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Interpreting Lives: Some Hermeneutical Problems in Autobiography and Biography.

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Questioning, it will be suggested, is a basic interpretative activity.¹ That does not mean that it is necessarily acknowledged as such, either in itself, or in its interpretative role. A biographer can research and compose a biography without understanding the role his questioning activity is playing in it. Equally a biography can be read without the reader advertent to the fact that the narrative could be an answer to a set of questions. Nadel in his theoretical reflections on biography makes no reference to the role questioning plays in it.² Edel does consider the biographical process to be a quest or inquiry.³ But a great deal of work remains to be done in articulating its structure as a complex of interrelated questions. The same appears to be the case in many other literary ventures, so much so that Collingwood remarked:

..you cannot find out what a man means by simply studying his spoken or written statements, even though he has spoken or written with perfect command of language and perfectly truthful intention. In order to find out his meaning you must also know what the question was (a question in his own mind, and presumed by him to be in yours) to which the thing he has said or written was meant as an answer.⁴

An author can compose a text of one kind or another without recognising explicitly the questions he is answering. Then a major task in interpreting the text is to articulate those tacit questions.

In the early stages of an inquiry such as researching a biography, the questioning activity is not much more than a vague and unfocused interest. As it unfolds, however, it becomes more and more focused and its anticipations become more obvious. Once the existence and interpretative role of the questioning activity is expressly acknowledged, then the situation changes. For questioning is an anticipation. Because of this, even before the solution has been reached, the anticipations of the questioning can be explored.

An important step in that process is the articulation of the questioning in words. The significance of this step in any inquiry, simple though it sounds, ought never to be underestimated. Before it has happened the interest or investigation is quite lacking in direction. Formulating the questioning in words amounts to a partial but important specification of the answer, even though it is not yet known. It is the hoisting of a signpost. One now knows something about the kind of answer one is searching for. The search takes on a specific direction. In most written examinations, questions are phrased in words. Paradoxically, although the examinee is being asked for the answers, a careful study of the questions almost tells him what they are, what it is that is being expected.

The process of articulating the anticipations of a type of questioning is not new. It is extremely common in mathematics and the sciences. Thus a mathematician will write down a series of numbers, 1, 3, 9, 19, 33, 51,.. etc. What does the etc., mean? It means that the series can be continued and the task is to find the rule. When we start to reflect on the rule of a mathematical series we are reflecting on the anticipations of a type of questioning. When we know the sort of thing a rule is, then in similar problems we know the kind of answer we are seeking. This tactic is highly developed in algebra where the unknown is named as X. Part of the problem solving is to work out what is known about X, the equations which define it, etc., prior to actually discovering it. Similar considerations apply to the categories, probability and development.

The present study will be concerned with exploring some of the anticipations of biographical and autobiographical questioning. It will acknowledge differences between autobiography and biography. But because of limitations it will focus on similarities in the questions. An autobiography or a biography is an interpretation of a person's life. As such it will be the central suggestion of the present study that it is really a response to a set or complex of questions, which can be tacit or explicit. The different questions of different disciplines such as mathematics or statistics, or of common sense living or historical studies carry their own distinct anticipations. In response to them are generated the specific categories of the discipline or realm of meaning. The biographical question does not anticipate that it will be answered in terms of a mathematical rule. Such would be a category error. It has its own unique distinct anticipations and categories. Dilthey, with his analysis of the categories of life rather than of nature, was one of the first to attempt to work out those anticipations.⁵

A possible general formulation of the autobiographical and biographical questions would be:

What is the lifestory of X as interpreted at time t by Y for Z?

The term, story, suggests that autobiography and biography are not concerned with all aspects of the life, but rather with those constituted by meaning and narrative. Biography is not biology. It could be asked, why use life story instead of character or personality? How exactly do those terms differ? Granted that, the question is not simply about the lifestory of X. The suggestion is that the relation of the interpreter Y to the subject X and to the audience Z is intrinsic to the meaning of the question. Does this mean that the problem of discovering the meaning of a life in its historical context cannot be separated from that of the significance of the life for a later generation?

The suggestion that a significant part of the meaning of the question could be defined by the relation of the questioner to the object of the question and his audience as well as by the structure of the life leads us to ask, are all questions like that? Are there forms of questions whose anticipations are independent of the relation of the questioner to the object of the question, the time, and the audience to whom he wishes to address his answer? For instance, it is not expected that answers to questions such as, "how many cars are in the car park?", or "what is the sum of the internal angles in a triangle?" depend on the relation of the person to

the object he is questioning. Nor do we seem to expect that the explanation of the periodic table of the chemical elements or of gravity depends on the relation of a particular questioner to the given data. Different generations might understand the problem differently, but what they seem to agree about is that there will be one explanation.

The relations that enter into scientific laws and explanations rigorously exclude any element of a relation with the scientist. In contrast answers to questions such as: "how does the triangle appear to you?" or "How many cars can you see in the car park?" depend explicitly on the relation of the questioner to the object. Depending on their viewpoint, different individuals will correctly answer the question differently. Every biography of one and the same subject is different. In fact if two biographers wrote exactly the same narrative we would be suspicious. It would run contrary to our expectations. So it seems that there are basic differences in the structures of questions and their anticipations.

As formulated the question needs to be broken down. It is really the name of a complex or nest of subordinate questions. Collingwood remarked that an inquiry, although it can be summed up in a single question, is really a complex of questions and answers.⁶ As the inquiry unfolds the task is to let all the sub-questions emerge and be resolved. The final insight in an inquiry is usually concerned with understanding how all the sub-answers fit together into the total answer. Understanding the meaning of a basic question will involve articulating the sub-questions, which are its parts, and their interrelatedness. Part I of the essay will consider how the biographical question breaks down in relation to the given unity of the life time of the subject. What sub-questions does the given life time pose? Part II will consider specific problems raised by the notion of plot. Part III will explore the extent to which the relation of the interpreter to his subject and to the audience he is addressing is a part of the meaning of the question.

I

Every question has a given in the world. What precisely is the given of the autobiographical and biographical questions? Wittgenstein has remarked typically:

Suppose I had such a good memory that I could remember all my sense impressions. In that case there would, *prima facie*, be nothing to prevent me from describing them. That would be a biography. And why shouldn't I be able to leave everything hypothetical out of this description.⁷

For sense impressions it would perhaps be more appropriate to substitute lived experiences and objectifications of life, in the sense that Dilthey uses them.⁸ But one crucial term in the quotation is "all". The biographical question is concerned, not with fragments of a life, but with the totality of the lived experiences in a human life time; the stages - childhood, early, middle and late adulthood; the dreams, the personal relations, works, roots and social relations, the search for meaning, and so forth, that enter into the life.⁹ The task of remembering or recovering all of those lived experiences ought not to be underestimated. If there are any significant omissions it could be impossible to understand the movement or unfolding of the life.¹⁰

This draws to our attention the fact that the given of the question is the total life time. For autobiography it is obviously the total lifetime up to time t . That time is usually determined by the point in the life where the person's identity, career, or vocation becomes defined. For the biographer the major chapters of the life might only be beginning then. Again, a study such as Mary Craig's Blessings is not autobiography, strictly considered. That is not to play down the value of a study of a chapter or a passage in a life. Yet it has to be recognised that there is much more to the biographical and autobiographical question.

Suppose then, that all the textual research has been done in relation to a particular life study.¹¹ Suppose the experiences of the different stages in the life, of the persons who were influential, of the works which were pursued, every text written, every word spoken had been remembered and collected and understood, where in the unfolding of the biographical question would that leave us? What further questions would remain before we could start to compose our biography?

A first question obviously arises now, namely, are all the experiences or events in the lifetime of equal significance for its unfolding and meaning? Being born of specific parents at a particular place and time is an event of quite exceptional significance for any particular life, a point well illustrated by the life of Sartre. It determines greatly the course the life will take. The same cannot be said of such events as having one's breakfast morning after morning. Major decisions concerning a marriage relation or a career can have a long prehistory. They occur at a particular time. But their significance might endure for the rest of the life. So it is that Progoff, in introducing such categories as Steppingstones and Intersections, acknowledges that there are specific events or experiences in a life whose significance for its meaning as a whole is outstanding.¹²

A person crossing a river by means of a series of Steppingstones can look back and in them identify the set of steps which have brought him to his present position. A person at a particular stage in her life can look back and remember the series of marker events or milestones which have brought her to the present position. The same exercise could be done for sub-processes within the life such as personal relations or works. They too are born and unfold through their own marker events. The important thing about the Steppingstones is that the thread of the life seems to move or flow through them. Major events could happen at different times in a person's life such as the death of C.S. Lewis' mother. But they might not be Steppingstones because the movement of the life does not seem to flow through them. Steppingstones derive their meaning and significance, not from the immediate moment but rather from the movement of the life as a whole.

There is also a large element of chance or synchronicity involved in their occurrence. Gandhi could not have anticipated that he would have been thrown off a train in South Africa, as a result of which his life became redirected to political rather than to legal matters. The Steppingstones are not like terms in a regular mathematical series on the basis of which once some of the terms become known the rest can be predicted. They have to be discovered individually and concretely in the details of the life. They could include Aristotle's peripety or reversal, discovery, and suffering.

The existence of Steppingstones is well illustrated in biographies and autobiographies. Buber, in his autobiographical fragment, recalls how his life flowed through a series of mis-meetings and meetings with his mother, grandmother, father, the horse, Hechler, the unknown young man.¹³ Through that sequence of experiences a major movement in his life unfolded which resulted eventually in the composition of the work, I and Thou. Augustine's life flowed through the sequence of experiences such as reading Cicero's Hortentius, meeting Faustus, reading the Platonists, reading the Scriptures, being baptised, and so forth. Merton's reading of Gilson's The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy was an experience that eventually established a new direction in his life. The same could be said about C.S. Lewis' early experiences of joy and of reading George Mc Donald's Phantastes. Sartre's reading of Flaubert as a child and his option for atheism at an early age again established directions in his life.¹⁴ With the discovery of a set of Steppingstones a large element of the core meaning of the life becomes known.

As well as Steppingstones, there are also intersections, roads taken and not taken, decisions made by or made for the subject. A person who has been on a long journey in a car can look back and identify the series of roads taken and not taken by means of which they have arrived at their present position. Persons at particular times in their lives can remember the series of roads taken and not taken, of decisions made for or by them by means of which they have arrived at the present time. Intersections can happen in relation to many things in the life, persons, works, social groups, bodyliness, and beliefs, to mention a few. Thus a person may or may not decide to marry another person, and that becomes a road taken or not taken in the life. That intersection in one aspect of the life can influence a whole host of other aspects. It can determine the social world in which the person will live, the work that he will do, the beliefs that he or she brings into their life. Again, a person may decide on one work rather than another, psychology rather than philosophy, research rather than administration. That again could influence the social and other relations of the person. Intersections, roads taken and not taken, influence the life both along and across it. An intersection or road taken in the realm of beliefs could determine the works and social relations of one's life for a very long time. Equally a road taken in a personal relationship could influence one's beliefs.

As long as one is continuing along that road, then the intersection is alive and well in one's life, even though one might have lost sight of the circumstances and occasion under which it was taken. Accordingly, no less than Steppingstones, a knowledge of the set of intersections in a life by means of which an individual has arrived at a particular point is of great significance for understanding the life.

The biographical question further subdivides into the set of questions concerned with discovering the chapters in a life. As a symphony is divided into movements, and movements into melodies, so a life seems to be divided into chapters which in turn can have themes and moods. But what exactly is meant by a chapter and what are the criteria for determining when a chapter begins and ends? What kinds of questions are chapters answers to? Processes such as a personal relationship or a work could obviously constitute chapters in a life. With respect to such processes some possible types of question would be, firstly, when did it begin and end, secondly what was its structure, and thirdly, what was its ethos or mood?

How and when does a chapter begin? In some cases it could begin dramatically with a meeting or a change of fortune. In other cases it could begin quietly so that it was only in retrospect that the new beginnings could be discerned. In many cases some time before one chapter is ending the next one is beginning to take shape. So the boundaries between chapters are not clear-cut. A major Steppingstone or Intersection can be a signpost to a chapter in the life. Around it a recognisable unit of time in the life can be seen to form. The broad structure of that unit of time can be analysed in terms of Progoff's nine questions.¹⁵ With respect to it we can ask:

- Who are the persons of inner importance for the life?
- What are the central works, social relations, dreams?
- What is the person's relation to their body and its uses?
- Who were the wisdom figures; What fateful events occurred?
- What were the intersections, questions about meaning?

Although all nine questions can be posed, in any unit of time the answers to two or three of them will be more significant than for the rest. These, in turn, will suggest the theme of the chapter. It could be the working out of a personal relation, the performing of a work, coming to terms with an illness, trying to find meaning in one's life.

Personal relations, works, social relations, dreams, the search for meaning, and so forth, are not static states but rather living processes within the life. Having identified a significant work, personal or social relation, the biographers question now becomes an attempt to understand the movements of those processes. It is at this stage that questions arise about the temporal structure of human processes, for that temporal structure is fundamentally narrative. As the process unfolds there is a complex interaction between the present situation, past memories, and future expectations. On a given day an event and its meaning could be linked, not with the day before but rather with an experience which happened some years ago. It follows that processes in the life cannot be captured at all in a chronicle of events. What is needed is a narrative proper. Edel was aware of this in his attempt to describe the personal relations of Henry James:

Instead of chronicling little episodes and encounters piecemeal, as mere anecdotes, I recreate two personalities in their relationship with one another and in particular the significance of the older man for the younger. By weaving backwards and forwards in time and even dipping into the future, which to us readers is after all entirely of the past, I reckon with time, as it really exists, as something fluid and irregular and with memory as something alive and flickering and evanescent.¹⁶

The unfolding of a personal relationship is not just a chronological series of events. It has a complex tense structure involving the interplay of the past, present, and future. It will have its moments of intimacy and acceptance as well as its hurts and rejections. It may have long pauses, times when the seed has gone into the ground and is waiting for the summer heat to awaken it. It is characterised by all the risk and precariousness of the creative process. As such it will be a conflict between opposites such as love and hate, creativity and destructiveness, hope and anxiety, connectedness and alienation. Following processes in the life such as the unfolding of a personal relation, of a major creative work, or a quest for the

meaning of life will require great maturity on the part of the biographer. To the extent that he or she has not had comparably deep experiences in their own life will profound experiences in the life of the subject seem like so many street noises.

As the broad structure of the chapter or unit of time becomes known interest can develop in its mood or atmosphere. The question can be posed, "it was a time in the life when what?" The search is for a title of the chapter which catches the mood. The answer can be arrived at by the process of twilight imaging.¹⁷ That title can be an image or phrase or metaphor. It is symbolic rather than strictly propositional. Thus in Vera Brittain's Testament of Youth chapter titles such as "When the Vision Dies...", "Survivors not Wanted" and "Another Stranger" are given. Friedman in Volume I of Martin Buber's Life and Work has as chapter headings: "Mysticism", "The Prophet of Realization", "The Threshold of Fulfilment" and "I and Thou".¹⁸

Such titles have organic depths which cannot be reached in propositions or narratives. They communicate deeply the whole atmosphere of the time. Not only do they communicate, they also evoke. What they evoke can be filled out in a narrative but never exhausted. Finding the titles of the series of chapters in the life time and simply writing them down in sequence can be a most significant step in the researching of a biography. As they are written down they begin to evoke the further question, what is the title of the life itself? As chapter titles, so also life titles such as "Surprised by Joy" or "Elected Silence" can again be deeply communicative and evocative.

II

As a sense of the Steppingstones, the Intersections, and the chapters of the life emerges the biographical questioning expands into a search for what might be called the plot. The Steppingstones, Intersections, and chapters, being answers to parts of the wider question could be termed the variables of the plot in a life. As they vary significantly from life to life so also does the plot. But, no less than any other parts, they do not determine the whole. What then is the further type of anticipation that is involved in the question about the plot?

For Aristotle in the Poetics a fundamental attribute of a plot is its unity. It involves a single movement constituted by many activities. To remove one or other of those activities would destroy the whole. An activity that makes no difference to the whole is not a part of the plot. His fundamental illustration is tragic plot, a movement in a life through a series of events largely beyond the control of the person, from good to bad fortune. About plot Ricoeur makes an interesting observation. For the poet the task is to invent the story. But for the biographer and the historian, just as for the psychoanalyst or judge, it might be to disentangle it.¹⁹ The suggestion is that a person is living an unknown plot in his or her life. The task of the biographical questioning is to disentangle, articulate and narrate it.

Ricoeur holds that Aristotle's notion of plot is a property, not simply of tragedy, but rather of all narratives.²⁰ A biographical narrative would then be a unity which unites the experiences of the life. This leads to questions such as, are there many different kinds of plots, or even - does every human life in some way embody a plot unique to it? As well as tragic stories there are also quest stories, conversion stories, love stories, and even cover

stories. Given such a multiplicity John Dunne was led to pose the question, "What sort of a story are we in?"²¹ His work is an exploration of a whole range of narrative themes or plots, beginning with the Gilgamesh Epic, the story of a quest for eternal life. Through a study of some of the main themes in recent biographies and autobiographies he suggested our predecessors lived the stories of the alienated and the autonomous man. These in turn have prepared the way for the current life story of the man without God.²² But if we are all entangled in a common story how can our uniqueness and individuality be preserved? Do we live a common story in a unique way or a unique story in a unique way? A biography is a unique understanding of a unique individual in a unique way. He may be living a tragic or a love story. But that story will be his own unique way of living it. It cannot be inferred from general themes or theories.

Where Aristotle approached plot in terms of a principle of organisation of a narrative, Scholes and Kellogg focus on its dynamism:

Plot can be defined as the dynamic, sequential element in narrative literature. Insofar as character or any other element in narrative becomes dynamic, it is a part of the plot. Spatial art, which presents its materials simultaneously, or in a random order, has no plot, but a succession of similar pictures which can be arranged in a meaningful order (like Hogarth's "Rake's Progress") begins to have a plot because it begins to have a dynamic sequential existence.²³

They distinguish between story and plot. Story for them is a general term for character and action in narrative form. Plot is a more specific term intended to refer to action alone, with the minimum possible reference to character.²⁴

Another approach to plot would be in terms of the question, what is it that is going forward in the life? In this respect there seems to be a difference between the autobiographical and biographical questions. Pascal puts it:

To the extent that autobiography is a story of the author's inward life, its natural concluding point is not his death but the point at which the author comes to terms with himself, realizes his nature, assumes his vocation.²⁵

Once Lewis or Joyce have remembered the story by means of which they became a Christian or a writer, then the interest ends for them as autobiographers. For the biographer on the other hand, the interest might only be beginning there. He will be interested in how the person lived out their chosen vocation.

But, as Progoff reminds us, understanding what it is that is going forward in a person's life might not be all that simple:

No wonder that Lao Tse said that the growth principle in life, which he called the Tao, is too elusive to be named or grasped at all.... In practice it becomes clear that the inner growth of a person is irregular, for it often disappears from view for long periods. The psychological cycles of growth move so slowly and circuitously that even when something very important is germinating underneath people are often misled into

believing that no growth is taking place at all... Equally misleading is the fact that active germination of a growth process often takes place at the low, seemingly negative, phase of a psychological cycle.²⁶

Of importance in understanding what is meant by plot is an appreciation of how we follow, and of how we don't follow a plot. For a plot seems to differ fundamentally from a life plan or a developmental rule relating different stages in the unfolding of a life. Levinson's *The Seasons of a Man's Life* puts forward a kind of life rule.²⁷ On the basis of it one can predict, on the average, the kind of developmental issues which will preoccupy an individual at certain stages in his life. Following a plot involves following something unique, concrete and historical. It involves a large element of chance, of synchronicity, of good and bad fortune, of the unanticipated. It is hardly visible in the early stages of the life. Yet the interplay of memory and expectation is intrinsic to following it.

The plot is understood, not in a part of the lived experiences, but rather in the totality. In a sense the plot cannot be known until the life is completed for there is always the possibility of a totally unanticipated twist. Related to this is the difference between conceptual and narrative meaning. We can explore the meaning of such concepts as tragedy, love, desire, and alienation, by a careful study of language use. But there is another sense in which their meaning is present in the totality of a narrative. In that sense love or tragedy or alienation is the meaning of the whole narrative and cannot be grasped in anything less than the totality. Understanding narrative meaning is a central task in following the plot.

At this stage the question arises about how adequately a plot, or related to it, a life can be understood. Is it not the case that there is always some kind of darkness at the heart of a person's life which is humanly unknowable:

In all autobiographies there is a cone of darkness at the centre, even in those so outstanding as psychological documents.²⁸

Perhaps it can be suggested that in life study there is a dialectic of meaning and mystery. For there would appear to be two opposed tendencies. A first would say that the life and the human person is ultimately mysterious. It is a position upheld by Marcel.²⁹ On the other hand the whole expectation of biography and autobiography is that a life is meaningful. It seems that the more we fathom the meaning the more we reduce the mystery. That, however, does not seem to be the case. The more we get a grip on C.S. Lewis' experience of joy, the greater the clarity with which he articulates it, the more we have a sense that we are face to face with mystery. The same seems to be true at the core of lives of individuals such as Newton, Einstein, Luther, Gandhi. But this dialectic ought not to lessen our resolve to fathom the meaning, for as Proffoff holds, there is to be discerned in the meaning of human lives a wisdom and teaching about life which cannot be found elsewhere.³⁰

Finally, there is the question, is there only a single, or as Nadel suggests, multiple plots be discerned in a person's life.³¹ Is the meaning of a life ambiguous? To what extent is the plot in a life independent of the standpoint and perspective of different biographers? Obviously it has to be to a large extent; otherwise they would all invent their own personal versions of the life. Certainly Proffoff holds that the unfolding of a life is like

the unfolding of a seed, and in that sense it has a unique unity of meaning. Biographers must be as imaginative and creative as possible in discovering the thematic structure of the life that is the plot. But they must also respect the evidence which the life presents. Biography is not fiction. It follows that the task is not to invent but rather discover the plot in the life.

It is through understanding the plot that the biographer arrives at a standpoint from which he can compose the narrative. In the diverse elements he has grasped some unity of movement, dynamism, growth.

III

Like most historians, it could be suggested that both autobiographers and biographers set out with the intention of producing a work that somehow gets beyond their own particular standpoint, perspectives, or prejudices. But the fact of the matter is that having done so they all write different biographies. There are some twenty six versions of the life of George Eliot. A whole host of biographies have been written of Luther, including those of Cochlaeus, Denifle, Lortz, Todd, Bainton, Maurius, and Erikson. Monica Furlong and Michael Mott have written different biographies of Merton.

The emergence of a multiplicity of different biographies of one and the same subject is an important step for the analysis of the meaning of the biographical question. For now, through comparison, aspects of its structure can be clarified in a manner not previously possible. After two or three different biographies of one and the same subject have been read, one begins to learn from them more about the biographers and their relations with the subject and their audiences, than about the subject himself. At least three types of relations seem to be at work in this, genetic, complementary, and dialectical. Significant variations in those relations could result in significantly different works. The currently unresolved question must be, to what extent can those relations be eliminated or not from the kind of understanding of a life we have been exploring so far? If they are intrinsic to the meaning of the question, then biographies should be read with that in mind.

Genetic differences in biographies arise simply because of the advancement of knowledge. Later biographers know more about the subject. Mott knows more about Merton than Furlong. They also could know more about the biographical process. Accordingly, assuming the other variables are kept fixed, a genetic series of biographies could be generated in this way. Within that series some differences could be revisionary, others could be revolutionary. New discoveries about the life, or about how to understand a life, could result in a revolutionary new approach. Augustine's Confessions constituted a revolution in the understanding of how to understand a life that has shaped our viewpoint, right down to the present day. At the same time it grew organically out of the earlier culture.

Complementary differences arise in biographies because of differences in the personalities or intellectual standpoints of the biographers. Two biographers could have identical knowledge of their subject and of the biographical process. Yet because of differences in their personalities they could stand in complementary relations with the subject. Edgar Johnson holds that a biography "is a psychological intersection of the

biographer and the subject." 32 Virginia Woolf remarks that "a biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves whereas a person may well have as many thousand"33 With Buber I would be inclined to hold that the self is relational. Individuals disclose themselves differently to different personalities. Equally, certain aspects of the personality of the subject will resonate with one biographer, other aspects with another. If the subject is a high introvert and the biographer an extrovert, that relationship will be a part of the biographical process. If the subject is Promethean and one biographer Apollonian, the other Dionysian, those different relationships will again express themselves in the biographies. A study of the work of Jung, Myers-Briggs, and of the Enneagram will make clear the inevitability of those relations.34

As well as personality differences, there are also differences in the intellectual perspectives of biographers. Bernard C. Meyer entitled his biography of Conrad, Conrad, A Psychoanalytic Biography. The work is written from the perspective of a psychoanalyst rather than of a literary biographer. So one biographer could approach the life from the standpoint of the literary or religious genius of the person; another from the standpoint of a psychoanalyst. Such differences could again be complementary. They would result in a complementary understanding of one and the same reality. Negatively, they do not in any way contradict or conflict with each other. The reality of a human life seems to be something like a diamond. It reflects a whole series of different faces to those with different standpoints. Problems arise when proponents of one of those standpoints put it forward as the total and only one.

Thirdly, there are dialectical relations. They stem from conflicts in the value systems and world views of the biographers, the subject, and the audiences. They are best illustrated in a sequence of biographies of one and the same subject such as those of Luther by Cochlaeus, Denifle, Lortz, Todd, Bainton, Maurius, and Erikson. Interesting in that series is the way each biographer wishes to present his subject to his audience. In that there is at work a further kind of relation, namely the relation of significance. The works of Cochlaeus and Denifle are largely polemical. They wish to present Luther as deranged. Lortz, though scholarly and critical, was the first Catholic to find praiseworthy elements in the life. Todd wrote in an ecumenical age. Bainton wrote in the McCarthy era and wished to present Luther as someone who had taken a stand. Maurius wrote in the Vietnam era and wondered what, if anything, Luther and ecumenism had to say to it. Erikson presented him to Americans as an unusually interesting case of a psychological identity crisis.35 Each biographer then selects out what he considers the audience will find of significance in the life.

In every instance what is presented is some evaluation of the life, either positive or negative, a point recognised by Maurius: "Yet nearly all writing about Luther has been couched in words saturated with value judgements."36 Such evaluations are clear-cut in hagiography and debunking biography. No doubt it would be nice to attain some value free standpoint but it does not seem possible. The meeting of the values and world views of the subject, biographer and audience seem intrinsic to the process. Every life is some mixture of brightness and shadow, of virtue and vice, of good and evil. Every biographer has his or her own values and disvalues, zones of light and shadows. No matter how much a biographer admires, or even loves his or her subject, they still have the task of presenting both what is worthwhile and what is not worthwhile in the life. Inevitably this will vary from biographer to

biographer. The more they admire their subject, the more difficult will it be to deal with the shadow. How they do so could be the measure of their stature as biographers.

Similar considerations apply to world views, which are partly systems of beliefs and values. Although Erikson is extremely sympathetic to the religious dimension of Luther's life, at the end of the day his world view seems that of an atheistic psychoanalyst. Atheistic and religious interpretations of Luther or Gandhi are in the end conflicting and irreconcilable.

As a series of dialectically related biographies begins to emerge and is studied by later biographers, a transformation takes place. For now the later biographers begin to appreciate how the values and world views of earlier biographers have entered into and are intrinsic to the biographical process. The range of values and world views involved could be quite limited. As the series grow that range could become more clearly defined. As it becomes defined a later biographer could discover that he or she has to make a deliberate, rather than a tacit option, for values and world views. In this there could result a profound clarification of the different world views from which the meaning of a person and a life can be interpreted.

To conclude, the aim of the paper has been to initiate an exploration of the structure and meaning of the autobiographical and biographical questions. A large part of the meaning of a question is determined by its anticipations. So a major part of the study was concerned with exploring the unique anticipations of such questions. Those anticipations will be common to all biographers. Some questions are such that the relation of the questioner to the object is not a part of the meaning of the questions. For others it is the case. Although there are common anticipations in the biographical question, it also seems the case that the relation of the biographer to the subject is an intrinsic part of its meaning.

Life Study, as Progoff reminds us, is a fundamental vehicle of meaning and wisdom. If that is the case it is important to understand the type of questioning on which the study of lives is based.

Notes and References

1. It can of course degenerate into interrogation or idle curiosity. Gadamer in his Truth and Method, Sheed and Ward, London 1975, 325f, especially 333f., draws attention to the need to investigate in greater detail the significance of the questioning activity in interpretation.
2. Biography, Fiction, Fact and Form, Macmillan 1984, Chapter 5.
3. Literary Biography, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and London, 1957, Chapter II.
4. See Autobiography, Oxford University Press 1970, p 31.
5. Dilthey, Selected Writings, Edited by H. P. Rickmann, Cambridge University Press, London 1976, 231f.
6. Autobiography, 30 - 33.

7. Philosophical Remarks, edited by R. Rhees and translated by Roger White and Raymond Hargreaves, Oxford 1974, p 97.
8. Rickmann, Selected Writings, 191f.
9. The works of Ira Progoff have been outstanding for the manner in which they help us to appreciate all the experiences in a life. Consult for instance, At a Journal Workshop, Dialogue House Library, New York 1975, especially chapters 9 and 11; Process Meditation, Life Study, and The Dynamics of Hope, all published by the same library in 1980, 1984, and 1985, respectively. But perhaps the best way in which to appreciate such experiences is through participation in a Journal Workshop.
10. Thus we are only given one sentence of Ignatius of Loyola's youth in his autobiography, the rest being suppressed. The result is that it is quite impossible to understand the movement of his life as a whole, and the significance his Manresa period. The Autobiography of Ignatius Loyola, Harper Torchbooks, New York 1974, p 21.
11. The present paper is a sequel to a chapter on autobiographical and biographical questioning in a PhD Thesis, Questioning and its Object, which I presented to the Philosophy Faculty of the University of Leeds in February 1980. That chapter dealt with the aspects of the question which were concerned with the recovery of texts, the testimony of friends, and so forth. The present study is building on it.
12. At a Journal Workshop, 102f, 133f. At a Workshop in New York in August 1985 he explored how Steppingstones and Intersections interacted with the structure of a life, both along and across time.
13. Meetings, Martin Buber, edited with an introduction by Maurice Friedman, Open Court, Illinois 1973.
14. The Confessions of Saint Augustine, Sheed and Ward, London 1978, pps 33, 68, 111, 141, and 151. Thomas Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, Signet Classics, New York, 169f. C.S. Lewis, Surprised by Joy, Fount, Collins 1978, pps 16-20, 61-3, 142-6. Sartre, The Words, Penguin 1983, 37, 65.
15. Life Study, Chapter 13, At a Journal Workshop, Chapter 9.
16. Literary Biography, p 149.
17. At a Journal Workshop, Chapter 6, also 119f. The Dynamics of Hope, Chapters 12 and 18.
18. The works referred to are: Vera Brittain, Testament of Youth, Fontana, 1970, Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber's Life and Work, The Early Years 1978-1923, Search Press, London 1982.
19. Time and Narrative, Volume 1, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1984, pps 74 - 5.
20. Time and Narrative, p 38.
21. Time and Myth, Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1973.

22. A Search for God in Time and Memory, Sheldon Press, London 1967, Chapters 3, 4, and 5.
23. The Nature of Narrative, Oxford University Press, London 1966, p 207.
24. *ibid.* p 208. The relations between plot and character are too complex to take up in this limited study. Hence the focus has been on plot.
25. Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1960, p 215. See also A. Cockshut, The Art of Autobiography, Yale University Press, New Haven 1984, pps 2-3.
26. At A Journal Workshop, pps 17 and 18.
27. Levinson, The Season of a Man's Life, Ballantine, New York 1978, Chapter 2.
28. See Pascal, *op. cit.*, 184. See also Schelling, The Ages of the World, AMS Press, New York 1967, p 94 where he remarks that if one was to understand a person's life from the ground up one would have understood the whole of history.
29. Mystery of Being, Reflection and Mystery, Gateway Editions, Indiana 1950, Chapters VIII and IX.
30. Life Study, Chapter 1.
31. Biography, Fiction, Fact, Form, p 103f, see also n 1, pps 223-4.
32. Quoted from J.L. Clifford, From Puzzled to Portraits, London 1970, p112.
33. Quoted by Edel in his Literary Biography, p 54.
34. Keirse and Bates, Please Understand Me, Prometheus Nemesis Book Company, California 1984, Chapters 1 and 2,
35. See Richard Maurius, Luther, Quarter Books, London 1975, especially 244f, 248. Erik Erikson, Young Man Luther, Faber, London 1958, especially 19f. Consult also the follow up, R.A. Johnson (Editor), Psychohistory and Religion, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1977.
36. Luther, 245.