

"Making the Most of Coincidence: The Value of Frustrated Purposes,"
Keynote Address at Conference to Inaugurate the William H. and Lucyle W.
Werkmeister Eminent Scholar Chair in Philosophy, Florida State University,
August 10, 1994.

Making the Most of Coincidence: The Value of Frustrated Purposes

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by
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Dr. Lucyle Werkmeister, President Sandy D'Alemberte and Mrs. Betsy Palmer, Former University President John and Mrs. Mary Champion, Former university President Stanley and Mrs. Shirley, Marshall, Former University President Bernard and Mrs. Greta Sliger, Vice President Bob and Mrs. Ellie Johnson, Provost Larry and Mrs. Linda Abele, Chairman Russell and Mrs. Margaret Dancy, Professor Eugene and Mrs. Pirrette Kaelin, members of the philosophy Department Faculty, members of the Florida State University Staff and Administration, other faculty, honored and generous guests:

It is a pleasure and an undeserved honor to stand before you this evening on such an extraordinary and auspicious occasion, to be asked to say a few words in tribute to a man the full measure of whose fullest and most enduring importance to value inquiry, as Aristotle taught us about judgments of happiness, emerges only at the end of his life.

This is an occasion in which the temptation to speak seriously of things philosophical and abstract is great. Bob Johnson has warned me against that: drawing on his knowledge of human biochemistry and psychology, he advised me to keep it light, keep it short, and keep it interesting; it's an after-dinner speech, after all, and blood is being diverted away from the audience's reticular activation system to their stomachs; their bodies are now more interested in what is going on there than what is going on in the auditory cortex, so you have some heavy competition, said Bob Johnson; besides, he said, not everyone in the audience will be a philosopher; so, again, keep it light, keep it short, and keep it interesting.

It's a good thing he said that, because Gene Kaelin, perhaps thinking of it in terms of a presentation at a philosopher conference, had e-mailed his suggested parameters just in terms of length: 30 minutes — about 15 pages typescript. And Lucyle Werkmeister, another delightful new friend, indicated that she thought that what I chose to say would be just fine — by which I took her to endorse at least the first and third of the Johnson rules: light and interesting.

It is very hard for a philosopher not to wax philosophical and hold forth on abstract and profound themes. (My wife, a scientist used to expressing her research in terse, economic sentences, tells me that it takes a philosopher at least ten pages to clear his throat.) While mindful of all these wonderful pieces of advice, I *have* given in to what I regard as a philosophical theme, but I am going to develop that theme in a way I intend and hope will be light, interesting, and — not too long.

Professor Werkmeister's own words have prompted this theme. I am already involved in a number of projects involving his works, including publishing a book and an essay, and also involved in an effort to collect hard copy of all of his publications. Eventually, this will be presented to the Werkmeister Archives here at FSU. But this project has had me reading a great

deal of what he wrote, and I am learning much more about this man and his outlook on life and values.

One of Werkie's essays that has become a favorite of mine is his "History and Human Destiny," published in 1957 in *The Personalist*. In it he sets out to answer a set of interrelated questions, questions about the nature of human history, its sense, its meaning for us. And, being an empiricist, an observer, rather than a speculative philosopher at heart, he quickly proceeds to questions about individual human beings: "Do the facts and events of an individual's lifetime, when viewed together, constitute a whole, a context or pattern, which may be regarded as the sense and meaning of his personal existence? And his answer is, Yes. "The human is capable of pursuing and achieving ends whose realization he regards as desirable or as worthy of his efforts. he is a being, in other words, who not merely suffers and passively endures the events of his life as they occur, but whose desires, inclinations, and deliberate actions transcend any given moment, and who, in a measure at least, is actively engaged in determining and directing the course of his life and in pursuing goals which he projects into the future."

Werkmeister then goes on to consider the unanticipated frustrations of life: ". . . [W]hen we come face to face with the brute factualities of human existence,; the inadequacy of the view that the meaning of human existence can be understood wholly in terms of the individual's life plan is evident: "for the truth is that the harsh realities of this world tend to distort, to disrupt, and pervert our life-plans, and that often, all too often, they prevent us from realizing our goals; they lead to frustration." And this changes the question. Now it becomes: "Did the modifications and disruptions in our life-plan, forced upon us by circumstances in the world around us, give our whole life that specific content and form in and through which its meaning has found fulfillment?"

And the sad story of individual human ambition is, of course, that "Often, all too often, the individual feels frustrated, crushed, condemned to failure by factors and forces around him which have disrupted and despoiled his noblest efforts and have deprived him of every opportunity to realize his goals . . . And so we see that man, who deeply desires and is capable of realizing meaning in his own life, also faces the threat of a complete annihilation of that meaning."

Werkmeister then develops his theme of man as an aspiring, goal-directed creature whose purposes set the context in which individual events take on their significance. he notes that the two distinguishing human characteristics shared by all humans, apart from the pursuit of deliberately-chosen purposes, are the awareness of our inner drives that enables us to exercise "at least some control over what we are doing"; and the "plasticity," the lack of fixed instincts or behavior patterns, that characterizes humans from birth. Werkmeister summarizes this in sight in a remarkably existentialist way: "Growing up as a human being is thus in a very basic sense a process of forming oneself, of giving direction and content and form to one's own being." And this pair of features, awareness and control of inner drives, and plasticity, give the answer to the initial question about the meaning of human history: "the slow, the circuitous, the agonizing process of man finding a way to his own true humanity." Confronted with frustrations, set-backs, losses, individually and collectively humans nonetheless and in general persevere.

Thornton Wilder, toward the end of his *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, writes: "But where are sufficient books to contain the events that would not have been the same without the fall of the bridge?" And here Wilder gives the theme of my talk: "events that would not have been the same without . . ."

I have titled these remarks, "Making the Most of Coincidence: the Value of Frustrated Purposes." And I have decided to proceed with my theme by telling you some stories — in ethics we now refer to them as "narratives" —

some of them about my experiences, and some of them about Werkie's and others'. My theme I pattern after that suggested by Wilder's remark, and his remarkable book.

Tonight is an event that, from my perspective, would have turned out very differently had a set of frustrations, accidents, coincidences occurred differently or been responded to differently. I find it quite remarkable that I am here, tonight, and I want to understand it in the spirit of Professor Werkmeister's view of the meaning of events in one's life. And, since I am pretty much a stranger to you all, this is also a way of introducing myself, a Yankee from Oklahoma, and thereby solve for us both the mystery of how I came tonight to be in your midst.

The story of my association with his endeavor begins with death on an icy day in Dallas, Texas, in November of 1961. I had driven the 60 miles down US 75 from Sherman, home of my soon-to-be-alma-mater, Austin College, to take the Graduate Record Exams being given regionally at Southern Methodist University. A "norther" had come blowing in the night before, and a freezing rain had been falling for several hours. I had had good experience driving in adverse weather in my first three college semesters at Perk College, Missouri, from which I had transferred three years before. Unfortunately, the driver in front of me had not: he skidded through a red light at a busy intersection just a block from SMU and hit a pedestrian; the poor soul was knocked over the car and fell, crumpled and inert, in front of me. I read the next day that he'd been killed, but I was certain of it then as I parked quickly, heard the ambulance siren, saw the police in attendance, and tore myself from the scene to run the remaining block, slipping into my examination seat just as the timed exam started. As I opened the booklet, it hit me: I had just seen a man killed! Shaken and distracted, I did not distinguish myself that day. The scores that came back were not promising, and, I thought, surely not my best; I would have to retake the exam in two months.

One consequence of that episode was that I was thrown off my graduate school applications. I missed the first cut at a number of schools, and when the results of my retaken exam were sent to my choices, many had already filled their entering classes and told me either to try in another year or that I was on their wait list. In particular, I was not admitted to the University of Minnesota, where I was heart-bound to study philosophy of science.

Discouraged, Elaine and I graduated and moved in with my parents in Oklahoma City, taking jobs that would pay the bills and resolving to wait the additional year and try again for Minnesota. Just as we got our first evaluation and enough of a pay raise to finance a move out of my parents' home and into an apartment of our own, a call came from Indiana University that a half assistantship had opened up due to a case of mononucleosis in a graduate student, who would be out the first semester, and I would be welcome to it if I wanted to study philosophy there. That half assistantship was in the princely sum of \$97.50 per month — paid only for 10 months of the year.

Our boss liked us; we had a cute apartment; we were out of debt, and we were making enough money to save a fair amount. So, we made the obvious choice: We reloaded the trailer we had just emptied, said goodbye to our slightly confused landlady, our slightly irritated boss, and my more than slightly worried parents, and set off for Bloomington.

They say the key to opportunity is being in the right place at the right time. It turned out that this was true, for at Indiana we met and befriended someone who was later to introduce me to William H. Werkmeister in a way that would, ultimately, bring me here today. So, to reflect and to anticipate: an ice storm, being positioned just behind someone who couldn't drive well in it, a tragic accident, all conspired to keep me from my intended training in philosophy of science at Minnesota. That put me in a position of being receptive to a late

summer invitation to attend Indiana University — the right place at the right time, not by planning but by virtue of a series of coincidences — my own contribution being a willingness to take the risk of leaving relative security to strike out after an altered dream.

We arrived on campus the day before classes started, late in August of 1963, and parked ourselves on the campus housing office doorstep. About 4 p.m., a harried secretary appeared and said, “We have just had a cancellation for an apartment: do you want it?” We rented that apartment on the spot, unseen, for \$55 per month, utilities included, then went to see it.

It was, as my father put it, one-and-three-half-rooms: a 12 X 12 whole room, a “one-fanny kitchen” in which you had to step into the living room either to open the refrigerator door or the oven, a closet one foot wider and one foot longer than the full-sized bed we put in it, and a tiny bath. After settling in like sardines in a can, I went off to Philosophy to sign up for courses and collect the texts that I was to teach to freshmen. Elaine, who had thought because of some severe eye trouble that she would be unable to do full-time graduate work, went to Psychology to sign up for a course “just to keep her hand in.” I discovered, to my delight, that a second unfortunate graduate student had come down with mononucleosis (1) and that I would have a full assistantship after all: the princely sum of \$195 per month during the academic year. Elaine was utterly charmed by the chair of the Psychology Department, Roger Russell, who told her that if she would enroll full-time in the Fall, he would guarantee her an assistantship in the Spring. She returned a bit shame-faced, having enrolled on the spot, to learn of my good fortune. The cost of her full out-of-state tuition and our books almost exactly equaled the other \$97.50 per month I had just achieved. But, though poor, we were happy.

It was an unsettling year. Kennedy was assassinated that November, shattering the hopes of a generation already deeply disturbed by the rumblings of the war machine in Vietnam. We had car trouble, medical problems. Graduate study was MUCH harder than we had anticipated. But it was returning to our cozy apartment after driving straight through from our mid-winter break of visiting our families, only to discover that it had been flooded due to a blocked sewer, that prompted my Elaine to say to me, “We have to find a better place! I don’t ever want to live below grade again.”

For the next three years we rented a house. It was luxuriously roomy, and expensive. To finance the additional cost, we rented out a room to another graduate student from one or the other of our departments. A graduate student to whom we had let a room suddenly announced she was getting married mid-year, and we had a vacancy. Another graduate student coincidentally decided that she had had enough of daily commuting from a town about 50 miles away, and posted an urgent request for a room in Bloomington where she could spend a couple of nights each week. Thus, Eva Huel Cadwallader moved in during our last year there, the spring of 1967, and that was the start of our friendship.

Again, let me note how our difficulties with the apartment, taken in haste and repented at leisure, had led us into landlordship, how the sudden vacating of our rental room from a passion suddenly matured created a need for a mid-year tenant, and how Eva’s abandoned marriage had first led her to return to graduate school and then placed her in a position matching our need.

Like Werkie, Eva had emigrated to the U.S. from Germany, as a young woman. She had completed her education through the bachelor’s degree in Psychology, married and had two children. Problems developed in the marriage after some years (her husband abandoned her and the young children), and she returned to graduate school to study philosophy. After Elaine and I left to take jobs in Buffalo, Eva completed her studies and wrote a dissertation on Nikolai Hartmann’s theory of values. That topic came to her, I think, chiefly because her adviser suggested she do work in German texts and capitalize on her native

language. Her dissertation was titled: "Nikolai Hartmann's Twentieth Century Value Platonism."

Eva's association with Werkie began after she completed her dissertation and got her first position. She was seeking publication of her dissertation and was looking for Hartmann scholars who would support the manuscript. (Eva has given me her file of correspondence with Werkie: it, too, will eventually rest in the Werkmeister archives here at FSU.)

It appears that they first met by chance at an APA Eastern Division "Smoker" in December 1971, discovering a common interest in Nikolai Hartmann. Eva was teaching at a temporary post at Western Illinois University, and was at APA looking for more permanent employment. It appears that Werkie had not considered Hartmann in his *Historical Spectrum of Value Theory: The German Language Group*, and they agreed that Eva would make some appropriate reference to that work in her dissertation, and Werkie would write a preface for the book version of Eva's dissertation.

Eva completed her dissertation in 1972, and defended it that August 1. By early October she had sent a copy to Werkie; ever prompt he read and returned it by November 1 with more than a dozen pages of typed comments, plus numerous marginal notes. By the following March, she had received a tenure-track offer from Westminster College in Pennsylvania, although Werkmeister labored mightily to gain her offers from Tulane and Montana, writing letters for her placement dossier, calling Andrew Reck and Thomas Huff personally on her behalf.

Werkie was elected President-Elect of the American Society for Value Inquiry in 1973, and served as President during 1974–1975. He was succeeded by Robert Carter, William Blackstone, and Gene Games, Blackstone's student. Robert Hartman was very active in the society in those years, and I believe he recruited Carter, Werkie, and Bill Blackstone, who in turn recruited Gene James and Stephen White, both his students at Georgia. Werkie appears to have gotten Eva Cadwallader interested in ASVI; he intervened with Bill Blackstone to get Eva an opportunity to read a paper on Nikolai Hartmann and Karen Horney at the Spring ASVI meetings in 1976. Apparently Blackstone and Gene James were impressed with the paper, because Eva was elected Vice President at that meeting in Cincinnati — nominated, as I recall, by Werkie.

Meanwhile, my wife, Elaine, and I had gone to SUNY at Buffalo, settled in, completed dissertations (quickly in her case, eventually in mine), and began the struggle for tenure. In my own case, this led me to take up a new field, bioethics, as one way "to make myself indispensable to my employer" (a piece of advice given me as a teenager by my father, which has always stood me in good stead), and the study of bioethics led me back into the study of ethics that I had set aside while writing a dissertation on the philosophy of mind. Tenure was granted me in 1974, giving me finally the luxury of expanding my professional activities beyond just publishing. Eva, as Vice President, had recruited me to come hear her paper on Hartmann and Horney, and it was at that meeting that I was first introduced to Werkie.

I remember Eva's astonishment at Professor Werkmeister's nomination of her to office. He spoke at length of the importance of new blood to the continuation of the Society, and spoke glowingly of her enthusiasm and energy level. I think he set the tone for her enthusiastic advancement of the Society; surely no one could have received the kind of endorsement he gave and not slave to the level best to deserve such "prospective praise."

When Eva moved into the President-Elect position, she recruited me for the Vice President's job, and I spent the next year, and the year after, working with her to establish programs at all three of the ASVI meetings, recruit new members, and build the Society. I became President the year after Eva's presidency, in 1979–1980.

So, again, a characterizing of the foregoing in terms of my theme: A chance meeting between Eva and Werkie at a smoker at the APA; a common interest in Hartmann; her boldness in asking for his support and his willingness to take a risk in supporting a young unknown; a young, struggling Society; Werkie's bold idea for a transfusion of new blood together with that young blood's willingness to be transfused; my long term association with Eva, the chancy origins of which I have already recounted for you: these all came together to connect me with ASVI, ultimately as a president who gave a presidential address, as was the Society's custom.

Various factors kept me from active participation in the Society after those years, and apart from attending an occasional meeting of the Society I didn't have much contact with it or its officers until 1991. I was unaware that jim Wilbur had retired from his editorship of the *Journal of Value Inquiry*, or that Robert Ginsberg, formerly an Associate Editor and contributor to the *Journal of Social Philosophy*, had been appointed Editor; I think I wasn't even aware that Bob had been involved with the Society as an officer for four years.

Two former graduate students of mine wrote a paper on the question of whether the amoralist was involved in a contradiction, and published it in the *Journal of Value Inquiry*; one of them sent me a copy. I thought the argument interesting, but flawed, and decided to write a response. I did so, and sent it to them with a copy to Ginsberg, more to tell him that an article he had published had evoked a response. To my surprise, the *Journal* accepted it and published it as a critical discussion note.

Bob Ginsberg tells me of one day that he was discussing with jim Wilbur, the outgoing editor, the possibility of building connections between the Society and the *Journal* by resurrecting the practice of publishing the Presidential Address of each President of the Society. He recognized my name in a list of past executive committee members he had been reviewing for a book that was being published of the papers presented at the first Conference of the international Society of Value Inquiry. He wrote to ask if I had published my Presidential Address (I hadn't) and, if not, would I be interested in publishing it in the *Journal*. I agreed, and, over the next several months, refined and updated it, sending it to him in December of 1991.

The day it arrived, Bob Ginsberg had achieved a tentative agreement with Editions Rodopi for a new book series, called Value Inquiry Book Series. One of the volumes he had proposed as a possible title was a volume of the presidential addresses of the American Society of Value Inquiry, which had just passed its 20th birthday. My presidential address (now 12 years old) had arrived and been opened and placed on the left side of his desk; the Rodopi agreement, in which the presidential addresses book idea was explicitly mentioned, was on the right side of his desk; and as he sat, musing over how he was going to get this and other titles to be edited for the series, he looked to the right, and to the left — and picked up the phone and called me and said, "I just got your presidential addresses for the *Journal*, and I have accepted it. Now, how would you like to edit a book of all the ASVI presidential addresses?"

I am neither so old nor so overworked that a give dropped unexpectedly in my lap does not impress me. I accepted the commission, and set about figuring out how I would do this thing, what would go into the collection to make it more interesting. My idea was to have each of the past presidents write a brief sketch of either how they got into philosophy, or what they were working on when they became President of the Society, or what being the president of a professional society meant to them.

And so I found myself writing William H. Werkmeister, and others, during the spring of 1992, informing them of the project and enlisting their support. All were enthusiastic. I think Burton Leiser was the first to send his autobiographical sketch, and I circulated it among the others as an example.

Werkie's remarkable autobiographical sketch arrived shortly thereafter. In it he referred to his visits in the 1930s with Heidegger while he had an appointment as Director pro tem of the Institute for American Cultural Studies in Berlin, he raised several of the classic questions about Heidegger, and he referred to what I thought must be a published book, *Martin Heidegger On The Way*. In editing his text, I looked up each of his books to give a full citation of publisher and year. But, I couldn't find this work.

Editing books takes time, particularly when one is corresponding with two dozen contributors or, in a couple of cases, their widows. So it was that I found myself with this question about *Martin Heidegger On The Way* unanswered as I finished the semester last fall. I knew that APA was meeting in Atlanta; we have relatives near Tallahassee whom we visit whenever in the Southeast; and I resolved to visit Dr. Werkmeister after the meetings when we were in Tallahassee for the January break and find out about this strange title.

In Tallahassee, we had to do some late Christmas shopping, and we traveled to one of your fine, interesting malls. In it, there was a small shop set up in the hallway, selling calendars. I noticed a young woman who was tending this shop, sitting, reading a copy of Plato's *Phaedo* with a second translation of the *Phaedo* by her side which she consulted occasionally. "This," I thought, "is a philosophy student!" and I approached her to ask if I was correct. She affirmed my guess, and we talked. I learned she was a philosophy student at FSU, and I said I knew of some of her professors, especially William Werkmeister, whom I intended to contact and visit in a couple of days. I remember how her face fell, for I had handed her the sad task of telling me of his death the previous month.

Much of the rest of this story you know. I called the Department and spoke, as I recall, first with Professor Dancy and then with Professor Kaelin. I raised the question of this reference; Gene Kaelin said that Werkie had been working on a manuscript about Martin Heidegger, and he thought that Mrs. Dr. Lucyle Werkmeister was sufficiently recovered that I might call and arrange a visit. I did, Gene having run interference for me and vetted me for her; we spend several delightful hours talking about Werkie, his last days, his labors; I had the extraordinary experience of sitting in his office and going through his library and some of his papers, of finding an unpublished gem on Nikolai Hartmann's account of comedy, and of discussing what I learned indeed was a book-length manuscript on Heidegger. Conversations led to trust; trust allowed her to part with the manuscript on Hartmann and the comic; I succeeded in interesting the *Journal of Value Inquiry* in publishing it; and I elicited from Value Inquiry Book Series a strong interest in the Heidegger book. The invitation to keynote the inauguration of this wonderful endowment came along a few weeks ago, again very much as a surprise; and I find myself here, tonight, on page 16, and about to conclude my remarks.

Werkmeister's essay has caused me, in preparing tfor this evening, to reflect on the remarkable series of events that have led me before you tonight. It was his firm view, I believe, that to be human is to be both purposive *and* ready to adapt to purposes' frustrations; to expect that carefully laid plans will go awry; even to look for the twists and turns of the world as opportunities, not just obstacles. His affirmation of the capacity of humans to sustain the act of valuation through the fact of limitation, even eventual annihilation, remains, to my way of thinking, the finest statement of value theory yet articulated.

Let me end with two quotes, and an announcement, of all of which I think Werkie would have approved.

Viktor Frankl once observed, "Life calls; then you respond." But I think that Shakespeare's character, Hamlet, captured the theme of Werkie's paper on the meaning of history even better when he said, "Readiness is everything!"

Last, the announcement. I have thought long and hard about how the extraordinary effects of this endowed chair might be magnified and shared with

a land wider population than the faculty and students of Florida State university. I spoke at length with Robert Ginsberg and the acquisitions editor of editions Rodopi about this idea: and Saturday afternoon I received word that the Value Inquiry Book Series, published by Rodopi, has approved enthusiastically the creation of a new special series, to be known as the WERKMEISTER STUDIES. Werkmeister Studies will exist as a publishing arm of the William H. and Lucyle W. Werkmeister Eminent scholar Chair in Philosophy. Works by the holder of the Chair can be included, as well as works by other persons associated with the Chair. Should the Chair involve sponsoring conferences, it is available as a publishing medium for well-edited studies emanating from those conferences. Should Dr. Werkmeister's estate yield either unpublished materials suitable for collection and publication, or materials not readily available that constitute bodies of his important works, the series is available for those purposes as well. And Werkie's own final book, *Martin Heidegger On The Way*, will be the first volume in WERKMEISTER STUDIES.

In closing, let me repeat my profound gratitude to you all for the opportunity of commemorating this evening with you. Yours is a remarkable opportunity: to establish Florida State University as a permanent and enduring center for value inquiry. I am delighted to have had the opportunity to be of small service to this grand endeavor, and I remain committed to its continuing success.

Thank you.

Clarence, New York
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