets are in no particular order and are by no means the only ones he used, but they are typical.[38] Later in his career he had a tendency to call less and less upon classical and other traditional sets, inventing his own instead. Among the traditional terms, one is struck by the number of distinctions directly traceable to Aristotle. Yet it should be concluded neither that these were entirely original with him nor that McKeon could not have found them in a dozen other places. Most of the Aristotelian pairs and triads are explicit or at least foreshadowed in

Plato, though often the terms are separately placed in the dialogues. In no location in the dialogues are the four causes expounded or even used together, but with a little patience one can discover that Plato was well aware of the possibilities of explaining things through mechanical sources of movement, the character of the bodies moved, their shapes or functions, and ultimately the purpose adduced for the movements. (I say this despite Aristotle's possibly biased remark that Plato used only two causes, the material and the formal [*Metaphysics* I. 6. 988a9–10].)

All the groups of terms served in two ways, as topics for explanation in modern, speculative terms, and as ordering principles, again not as Plato or the others used them but as regulative of discussions of problems arising in the course of contemporary philosophical inquiry. They could, of course, be employed in recovering and expounding the thoughts of others, but if so were modified in meaning so that they were not used as mere templates for interpreting the thought of Locke or Mill or Santayana as if they were sloppy or thin versions of Plato or Aristotle. They became, as it were, commonplaces for the invention of McKeon's own arguments, and this, rather than in a purely historical function, was where they were chiefly exercised. All the sets were incorporated into more elaborate arrays and thence into even more elaborate prose analyses. They were, moreover, capable of being turned upside down, so to speak: being was superior to becoming in some philosophers, but becoming could also rule over being, or they could sit side by side. McKeon could, in effect, as easily say that 3 is the Cth number in the integer series as that C is the third letter of the alphabet. Because most of the groups of terms had entered the history of philosophy quite early, they had eventually become common coin of philosophic speculation and debate and consequently could be made to fit more easily than neologisms and latter-day catchwords in the classifying and explicating of doctrines, sciences, and systems.

One of the most significant statements in the history of thought regarding method is also one of the shortest, and McKeon evidently set considerable store by it. The aim, says Socrates, is "that of seeing and collecting together the different particular things in one idea (*mian te idean*), to make clear in defining the thing one wishes to explain. . . . [and] that of cutting the things according to forms (*kat' eidē*) by the natural joints."[39] While one cannot separate McKeon from most system-builders by any single slogan, it may still be said that the emphasis of the latter is to grasp and relate entities by a single method, while

that of McKeon is to divide and synthesize as required to make explicit a problem as it is elucidated—or ignored—by several alternative philosophic methods. Because he commences by assuming that most philosophers, when taken strictly on their own terms, make sense, it follows that whatever techniques he sets up for dealing with them must enable him to fathom their approaches, assessing carefully all respects in which these can be said to be true. His own method, while by definition independent of his concepts, cannot in practice treat the two as divided; indeed, most of his accounts of his method rests on showing the affinity of the concepts when presented in a philosopher's own order. Some distinctions and assimilations are obviously more compatible with one method than with another.[40] Nevertheless, McKeon sought a method that could treat other methods and other concepts in a virtually natural way, for otherwise distortions would creep in. His own concepts ground his method of taking in all methods, rather than grounding one more system. He is thus free to explore both the concepts—eventually he came to deal primarily with those considered to be principles—and methods whereby these are generated, linked, and justified in other systems. He could, within reasonable limits,[41] open up *all* systems to interpretation that will exhibit their internal consistency, their closeness of fit to obvious facts, their serviceability in whatever practical spheres they may treat, hence their ultimate truth. This is an article of reasoned faith, and full induction of a system into the roster of acceptable ones cannot possibly be allowed until its intricacies have all been explored. This is the opposite of establishing some interior illumination, some Augustinian truth whereby all other truths are true: yet in a loose sense the doctrine itself is just such an illumination, for it allows those other truths to be true. One can say, then, that the supreme truth whereby all truths are warranted is that these truths *are* true, when properly understood, and that they in turn reflect light backward upon McKeon's original assumption. Every genuine philosophy is at first a credendum, then an object of intellectual experiment, ultimately a compendency of legitimate assertions.

He frequently gave the impression that he was a cryptanalyst trying to crack a code unique to each philosopher or even to each text, or better, that he was an anatomist looking at the bones to explain the conformation of softer body tissues. To grasp this structure—something most other scholars have not tried with his persistence to do—he set great store by what the author hinted about his own methods and then, when

the author did not quite follow his own prescriptions, would ask what had intervened. Was there an inadequacy of which the author was not conscious, or did he deliberately introduce a second method supervenient upon the first? If the text being examined provides no answer, then one looks at other writings by the same author, but mainly as a last resort.

Among Aristotle's most extraordinary performances are his *Parts of Animals* and *Generation of Animals*. What makes these extraordinary is their author's ability to notice not only single facts but correlations of facts, and correlations of these correlations of kinds, sizes, and shapes of organs with other organs or habits.[42] The correlations feed his wider schematism of the divisions of animals into blooded and bloodless and his still wider one distinguishing plants moving augmentatively but lacking locomotion from animals possessing both and the yet broader division between living things (having their own source of nutrition, growth, and reproduction) and nonliving bodies. The observations both contribute to a system as a whole and are guided by the system; Aristotle could not possibly have seen so many correlations and groupings had he not been looking for them. McKeon very early formed a habit of noticing facts about texts and their correlations in the presentation of ideas. A philosopher would customarily use such and such a characterization for certain kinds of entities, in certain contexts, for reasons not explicit but anyway internal to the character of the philosophy. What, then, would be the limits of application of this expression? The answer could only be in terms of the author's own principles and methods. Finding gills of a special sort in a species of fish would stimulate the search for a specific number of fins.

The noting of marks and their correlating was not, however, the whole of the enterprise, for McKeon's chief premise was that *any* well-made system would fit into his more comprehensive pattern into which other systems would also fit, but two systems were never *directly* translatable one into another. The pattern is, however, capacious and flexible enough to allow for many alterations and even mixtures of types, and at the same time radically defective systems can be shown up for what they are by exhibiting their disconformity to any acceptable combination of rubrics in the main array. This approach strikes me as having a disadvantage and an advantage. One comes away from reading many of McKeon's major papers with the impression that there is almost nothing new to be said in systematic philosophy, and yet that everything well

said is somehow, and in its own terms, perfectly true, that later systems do not overturn the earlier except in the choice of problems and manners of expression. But the enterprise differs from the construction of one more system even so.[43]

Another likeness comes to mind. Jay Hambidge was the hope of art students for some decades earlier in this century.[44] Basing his theory mainly upon careful measurements of Greek vases and sculptures, Hambidge sought underlying principles of symmetry, not static but dynamic, that could in turn be used both for analyzing all more recent paintings and other artistic fabrications and also in the creation of fresh pieces to be taken from easel or kiln. The similarities and dissimilarities to McKeon need hardly be set down. He began with principles loosely derived from the Greeks and applicable to whatever could be put into writing or speech that bore upon communicating philosophic ideas. It is a formal theory, as he himself expounded it, with a maximum of order in the posing of questions and arranging of topics, yet the order deliberately accommodates individual cases all the same. I cannot say how many of his pupils and other readers have set about following to the letter his procedures, but with trifling exceptions there is little reason to condemn any of their writings that I have seen for being overly routine, uninspired, or mechanical. McKeon's own hand is of course not there; but by the late 1980s many and varied articles and books have been published, works showing unmistakable evidence of his teaching. Its benefits seem manifest.

Style and Arrangement

Despite the regard that most of his students had for McKeon—some of it this side idolatry—and despite his indefatigible speaking at philosophic and other conferences over the world, his effect upon scholars, teachers, and creative thinkers who form the usual public for philosophic writings has been somewhat less than one would expect. He was by no means neglected. He was talked about, argued about, what he said made a difference; and yet his printed works never quite received their due. This is bound to change in the future, with publication of his previously printed essays collected in book form and with other plans afoot for collecting the *Nachlass* of various sorts. All in all, however, there were aspects of his writing that may have been responsible for the spotlight's shining less brightly than he deserved.

The list given of leading terms in his distinctions, no more than a part of his rich vocabulary, was prescribed by the subject matters in hand. The words in that list and in the rest of his choices are chiefly interesting for the specificity of the meanings he gave them; even "true," "thing," "good," and other transcendentals are used to satisfy a definite purpose and are often set off *against* each other. The sturdy old English words are there, but they often seem outmaneuvered by the many Hellenisms and Latinisms. He had learned his style partly from his teachers Woodbridge and Dewey, and relatively little from the chapters and papers so dotted with neologistic intrusions by Peirce, Whitehead, and Heidegger in their most inventive and abstruse moments. The occasional little flashes in his writings come not so much from turns of phrase, wry humor, or metaphors as from little clumps of epithets, duos and trios of shrewdly chosen nouns or adjectives. The epithets are not timeworn (for instance, McKeon does not use the expression "timeworn epithet"), there are many polysyllables in succession but no unneeded ones, almost no colloquialisms, there is no faltering or groping, no apologizing for his phrasing. But of memorable phrases one cannot hope to make a sizable chrestomathy as one could of Whitehead in his less technical passages, or Bradley, Russell, or many others. At one point in his career he succumbed to a temptation, but not for long; it was in his *Selections from Medieval Philosophers,* a work of his comparative youth,[45] where he wanted to avoid excessive capitalization, referring as he had to very often to nationalities, concepts, and other notions often or always accorded uppercase treatment. It would, he said, have looked like German; so instead he wrote "german" throughout. One can wring this out of St. Bonaventura: If Plato spoke the language of wisdom and Aristotle that of science, McKeon, inspired by the muse Erato, wrote the language of lowercase letters and semicolons.

Just as he invents few words, except for the now-famous "holoscopic" and "meroscopic," without which no graduate student in philosophy at Columbia or the University of Chicago could long survive, McKeon does not consciously return to words long in the vocabulary of British and German writers. There are one or two aspects of his style stemming from the masters of the eighteenth century, nevertheless McKeon is up-to-date; it is a twentieth-century style, but sober. The age-old terms or their translations and transliterations were much employed in the first half of our century—substance, proposition, justice,

art, dialectic, semiotic, analytic, semantic: words still common in philosophic talk. As a rule he begins a long succession of points by using these terms in meanings as close as possible to their original significations but gradually alters them so that by the conclusion they are broadened in his peculiar manner and can enter into multiple new connections.[46]

His words are often perforce long, but his sentences are long by choice. They tend to be periodic, but often containing pairs and triplets of balanced phrases, though lower in key than those of Dr. Johnson and ordinarily less acerb than those of Gibbon. Modifying phrases and clauses abound, and this makes for a complex rhythm, with patterns not immediately apparent to the ear until the last phrase, just before a full-stop. With his theory of evenly matched choices, his tendency to anaphora is very evident. Special elegancies, conceits, allusions, tropes, "artistry" of any sort, never long detain him, though he does notice these adornments in others; and when a reader starts upon a sentence in the essays he can, as a rule, count a length of four or five lines, without flourishes. Nor is there possibility of finding a non sequitur. The balance in phrasing is achieved by antitheses, for few modern writers display more of them, but they grow from the subject matter and give proof of McKeon's method, which is both differentiative and encircling in due proportions.

Like his sentences his paragraphs are long, taking up a single aspect of a topic, dealing with all of it, dropping it at the end, never any sooner. If one were to outline his works with ordinary dendritic charts, one could cover pages upon pages with little branches that merge into bigger branches to indicate the distinctions, subordinate and then principal, contained in his packed but fine-cut paragraphs. I do not remember a single one of them that left me wondering why he had bothered to retain it from a draft; each slice of his prose carries forward the argument, proves it, illustrates it, applies it, explains it in some way, and none of the parcels of sentences can be brushed aside.

The essays were cut from the same stylistic cloth throughout the sixty years of McKeon's adult career, though there was a gradual, all-inclusive change and many minor deviations within that long stretch. Sentences of many of his later writings have more balanced rhythms than the earlier ones, true enough, but this is only because there is a growing balance in the arguments and arrangements of structures that is reflected very closely by the balance of the phrases. The author becomes more

concerned than ever to be correct and complete, to leave every stone turned face up in full view.

Yet McKeon often varied the order in which he listed important items serving as headings for his discussions. Thus at one point A, B, C, D becomes A, C, B, D and then B, A, D, C, and though there are doubtless dialectical reasons for this, rhetorically it would have been simpler to follow the alphabet.[47] In addition, he sometimes commences an essay section with a summary of preceding materials or a longish transitional passage, so that it is now necessary to read a couple of pages before lighting upon the topic of the section in hand. One usually finds a program there—sooner or later—but it often requires a second reading to be clear.

Some essays show evidence that McKeon had a wider audience in mind—fewer footnotes, fewer (though still a great many) distinctions, a smaller technical vocabulary. At a guess, one article in ten or a dozen is of this kind. The easier articles normally contain references to major figures who seemed to be his favorites not because he always agreed with them but because they illustrated highly characteristic points of view: Democritus, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, St. Augustine, St. Thomas, Francis Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes, Spinoza, Hume, Kant, Mill, Dewey, and perhaps some more. But there are many names in the longer essays that are not part of the everyday luggage of most philosophically-minded readers: Porphyry, Hincmar of Rheims, Lully, Nizolius, Baumgarten, Herder, Renouvier, and others who appear and await more general recognition.

I know of no instances where a shorter, more readable article is a mere popularization of the same lessons, omitting details of a longer one, though there is often considerable overlap. The essays on rhetoric have many general points in common, and this is true also of those on politics. Otherwise, the directions of the respective arguments in the essays are never identical. McKeon speaks of the words in Plato's dialogues as fitting a "vast matrix,"[48] and something of the sort obtains here in the terms, statements, and proofs McKeon arranges. Now it is the clarification of lines of historical development, now the resolution of philosophic conflicts, now the concordance between seemingly opposed opinions of physicists, now the agreements between discordant nations, peoples, or cultures, now the silencing through mutual understanding of warring literary critics, now the establishing of grounds for world peace: the search for resolution and harmony is ever present.

Almost no paper of McKeon's remains within confines of a single traditional discipline, not because he was, to use an old phrase from an advertisement for a course in mental training, "the man with the grasshopper mind," but because the problems he chose almost invariably cut across the lines laid down in scientific studies. He seemed in this respect far more at home in fields other than the Aristotelian, wherein, as he never tired of pointing out, the sciences were carefully differentiated in terms of their subject matters, methods, and principles.

If one reads McKeon's books and papers chronologically, as early adherents had to for many decades when his writings were appearing in various journals and on bookshelves, one receives the impression of a county fair, a subdued, decorous fair to be sure, in which the papers follow each other in somewhat bewildering succession with a surprising variety of subject matters. If, on the other hand, one is in a position first to collect a set of papers all concerned with the diversity of cultural structures, or with rhetoric, or with the Middle Ages, or metaphysics, it soon turns out that there is a close correspondence, an interlocking such as I have already suggested, even between papers composed two or three decades apart, McKeon's methods being sufficiently flexible and all-embracing. With a trifle of pruning and rearranging, each of these collections and several more could well be made into separate books, and these in turn could be so selected that they conformed to favorite distinctions of McKeon himself: theoretical-practical-productive would be one, historical-literary-scientific another, and thing-thought-word still another.

McKeon once complained in class that a student, whose full name I happened to share, was treating a topic as if its organization depended upon the matter of the text under discussion rather than its form. He himself found it almost impossible to speak of any subject in philosophy, the special sciences, or the arts without making at least one root distinction and then relating some other distinction to it, thereby giving even the most elementary treatment the beginnings of a formal aspect. The difficulty of expounding his work is that either one must stick to his principles of arrangement throughout, in which case one is parroting, or one must apply a diverging and even contrary set of distinctions; the result then would be to falsify or at least to overcomplicate the original. If as a third try one introduces a loose topical sequence, dictated by popular conventions, one runs the risk of bringing chaos out of order. I can scarcely believe that with the means now at any writer's disposal the

keenness and pervasiveness of selection of ordering principles in McKeon's essays can be outdone, and these will be put into a better integrated, more comprehensive system of ideas. Most persons will, I think, be content, and properly so, if they do not unwittingly introduce confusions, forgivable or unforgivable, into his life work.

3

A Learned Apprentice

As an undergraduate, I happened one day to run across Richard McKeon's M.A. thesis on file in the yawning, somber rotunda of Columbia University's Seth Low Library and for curiosity's sake thumbed it through. The year of authorship was 1920, when McKeon received both his bachelor's and master of arts degrees. In his thesis he dealt with theories of art and took up, if my memory serves, Benedetto Croce, George Santayana, and Leo Tolstoy. At the time his style was direct and slightly hyperbolic, and I recall the last page, which contained a line that would never—not *ever*—have found its way into his later writings: "Not art for art's sake should be the cry, but art for life's sake." Many years later he referred privately to the whole thesis as "damn bad."[1]

Although he also had reservations about his doctoral dissertation in later years, he made no such sweeping condemnation. *The Philosophy of Spinoza: The Unity of His Thought*[2] was its title, and the work was dedicated to Frederick J. E. Woodbridge, whose seminar had provided its initial stimulus. It was published the same year that McKeon was awarded the Ph.D. (1928), although he once said that it was substantially finished before his sojourn in Europe (1922–25). The only part betraying a later touch is the densely packed bibliography, which lists a few papers and books published as late as 1927. At any rate, its author once gave credit to Woodbridge for having underlined the great importance of a "slight point" that McKeon had contributed in the seminar, and later incorporated into the book: "If thinking could be conceived which did not reveal and know itself, there would be no grounds or opportunity for knowing God" (p. 233).[3] For Spinoza a further step was required: to know all things it was necessary to know God, the ground of every mode, finite and infinite.

Part One of the dissertation traces the many currents leading up to Spinoza's synthesis: medieval Jewish and Christian traditions and the Cartesian philosophy that Spinoza set about to expound and rearrange in an early work, his *Short Treatise,* as well as his controversy with Robert Boyle on the reliability of experiment for science. Part Two traces Spinoza's system, chiefly through the *Ethics,* but with much attention to *The Correction of the Understanding* (McKeon's own rendering of the title, *De emendatione intellectus*), the *Theologico-Political Tractate,* and the unfinished *Political Tractate,* as well, of course, as the few dozen letters remaining. McKeon said to me (it must have been about 1972) that he planned to make some rather radical changes in the book, and I have been told by Zahava McKeon that notes for these changes are now being used to bring forth a fresh edition of the work. (Meanwhile, the original version has been reprinted by a small press.) McKeon mentioned in particular the first chapter, on the medieval background, where he had conflated several varied traditions, summing them up as a largely homogeneous influence in a way not at all characteristic of his later work. Among other improvements, he planned to bring the bibliography up to date—but what a bibliography it had been in its original form! Occupying pages 319–37 in six-point type, it listed works (many of them also quoted in the footnotes) in Latin, German, French, Italian, and Dutch, as well as English, with the entries classified under eleven headings.

The principal contention of the book bears out its subtitle: Spinoza was seeking a method that would bring together metaphysical, theological, physical, and psychological truths, all of them intended to bear together upon the analysis of the passions, their great and frequently deleterious strength, and the power of the intellect to inquire into the nature of God and to receive a cool beatitude from its love of Him. This, the highest good of man, can only be understood and attained if man's connection to the whole of existence, both the universe and what lies in thought apart from the universe of bodies in motion, can be seen as an interlocking system. The basic feature of the Spinozist method is its reflective character: Method is an idea of an idea, and this is as natural an activity of the mind as is the original simple idea of any finite mode. If an idea is adequate, the mind has produced it solely through its own activity, whereas every inadequate idea results from joint causes operating in mind and in the world of bodies. Because of the strict par-

allel between idea and body, changes in the human body are directly mirrored in changes in its ideas, and as that body reacts to bodies, whether living or not, outside itself, there will be corresponding alterations in ideas; and because of this reactive character, these will be inadequate, tinged with emotion. The mind is the source of the virtues as well, and these are emotions generated solely in accordance with one's own nature; the passions are the way one suffers from the impact of alien finite modes. But the laws of causation themselves derive from a universal source beyond bodies, namely, God or Nature.

As chapter 4 will show, McKeon was persistent and adept in his use of diagrams as aids to philosophizing. As I have said, when teaching, he almost invariably covered the blackboard with comprehensive charts, and these found their way into his publications—only in prose form. As a foretaste of his own uses I present in figure 3.1 what seems the truest representation of the primary structure underlying his account of Spinoza's theory of man and God.

The Philosophy of Spinoza carries through this pattern but ends with a statement of a distinction between unity in the sense of consistent recourse to the same set of principles and unity in the sense of completeness of the texts in which the application of self-evident starting-points is enshrined. A passage (pp. 315–16) affirms the former but points out that none of Spinoza's short works was ever finished, and even Parts 4 and 5 of the *Ethics* are "open to criticism from the point of view of both organization and comprehensiveness." An unusual remark for McKeon, and although he spoke this way privately many times, in print and even in class he rarely criticized a book on such grounds.

This was a doctoral dissertation of exceptional scope, erudition, and clarity, and the author made good almost all of his intent to show how the highly diversified traditions that had fed Spinoza's thought emerged in a unified if complex system. It was an effort to show how, examining a work in its own terms, we must at least take seriously its own tests for meaning, truth, and validity. In so doing we can grasp its wholeness and possible correctness, even where it departs most from previously existing and rival systems.

The author published but three subsequent papers on Spinoza. (Chapters 1 and 4 of Part 1 of the book had already been printed as journal articles.) The first new article supplemented the book,[4] the third in order of time altered its exposition of Spinoza's background,[5] while the second, a very erudite paper on possibly authentic opuscula on

Institution	Persons	Discipline	Kinds of Knowledge	Communication	Purposes
PHILOSOPHY	choice spirits	intellectual love of God	intuition	teaching	to see oneself in relation to eternal things
RELIGION	prophets and communicants	obedience to God's laws	revelation, imagination	commands	love of neighbor piety toward God
STATE	citizens	obedience to laws of nature and human ordinances	reason, experience	legislating	enforce respect for rights of others: justice, peace, security

Figure 3.1 McKeon's Conception of Spinoza's System

probability and the rainbow,[6] adds little to the understanding of the philosophy as a whole. I turn my attention to the first, "Causation and the Geometric Method in the Philosophy of Spinoza," in which McKeon tries to show first that the mere influence of Descartes is insufficient to explain Spinoza's adoption of a geometric method in the *Ethics;* the real reasons lie much deeper. Truth for Spinoza must take the form of a system; no truth can be isolated from the totality of true propositions, even when it is juxtaposed with them. A set of true ideas must be sequential, and an adequate idea is indeed one dependent solely upon a principle that itself is beholden to no further principle for its support. A true idea (defined as one corresponding to its ideatum) gives the reasons for the making of a thing and thus moves from its cause to the effect it has. To this progression the geometric method is exactly fitted. Through its deductive chain we can explicate not only what is known but also the knower, that is, the understanding, which is no random assembly of ideas but the most orderly possible selection of them, each successive member of which depends upon all its predecessors. The dependence is that of deducing properties of the thing from its essence as defined by its proximate cause. Since the geometric order is an order of ideas, the causes it presents will be the causes of ideas, but then the question becomes one of explaining how the causal connections of one idea with others can be the same as the relations of the ideates with other things. Even if a true idea is one from which the properties of the thing it defines may be known, that idea is simple and is not one associated fictively with some other. The simplest of ideas is that of God, Who must exist because the mind can make deductions from particular affirmative essences through the formation of definitions, which is to say, because the mind is capable of understanding.

Definitions and deductions stemming from them deal neither with individual finite modes nor with empty universals but rather with these affirmative essences, which are fixed and eternal things. A particular body, well defined and of known proportions in both its dimensions and its quantities of motion and rest, may be deduced by supposing its proximate cause. The prime source of error, however, lies in supposing that any one causal explanation necessarily excludes all others except, of course, in the unique case of the deduction of all things from God.

To discuss here the correctness or incorrectness of McKeon's interpretation would divert from the chief purposes of this study, but perhaps it has been a misfortune that much subsequent writing on Spinoza has followed directions quite contrary to this effort to see method and concepts as inextricably linked. Whether McKeon was right or wrong, it was wise to ask whether Spinoza could interpret both nature and man using the single conception of what understanding really is and yet allow for the unchanging character of nature as much as for the ever-changing bodies that owe their very existence to a unitary origin.

Quite apart from this, both the book and "Causation and the Geometric Method" exhibit certain themes, certain aims that loom large in McKeon's later works. First, a fair judgment of the thought of another man requires the expenditure of intensive scholarly effort—the mastery of the philosopher's native language (in Spinoza's case Latin was chiefly a late-adopted, almost artificial language), the reading of authorities great and small, the outlining and charting, the finding of connections and contrasts even where these are not fully explicit but left for the careful reader to elicit. Second, an understanding of a philosophy cannot be gained without a thorough grounding in its principles, traced through the main body of the thinker's logic and metaphysics (where these exist), then in their many applications in ethics, politics, art theory, and so forth. Third, a grasp of a philosophy's true purposes does not necessitate filling one's mind with the biography and social background of its author; these can lead one astray.[7]

McKeon's next major publication, a remarkably mature work—the author was not yet thirty—expounded, assessed, and finally quoted long passages translated by him from doctors and saints of the Christian Dark and Middle ages, St. Augustine to Ockham.[8] This large book (over 900 pages) appeared in the early dawn of a more widespread American interest in medieval studies—Harry Austryn Wolfson, Charles Homer Haskins, George Sarton, Lynn Thorndike, and a few others were learned exceptions—when almost nothing but serious misconceptions and silly clichés dominated the prevailing impressions of the period: (*a*) medieval philosophy was wholly based on authority; (*b*) medieval logic was almost totally concerned with realism versus nominalism, with conceptualism thrown in; (*c*) there was no freedom of thought in the medieval universities, and this was reflected in the dogmatic thinking of the time; (*d*) there was no interest in science; (*e*) all medieval logic was sterile, a mere set of devices for winning debates; (*f*) all medieval philosophers engaged constantly and exclusively in logic-chopping; (*g*) all medieval philosophies upheld the same basic doctrines; (*h*) Ockham's Razor somehow put a timely stop to all this; (*i*)

the medieval theologians seriously debated the number of angels able to dance on the point of a pin.

McKeon, who had received far the greater bulk of his training in medieval studies in France, tarried very little over such issues, feeling that the richly diverse texts would, if carefully read, speak for themselves. The only point of any genuine philosophic concern to him was (*g*), dealing with the degree of likeness and difference between the philosophers.[9] In his introductions to individual authors, he was able to show occasional equivalences that were not a matter of the ordinary translation of terms into supposedly exact replacements in adjacent systems but of a careful adjustment of terms, principles, and directions of movement in what is stated. If, for example, a philosopher has begun with God's illumination of the human mind and moves downward to our awareness of particular things, no simple verbal change could help make the transition to another philosopher who holds that truth derives from reports of the senses arranged according to logical principles for setting out the warranties and conclusions of rational discourse. The adjustment would require a broader view in which all the doctrines, together with differences in the respective theories of their meaning, would have to be taken into account.

Until the second half of the nineteenth century, European philosophers and historians alike had accepted the fancy of the Renaissance and seventeenth century that the Middle Ages had been a period of logic-chopping carried on by men in bondage to theological authorities.[10] The English-speaking nations harbored this notion somewhat longer than others, so that McKeon and his early successors in medieval studies found that any literal translation that used cognate expressions rather than analogues or paraphrases would be widely misinterpreted. McKeon avoided so far as possible alternatives to the most literal renderings consonant with decent English, however, but supplemented his renderings with a glossary of terms, many entries containing very sharp distinctions; a large number were from the thirteenth century, and most of those from St. Thomas's works, so replete with definitions. This glossary is no superficial help for those hopelessly at sea; it makes representative parts of the medieval treatment of theory of knowledge intelligible in considerable detail. The same comment holds for McKeon's introductions to each philosopher, which again offer next to no biographical or cultural particulars but explicate something of the problems as individually stated and the methods used for clarifying and solving them.

The two volumes afford insights into the deeper layers of thought between the fourth and fourteenth centuries, and if they ignore the political colors of the period or the variety of incidental topics dealt with, all told, by the sages of that thousand years, we must remember that McKeon always aimed, as did Kant and many others, at a conceptual rather than imaginative history of philosophy.

Publication of these volumes was preceded by a short piece on William of Ockham,[11] a longer essay on St. Thomas,[12] and a brief account of medieval empiricism.[13] McKeon's later essays were aimed not so much at exposition as at general interpretation: a paper on utility and medieval philosophy,[14] a long study, "Renaissance and Method in Philosophy,"[15] and then studies of rhetoric and poetic, property, Duns Scotus, and other topics that will be noticed later in this book, as well as a collaboration on a scholarly edition of Abailard's book collecting arguments for and against over one hundred fifty propositions.[16] One reason that McKeon wrote relatively little, considering his mastery of the period, was that medieval authors concerned themselves less with the topics in which he became intensely interested later in his career: the possibility of world government, the extension of rhetoric, social adjustment between groups, the theory of education, the foundations of science.

Anyone familiar, however, with McKeon's later writings will be struck by the number of portents of explicit teachings and general tendencies that were heralded by the book on Spinoza and the anthology of medieval thinkers. The vocabulary that eventually appeared in his writings and made them easily identifiable is not in evidence in either work, but the introduction and final chapter in the volume on Spinoza betray many concerns that came ultimately to characterize McKeon's entire approach: the strong emphasis upon method; the stress on the need to see a system as a whole even though it should also be interpreted part by part; the distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge and the latter's tendency to rule the former; the attention to the order of entities, that is, grades of power or excellence, and the order of their presentation; the stress upon goals or purposes in philosophy; the concern for the interdependence of the sciences, even where a full unity cannot be established. In the two volumes on the Middle Ages, one finds over and over an impulse to state precisely the relations of opposition and agreement (sometimes bound closely together) between philosophers; the need to read each thinker separately to discover and ac-

count methodologically for his uniqueness; the distinguishing of types of influence running from one thinker to another.

So much for these two outstanding books by a prodigy. There existed a fairly early manuscript by McKeon, "Philosophy in the Middle Ages," referred to in a footnote by a distinguished pupil of his[17] in connection with a specific point; the manuscript has never been published, and the only reason that comes to mind is the guess that McKeon wished to be identified as a medievalist no more than he later wished to be viewed as a neo-Aristotelian. I once asked him if his book would ever be issued in print, and he replied that it would—in the footnotes of books by other people.

4

The Structural Dialectic of Philosophic Discourse

By turning the pages of Plato's dialogues one soon confirms that dialectic for him is not merely the art of adroitly querying an opponent to force him into concessions he had never dreamt of making. Now and then the master dialecticians whom Plato conjures up—Socrates, chiefly, but also the Eleatic Stranger, Parmenides, and the Athenian Stranger—do that with dispatch, but their tactics are by and large constructive, and the respondent who begins by thinking that he knows but soon finds that he does not is matched in many dialogues by one who begins by confessedly not knowing and coming finally to realize that now he does know. Inherent in this dialectic is Plato's demonstration that content cannot be divorced from the manipulations of contraries, contradictories, analogies, step-by-step proofs, images, and his myriad other devices.

Turning to another exploiter and expounder of dialectic, Aristotle, one just as quickly finds an entire aspect of this art manifesting itself as rules—rules devoid of the content of the sciences, theoretical or practical. By far the longest treatise of the *Organon,* the *Topics,* is devoted to the ways by which, using honest, straightforward means, one can win arguments and avoid impeding oneself in disputes. I shall follow Aristotle's lead in this chapter, so far as McKeon's dialectic would be amenable to it, and Plato's in the next. Here I shall relate some details, at least, of the many and increasingly complex schemata across which McKeon laid text after text from the history of philosophy and point after point in his ceaseless efforts to find certainty or an alternative.

The Early Versions

After his *Selections from Medieval Philosophers,* most of McKeon's publications referred to and often expanded other men's thoughts, though